

FORMAL SIGNALS OF DISCOURSE TYPES

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ABSTRACT

In some written English texts formal features of grammar, lexis and punctuation provide signals which help to distinguish different discourse types. These differences are ones of speech function. These distinctions are not always signalled formally. Formal clues, however, provide a means by which initial broad distinctions can be made which can then be checked through a study of the meanings of items not formally distinguished. Some ambiguities cannot be resolved.

Two texts are used to illustrate this. In *The Bafut Beagles* by Gerald Durrell three discourse types are distinguished: (1) *narrative including specific descriptions* is marked by: (a) a continuity of 'past' verb forms; (b) *I* referring to the author as protagonist, *he* or *she* to a particular animal. The NPs typically have specific referents. (2) *generalized descriptions and explanations*: (a) a change from a continuity of 'past' to 'present' verb forms; (b) *I* does not occur; *you* means 'anyone', *it* and *they* refer to species; (c) concord across sentence boundaries not applied, e.g. *toads ... the toad*; (d) words implying generalization, e.g. *the average X, the collector*. The NPs typically do not have specific referents. (3) *author to reader comments*: (a) a change from 'past' to 'present' verb forms; (b) *I* for the author as writer; *you* for the reader; (c) verbs referring to thought processes of the writer, e.g. *think, suppose*; (d) present perfect, modal or simple present verbs with subject *I* and often an adverbial of frequency.

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the first conference of the Linguistic Society of New Zealand in Auckland in 1976. The section on discourse types in *The Bafut Beagles* was written by R.L. Fountain. The section on semi-indirect style was written by I.S.P. Nation.

In *At the Bay* by Katherine Mansfield the discourse types are: (1) *narrative* marked by: (a) sentences containing both subject and verb; (b) each verb, usually 'past', takes the story one step forward. (2) *direct*: (a) quotation marks; (b) clauses like *he said*; (c) quotation and exclamation marks; (d) question word order and sentences without a subject or a verb; (e) words with emotional and subjective meanings. This type gives us the exact words said. (3) *indirect*: (a) sentences have a reporting verb and a dependent object clause; (b) optionally, but frequently, concord of tense between the main and dependent verbs; (c) circumstantially determined changes in pronouns and adverbs of time. This type reports what was said or feelings and thoughts. (4) *semi-indirect* contains some features of indirect: (a) 'past' verbs or *had V +ed* (cf. 3(b) above); (b) (see 3(c)), and also some features of direct: viz. 2(c), (d) and (e). The reader is given access to the feelings and thoughts of the characters.

Some pedagogical implications for English as a second language are discussed.

DISCOURSE TYPES IN *THE BAFUT BEAGLES*

Tense forms

It is not always realized that tense is a cohesive feature of discourse in English.¹ Because tense usage has often been studied in sentences rather than in texts, and because these studies have dealt mainly with the time references of various tense forms,² the cohesive functions of tense forms in texts have not received the attention they deserve. Changes in tense sequences from past to present or from present to past are often motivated by more than a change of time reference.³ They

¹ Hasan (1968), for instance, does not include tense in her study of *Grammatical Cohesion in Spoken and Written English*.

² For instance, Leech (1971) and Quirk et al (1972).

³ Lackstrom, Selinker & Trimble (1970) have studied tense usage in certain engineering texts and point out that a change from present to perfect or past forms along with other features of NPs signals modification of the generality of the assertions. Thus, *Plants fail ...* may be used to introduce a statement of very wide or even universal generality. While *Plants have failed ...* restricts the assertion to some plants - a lesser degree of generality with more modest implications. *A plant failed ...* introduces a very specific statement referring to a particular plant.

often signal a change of discourse type and co-occur with other changes of form and meaning in the noun phrases (NPs).

An analysis of *The Bafut Beagles* by Gerald Durrell (hereafter *BB*) was made to study these features of tense usage. Besides Durrell's main intention - to narrate the events of an animal-collecting expedition, he has a subsidiary purpose - to give information about the creatures captured. Also, as story teller, he seeks to establish a rapport with his reader and so occasionally makes comments to the reader directly. These three communicative tasks - narrative, explanation and author to reader comment - are realized by three different types of discourse each marked by different features of tense and NP usage.

It is now generally accepted that English has only two tenses which we will call 'present' and 'past'⁴ (in quotation marks to show that time reference is often not the main consideration). Thus 'present' and 'past' include their respective 'simple', passive, progressive, perfect and modal forms. A change of tense occurs when a 'present' finite element in one verb phrase (VP) is followed by a 'past' one in the next or vice versa.⁵ All the parts of *BB* between quotation marks were excluded and all tense changes in the rest of the text were marked. This gave a high degree of continuity of tense forms. In an estimated 8,000 finite verb forms in *BB* there were only 225 tense changes, i.e. one change per 30 to 40 verbs, or on average one per page.

This was rather a crude classification. The two tenses of English, like other formal features, are exploited for a variety of purposes and a significant change of function, e.g. from narrative to hypothetical statements, may not be marked by a tense change. Also some modals such as *might*, *should*, *could* and *would* are used within 'present' form contexts without implying a change to 'past' form meanings. Nevertheless, it proved a fruitful procedure because it isolated 112 places in the narrative where the writer felt it necessary to introduce 'present' tense forms. It is these passages which I wish to examine in some detail first.

⁴ Cf. 'actual' and 'remote' (Joos, 1964: 121 ff); 'non-past' and 'past' (Lyons, 1968: 306).

⁵ The case for this view can be based on form or frequency, George (1963a, b), Ota (1962). Its validity for the study of texts will be made clear by this paper.

Pronouns

There are two types of 'present' passages in *BB*. The most obvious distinguishing features are in pronoun usage. In the 'past' passages the author uses *I* and *we* and their related forms to refer to himself as protagonist in the story. We will call these I_3 passages because this use of *I* parallels the third person pronouns in many other narratives. I_3 does not occur in present passages in *BB*. When *I* occurs with 'present' verbs the speech function (Jacobsen, 1960; Hymes, 1962) is different. Here *I* is used to express the viewpoint of the author at the time of writing. We will call these I_1 passages because this use of *I* parallels first person present time reference in conversation. There are also 'present' passages where *I* cannot occur. We will call these I_0 . This test with *I* is a useful way to distinguish the three main discourse types in *BB*. They are: I_3 'past', I_1 'present' and I_0 'present'.

For example, in this passage I_3 changes to I_1 and back to I_3 with the corresponding tense changes from 'past' to 'present' and back to 'past':

... There must have been some fifty people watching me₍₃₎ as I₍₃₎ covered myself with soap, and sang lustily, but I₍₃₎ did not become aware of the fact for some time. It did not worry me₍₃₎, for I₍₁₎ *am not unduly modest*, and as long as my₍₃₎ audience (half of which consisted of women) were silent and made no ribald remarks I₍₃₎ was content that they should watch ... (BB 167)⁶

Author to reader comments (I_1 - present)

I_1 passages in *BB* are used to make author to reader comments. They often consist of brief expressions like: *I remember* (BB 28); *I suppose* (BB 37, 182); *I expect* (BB 186); *I think* (BB 110); *I suspect* (BB 25); *I should imagine* (BB 90); *I have no doubt* (BB 118, 74), where only a limited class of verbs can occur. But we also find more complex constructions containing present perfect or modal verb groups or simple presents often with an adverb or adverbial phrase expressing frequency:

... uttering the most ear piercing shrieks *I have ever heard from an animal of that size.* (BB 41)

⁶ Page numbers are given from *The Bafut Beagles* by Gerald Durrell, Penguin 1958.

... I have heard embarrassed human beings call monkeys dirty, filthy creatures when they have watched them innocently perform these actions in public, and it is an attitude of mind I always find difficult to understand ... (BB 195)

... I can never resist owls at the best of times ... (BB 3)

Quite a few I₁ passages have an "interaction management" function (Laver & Hutcheson, 1972). In some of these passages the pronoun *I* does not actually occur but they are classified as I₁ because they are analogous to the ones above, and often by a simple paraphrase I₁ could be introduced. Sometimes the verb form is an imperative.

A word of explanation is called for at this point. (BB 77)

Its colouring and pattern were so dazzling and so intricate that it is almost impossible to describe. (BB 112)

It is easy enough to write that sort of thing. (BB 129)

To say I was startled, means nothing. I was horror stricken. (BB 75)

Take the case of the Baby Drills ... (BB 185)

This should give you some idea of a baby Drill ... (BB 186)

In the last example the pronoun *you* is used to refer directly to the reader. This could be called you₂. It is a distinctive feature of I₁ passages though rare in *BB*. Another use of *you* is to refer impersonally to anyone. This can be termed you₃. You₃ does not occur in I₁ passages.

Forty passages in *BB* were classified as I₁ 'present'. Their occurrence is not determined by the structure of the discourse. They appear quite randomly whenever the author feels some direct comment to the reader is called for. They occur in both I₃ and I₀ contexts.

Generalized descriptions and explanations (I₀ - 'present')

Most I₀ passages give generalized descriptions or explanations about species of animals or groups of people. Here are some

examples:

... our baby Drills, when they had transferred their affections to us and decided that we were their parents, demanded loudly and vociferously that they should be allowed to cling to us. *Next to vast quantities of food, the most important thing in a young Drill's life is to feel that it has a good grip on the provider of the food. As it is almost impossible to work when you have four or five baby Drills clinging to you like miniature, cackling Old Men of the Sea, we had to devise some plan to keep them happy ...* (BB 186)

... It was quite astonishing the variety of food we put in the cage, and which they refused - *astonishing because even with the most finicky animal you will generally strike something it likes, if you offer it a wide enough choice of food. It appeared that the Idiurus were not going to be easy to get back to England.* (BB 184)

A large group of I₀ passages in BB describe and explain processes and operations. In this example the I₀ passage contains both 'present' verbs and imperatives:

... *Now emptying a snake from a calabash into a cage is one of the simplest operations, providing you observe one or two rudimentary rules. First, make sure that any inmates of the cage are far away from the door. This I did. Secondly, make sure how many snakes you have in the calabash before starting to shake them out. This I omitted to do ...* (BB 99)

Another group describe the settings of the story:

... They (the frogs) caused me considerable trouble on the way down from Bafut, and many anxious moments: *in the highlands the climate is cool and pleasant, but as you descend into the forested lowlands it is like entering a Turkish bath, and the frogs did not like this change at all ...* (BB 92)

Some I₀ passages explain the meanings of words or phrases:

... *The English name for this beast is the Pigmy Scaly-tail, while zoologists, in their usual flippant and familiar manner call it Idiurus kuvuensis ...* (BB 163)

A rarer kind consists of a simile:

... on his face was a look of eager expectancy, *like that of a child at a pantomime before the curtain goes up ...* (BB 104)

The pronoun changes from I₃ to you₃ which we have noticed as a typical feature of I₀ passages are really an aspect of a more general feature of NP usage. The pronoun system of English is one of the most formally proliferated areas of grammar and therefore features which are sometimes not formally distinguished in other NPs are formally distinguished by pronouns. A general feature of NPs in I₀ passages is that they often do not have specific referents. Both definite and indefinite NPs may or may not have specific referents as the following sentences show:

non-specific: *The cane rat is not a very timid animal.*
Cane rats are not very timid animals.
A cane rat is not a very timid animal.
*The cane rats are not very timid animals.*⁷

specific: *I could see we had caught a cane rat.*
I could see we had caught the cane rat.
I could see we had caught some/səm/cane rats.
I could see we had caught the cane rats.

This difference in reference, though not in form, can be seen if we compare the meanings of the NPs in the I₃ and the I₀ parts of the passages above. *Our baby Drills, their affections, their parents* (BB 186), *the variety of food we put in the cage and the Idiurus* (BB 184) refer to specific entities, while *vast quantities of food, a young Drill's life, four or five baby Drills* (BB 186) and *the most finicky animal* (BB 184) do not. NPs which refer to specific places, e.g. *the highlands* (BB 92), or to specific words and phrases, e.g. *The English name for this beast* (BB 163), are special exceptions to this general feature of I₀ passages.

Another formal feature is words and phrases like *generally, the average X, as a rule, every species*, which imply generalization as in this passage:

... Rather bewildered by this, *for the average*

⁷ For a very good discussion of article usage in these sentences see Boagey *Further Study of A and The* (ELI, Victoria University of Wellington handout).

African is generally only too pleased to have his photograph taken, I turned to a Hausa standing close by and asked him ... (BB 17)

I₀ passages are also occasionally formally marked by the concord constraints typical of I₃ passages not being applied across sentence boundaries.

These creatures are called Brow-leaf Toads ... If the toad crouches ... (BB 24)

An I₀ passage may include 'past' forms which occur because of a past time reference or to introduce a hypothetical statement. *Had thought* in this I₀ passage occurs to introduce a past time reference:

... Mimbo looks like well-watered milk, and has a mild, faintly sour, lemonade taste which is most deceptive. A really good mimbo lures you on to drink more and more, until you suddenly discover it is not as harmless as you had thought ... (BB 68)

In all, I₀ passages in *BB* totalled 82.

Unlike the I₁ passages the positions of the I₀ sections within *BB* were not always random. The book contains about twenty episodes in which Durrell recounts how he captured or obtained specimens of various species. An archetypal episode could have the following structure (though, in fact, none contained all these features). It may start with narrative leading up to the *first mention* of the particular animal. The author may then narrate the preparations leading to the *outset* in quest of the creature. Next follows the narrative of the journey leading to the *first sighting* or *hearing* of the quarry. Then follows further narrative leading to its *capture*. Finally there may be an account of the return to base camp where the specimen is *housed* and cared for. Now these points in the narrative - first mention, outset, first sighting or hearing, capture and housing - are the places where Durrell may, if he wishes, introduce informative data about the creature, in descriptive or explanatory passages. Provided that the author is prepared to formally confine his description to giving particulars of the specimen captured he will continue to use 'past' tense forms and most NPs will have specific referents. The reader may be intended to generalize much of this data interpreting it as information typical of the species to which the specimen belongs, but he must do this for himself if the tense is 'past'. It is at the point of transition from description of specimen to generalization about species that the change of

tense forms and the associated changes in the forms and meanings of the NPs occur. Thus, passages of informative data are typically found at specific points in these episodes and these may be (or contain) I₀ present passages if Durrell wishes to make explicit generalizations about species. There were also other I₀ passages which occurred apparently randomly at other places in the text.

Narrative and specific descriptions (I₃ - past)

We will now examine some types of 'past' passages in *BB* to see if they can all be classified as I₃.

The etymology of words like *tell*, *tale* and *recount* shows that the 'English view' of narration involves 'enumeration'. The items 'counted' are the events in the story which are represented by finite verbs like those italicised in this passage, each of which takes the story one step forward:

... I *disturbed* a Que-fong-goo. He *slithered* out of hiding and *skimmed* across the rough surface of the rock as smoothly as a stone on ice. I *gave* chase, but *discovered* that a skink's idea of a suitable place for hunting was not mine. I *caught* my toe in a crack and *fell* flat on my face ... (*BB* 115)

The italicised forms do not just tell us that the events occurred in past time. Their order in the passage, in the absence of adverbial, aspectual or modal modification, tells us the *chronological* order of occurrence. This kind of verb usage is the basis of narration. NPs which have a subject relationship to these verbs will usually have specific referents and so I₃ is typical of this kind of passage.

I₃ is also typically found in the 'past' passages which narrate a series of events which were habitually repeated:

... Our hunting method was as follows: we *would* walk out to some remote hillside or valley, and then choose a thick patch of grass and bushes. At a suitable point we *would* spread the nets in a half moon shape; then, with the dogs, we *would* walk through the undergrowth, driving whatever creatures we *found* there into the nets ... (*BB* 30)

Once the iterative aspect is established, adverbially, modally

or lexically, simple past verb forms can be used to express the iterative meaning.

A third type of 'past' passage occurs when Durrell describes the settings in which the events of the story occurred. Here the verbs are often simple present actual and since they do not refer to events they do not have the fixed sequential relationships of the verbs in the previous two passages:

... We *knew* when we reached Bafut, for there the road *ended*. On our left *lay* an enormous dusty courtyard surrounded by a high red brick wall. Behind this *was* a great assembly of circular huts with high thatched roofs, clustered round a small neat villa. But all these structures *were* dominated and dwarfed by an edifice which *looked* like an old-fashioned bee-hive, magnified a thousand times On the opposite side of the road the ground *rose* steeply, and a wide flight of some seventy steps *curved* upwards to another large villa This, I realized, *was* to be my home for the next few months ... (BB 19)

When the description is made from the author's point of view I_3 can occur in this type of passage.

At a few places in BB (pp. 32, 47, 110, 128, 164, 188, 190, 193) a stylistic variation on I_3 occurs where you_3 is used instead of I_3 . This is typical of contextual description but can also be used in iterative narration. Twice this use of you_3 occurs after an I_0 passage.

... Presently we turned off the road and followed a narrow twisting pathway that led over the hills. *Here the mist was thicker, but low lying. You could not see the lower half of your body, and you got the impression that you were wading waist deep in a smooth and gently undulating lake of foam. The long grass, moist with dew, squeaked across my shoes ...* (BB 32)

Since *I* or *we* could be used in this passage instead of *you* without other changes this kind of passage does not need a separate classification. It appears to be a stylistic variation on I_3 'past'.

In another kind of 'past' passage Durrell describes his animals. Often these passages are marked as I_3 by the use of personal pronouns - *I*, *my*(3) etc. for Durrell and sometimes *he* or *she* etc. for the creature if Durrell feels a personal

attachment to it. In I₀ 'present' passages these pronouns change to *you, your*(3) etc. and *it* etc. However, some 'past' passages describing specimens contain an intriguing intermediate shift.

In this passage, for instance, the italicised NPs contain personal pronouns:

... *My Hairy Frog* ... was quite large: with *his legs* tucked nearly in *he* would have fitted on to a saucer without much room left over. *His head* was broad and rather flat ...

Then there is a change to indefinite NPs:

... with *very protuberant eyes* and a *mouth with an extraordinary wide gape* ...

This appears to be a transitional stage leading to NPs with definite articles:

... *The ground colour of the upper parts* was a deep chocolate brown, mottled dimly in places with darker brown markings; *the underside* was white, flushed with pink on *the lower belly* and *the inside of the thighs*. *The eyes* were very large, jet black mottled with a fine filigree of golden marks. The most astonishing thing about *the creature* - *the hair* - was confined to *the sides of the body* and *the thighs*, where it grew thick and black, about a quarter of an inch long.

Finally the passage changes to an I₀ 'present' description of the species:

... This adornment is not really hair at all, but consists of ... (BB 88-90)

In this passage the movement from personal to impersonal forms coincides generally with a movement from non-generalizable details like size to generalizable ones like colours. At the beginning of this description the passage is clearly I₃ but this classification would seem less certain when the NPs have definite articles. Although the NPs still formally refer to the specimen their specificity seems to be modified and it is doubtful whether an expression like *My Hairy Frog* could now be used, instead we have *the creature*. Nevertheless, *the creature* here still refers to the specimen, not the species. Furthermore, a study of other passages in *BB* shows that this is

an optional feature of NP usage. The change of forms here seems to imply generalizability rather than to state a generalization, so I₃ 'past' is retained as the classification for these passages.

Reported generalizations (I₀ - 'present' and 'past')

When a generalization is reported the author has a choice. He may continue to use 'past' forms retaining 'concord of tense' as in this example:

... This unusual discrepancy was, however, soon explained: it was found that *the male spent his life submerged in water, whereas the female led a purely terrestrial existence for the greater part of the year, only going to water during the mating season ...* (BB 90)

or he can change to present forms:

... I explained, with my best Harley Street air, that *a certain forest fly lays its eggs on the fur of various animals, and when the maggot hatches ...* (BB 188)

In these last two examples there is the option of either 'present' or 'past' forms without other changes in the NPs. If BB 188 is I₀ 'present', then BB 90 must be I₀ 'past'.

Sometimes, however, there is a reason for continuing to use 'past' forms:

... But until I met these two I had always imagined that *all toads were pretty much the same, and that having met one you had met them all as far as personality was concerned, though they might differ in colour and appearance, but I soon found ...* (BB 24)

Here Durrell does not now wish to assert these statements as applicable generalizations. The past forms together with the context (*imagined that ... but I soon found*) are signals that this passage is not to be taken as an unqualified generalization. Here too it would be possible to use present forms but there seems to be good reason to prefer 'past' ones. Nevertheless this is also classified, rather less certainly, as I₀ 'past'.

Summary

In these last three examples where we have reported generalizations the writer has the choice of either 'present' or 'past' tense forms without having to make changes in the forms and reference of his NPs. If however he wishes to introduce informative data directly into his narrative, without reporting the data, he has the same choice of 'present' and 'past' tense forms, but there are constraints on the forms and reference of the associated NPs. If he chooses to continue to use the 'past' forms which are typical of narration, the NPs will continue to have specific reference to particular specimens. Although he may imply generalizability he cannot explicitly make generalizations without changing to 'present' tense forms. When he does this the NPs will have generic reference to species not specific reference to specimens. Another kind of change to 'present' tense where the NPs may be specific is in an author to reader comment. These distinctions of form and reference make it possible to differentiate discourse types in texts like *BB*.

DISCOURSE TYPES IN *AT THE BAY*

There are formal signals of changes in discourse type in the work of Katherine Mansfield also. These are most apparent in the use of what earlier writers called semi-indirect style (Kruisinga, 1932; Kruisinga & Erades, 1947).⁸

Like the indirect type,⁹ the semi-indirect type gives the reader access to the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the novel or short story. Thus instead of characters being revealed directly by explication in the narrative, their inner thoughts are presented and the reader is left to interpret the characters on the basis of their thoughts. Thus the thoughts and feelings of the minds of the characters as revealed by the use of the semi-indirect type primarily give us information about the characters themselves. The "facts" contained in

⁸ K.J. Hollyman (personal communication) notes: "To the best of my knowledge semi-indirect style, or style indirect libre, was a notion originally floated by Charles Bally in the *Germanisch-Romanisch Monatsschrift* from 1912 on. The book that established the idea so far as French was concerned was Marguerite Lips (1926), *Le Style indirect libre*, Paris, Payot."

⁹ The indirect type is sometimes called reported speech or indirect style. The direct type is sometimes called direct speech.

these thoughts are usually of secondary importance. Failure to realize that the semi-indirect type is being used causes the reader to accept the "facts" at their face value and to take them as the author's statement (George, 1972).

The following approach to distinguishing the semi-indirect type is based on formal criteria. It must be remembered however that the semi-indirect type is as much a point of view, that is a mental division, as a formal one. Application of the formal criteria is successful in most of the cases, but in the others we must make a more subjective decision.

Signals of the semi-indirect type

In the following discussion of the semi-indirect type continual reference will be made to the passage from *At the Bay* by Katherine Mansfield given at the end of this section.

The semi-indirect type combines some of the features of the direct and indirect types. It also bears a resemblance to narrative.

Here are the signals of each of these four types of written sentences.

a Direct:

- i The use of quotation marks.
'Coach! Coach! Stanley!'
- ii The presence of clauses outside the quotation marks like *he said, she shouted, Beryl's voice cried from the gate.*
- iii The use of the question mark and the exclamation mark.
- iv Question word order, and sentences not containing a verb or a subject.
'Is that true?' 'No time to say goodbye!'
- v The use of certain words to give emotional and subjective emphasis.
'It was *really* him.'
- vi The words in the direct type are often intended to be an exact copy of what was said with no changes.

b Indirect:

The indirect type is sometimes called reported speech.

Reported speech is in fact an unsuitable name for the constructions and other formal features that are used for reporting. These same features, as well as reporting speech, also report or provide access to feelings (*John felt that things had gone too far.*), and thoughts (*She realized it was too late.*).

- i Sentences containing object clauses, and containing reporting verbs in the main clause. Occasionally the object clause is introduced by *that* but often *that* is omitted. When questions occur in indirect style, the finite verb does not precede the subject as it usually does in questions, but it follows the subject, for example: *I wonder when you are leaving.*
- ii Concord of tense between the verb in the main clause (usually simple past narrative) and the verb in object clause. This concord is by no means obligatory, but it is common. The verbs *should*, and *might*, *could* and *would*, sometimes function as the past tense of *shall* and *may* (Kruisinga, 2340).
- iii Depending on the circumstances, there are usually changes in pronouns and adverbs of time. Thus these changes plus the tense change result in the reported speech, thought, or feeling being similar to what was said or thought, but not exactly the same. In the passage, sentence 3 in its direct form would be : "Linda's vagueness on these occasions can't be real." *Can't* becomes *could not*. The changes that are made cannot be described in any strict rules as they are mainly dependent on the changes in the situation caused by the reporting. Davie (1970) and George (1972) discuss this.

c Semi-indirect:

The semi-indirect type is somewhere between the direct and indirect types. The semi-indirect type can also contain some of the features of the direct type.

- i The use of the question mark and exclamation mark.
Would nobody sympathize with him?

- ii Question word order, and sentences not containing a verb or a subject.
- iii The use of certain words to give emotional and subjective emphasis.

And some of the features of the indirect type.

- iv Use of the past tense or *had* + stem+*ed*.
- v Changes in pronouns and adverbs of time.

So, the sentences in the semi-indirect type are not intended to be an exact copy of what was said.

d Narrative:

- i Sentences usually contain a subject and a verb.
- ii The verb is usually in the past tense, and takes the story another step forwards. The use of the past tense both in narrative and the semi-indirect type often makes it difficult to decide whether some sentences are narrative or semi-indirect.

Let us look at a passage containing the semi-indirect type and classify each sentence or clause into one of the four categories of direct, indirect, semi-indirect, and narrative. Each classification can usually be justified using the criteria listed above. So in the sample passage from *At the Bay* given at the end of this section,

'Stick, dear? What stick?'

are direct because of the quotation marks, the use of the question mark, and lack of a verb. The words could be an exact copy of what was said.

Linda's vagueness on these occasions could not be real, Stanley decided.

is indirect because the sentence consists of an object clause with a reporting verb *decide* in the main clause. *Could* might be the modal preterite.

Would nobody sympathize with him?

is semi-indirect because there is a question mark and question word order, *would* might be the modal preterite, and the pronoun *him* is used although it refers to the thinker, Stanley. With slight changes, in the pronoun and perhaps in *would*, the sentence could be direct style, that is, "Will nobody sympathize with me?"

Beryl's voice cried from the gate.

is narrative because it contains a subject, and a verb in the past tense. It takes the action of the story one step forwards. There are also negative reasons (no quotation marks, not a representation of what was said, etc.) why it is narrative.

It is not possible to classify every sentence in this way as often the formal signals are ambiguous. In the passage the following sentence is like this:

The worst of it was Stanley had to shout
goodbye too, for the sake of appearances.

This sentence is either semi-indirect or narrative. The decision depends on whether we consider it is one of Stanley's thoughts (semi-indirect) or a statement by the author (narrative).

Let us now examine the effect of the discourse types on the piece of writing. In the passage from *At the Bay*, the narrative sentences carry the plot or action of the story. They stand as islands, surrounded by the other types of sentences. They tell very little about the characters themselves. By the end of the passage we have an impression of Stanley's character, self-pitying, impatient, rather irritable. All of this is revealed mainly through the indirect and semi-indirect sentences. But it is necessary for the reader to discover this for himself. He is given access to the thoughts and feelings of the character and must interpret these. It would be a mistake to consider the semi-indirect sentences at face value.

The heartlessness of women!

And there she stood, idle, shading her eyes
with her hand.

The author does not intend us to think that women are heartless (the author herself is a woman), or that Beryl was lazy and idle. The question to ask is rather, what sort of person

would think these things, what state of mind would he be in when he thought them? This is the information given to us through the use of the indirect and semi-indirect sentences.

The semi-indirect type has other functions, such as compression of the events in a story, providing a contrast between minor and major characters, but these are less important.¹⁰

Failure to realize that a writer is using the semi-indirect type can cause the reader to miss much of the information that is contained in the writing and in a few cases can lead to misinterpretation of a passage.

From *At the Bay* by Katherine Mansfield

1 'Stick, dear? 2 What stick?' 3 Linda's vagueness on these occasions could not be real, *Stanley decided.* 4 Would nobody sympathize with him?

5 'Coach! Coach, Stanley!' 6 *Beryl's voice cried from the gate.*

7 *Stanley waved his arm to Linda.* 8 'No time to say goodbye!' *he cried.* 9 And he meant that as a punishment to her.

10 *He snatched his bowler hat, dashed out of the house, and swung down the garden path.* 11 Yes, the coach was there waiting, and Beryl, leaning over the open gate, was laughing up at somebody or other just as if nothing had happened. 12 The heartlessness of women! 13 The way they took it for granted it was your job to slave away for them while they didn't even take the trouble to see that your walking-stick wasn't lost. 14 *Kelly trailed his whip across the horses.*

15 'Goodbye, Stanley,' *called Beryl, sweetly and gaily.* 16 It was easy enough to say goodbye! 17 And there she stood, idle, shading her eyes with her hand. 18 The worst of it was Stanley had to

¹⁰ Since writing this section the work by Page (1973) has been brought to our attention. In spite of different terminology, our findings support those of Page.

shout goodbye too, for the sake of appearances.
19 *Then he saw her turn, give a little skip and run
back to the house.* 20 She was glad to be rid of
him!

(The italicised sentences are the narrative ones.)

APPLICATIONS TO TEACHING ENGLISH

This study has been made with a view to pedagogical applications in the teaching of English as a second language. The following points would seem to be important applications of this study.

The learning of English tense forms involves more than learning the time references of these forms. Tense is a cohesive feature of English discourse, that is, a continuity of 'present' or 'past' tense forms in a text often signals the continuity of a discourse type. Conversely, a change of tense forms may signal a change of discourse type. Recent linguistic studies have focussed on the semantics of sentence elements and there has been a tendency to neglect the insights of earlier grammarians such as Kruisinga who through the study of texts adopted a more functional approach to the study of tense forms. Particularly outside Europe, in areas where most languages lack parallel features of tense usage, these aspects are of basic importance to the learner of English.

For this reason, the sentence should not be the only or even the main unit of language for an ESL teaching programme. The significance of tense forms, like the other cohesive features of English, e.g. pronouns, articles, determiners, and comparative forms is only apparent to the student if texts longer than the sentence are used for study and practice.

If the student is to develop 'communicative competence', he must develop an understanding of a range of speech functions. Some of these will be similar to the discourse types we have discussed. Those in *The Bafut Beagles* such as narration, description of specimens, generalization about species and explanation, represent speech functions which are typical of the use of English in secondary schools. While few ESL learners will want to write in semi-indirect style those who do not understand this form of discourse will have difficulty in reading much modern fiction.

This study shows that these discourse types are expressed by combinations of various items in different sentence

positions including both the VPs and the NPs of the passage. For instance, narration is expressed by both a succession of 'past' tense forms often representing events in combination with NPs having specific referents; description of specimens - by both 'past' tense forms often with neutral or actual meanings and specific NPs; generalization - by combining non-specific NPs, 'present' neutral tense forms and lexical items implying generality; semi-indirect style is expressed by a combination of some features of direct and some features of indirect style. This correspondence between forms and functions provides a means for the learners to acquire competence in a range of speech functions.

Texts like the ones studied in this paper are complex ones because they use a range of discourse types. This is one factor which contributes to the difficulty of a text. A teacher or course designer can use an awareness of discourse types in the grading of language teaching materials. This applies to both the selection of texts for reading and comprehension and the organization of assignments for composition. Simpler texts and composition topics will involve only one discourse type, e.g. narration without author comments, descriptions of particular scenes or specimens, generalized descriptions, following (or giving) directions. Advanced students can deal with more complex texts which involve transitions between different discourse types. If difficulties arise, formal signals like those identified in this paper will provide the student with one means of acquiring these functional varieties of English.

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