Introducing constructed dialogue in Greek and American conversational and literary narrative*

Deborah Tannen

1. Introduction

The term "reported speech" is a misnomer. Examination of the lines of dialogue represented in storytelling or conversation, and consideration of the powers of human memory, indicate that most of those lines were probably not actually spoken. What is commonly referred to as reported speech or direct quotation in conversation is constructed dialogue, just as surely as is the dialogue created by fiction writers and playwrights. A difference is that in fiction and plays, the characters and actions are also constructed, whereas in personal narrative, they are based on actual characters and events. But even this difference is not absolute. Many works of fiction and drama are also based on real people and events, and many conversational storytellers – to the consternation of their children and spouses but the delight of their hearers – embellish and adjust characters and events.

Many researchers (for example, Labov 1972, Chafe 1982, Ochs 1979, Tannen 1982, Schiffrin 1981) have observed that narration is more vivid when speech is presented as first-person dialogue ("direct quotation") rather than third-person report ("indirect quotation") – and is more commonly found in conversational narrative (sometimes generally referred to as spoken discourse) than written expository discourse (but not of course in written literary discourse, precisely because fiction and poetry are akin to conversation in workings and effect). But there is more to it than that. The creation of voices, more than the depiction of actions, occasions the imagination of alternative and distant worlds that is the stuff of dreams and art.

Friedrich (1979: 473) suggests that "it is the more poetic levels and processes of language, however defined, that massively model, con-

strain, trigger, and otherwise affect the individual imagination." I see constructing dialogue as one such poetic process. Therefore I have included it in an extended, ongoing project examining the ways that poetic linguistic devices are spontaneously used in ordinary conversation as compared to how they are developed and manipulated in literary discourse.

In this chapter I argue that constructed dialogue in conversation and in fiction is a means by which experience surpasses story to become drama. Moreover, the creation of drama from personal experience and hearsay is made possible by and simultaneously creates interpersonal involvement among speaker or writer and audience. After discussing these theoretical aspects of constructed dialogue, I turn to an analysis of forms and functions of constructed dialogue in two genres of two languages: stories told in conversation in American English and Athenian Greek, and excerpts from an American and a Greek novel. Citing examples from these discourse samples, I first consider the evidence that dialogue in conversational storytelling is not reported speech; then examine the ways that dialogue is introduced in the four discourse types under study; and finally examine more closely the use of dialogue in one genre – Greek conversational storytelling – and consider its place as one of a range of features creating involvement in narrative.

My analysis compares the forms and functions of conversational and literary narrative in American English and modern Greek. The conversational discourse analyzed consists of stories told in conversation either in dyads or in small groups, recorded by someone who happened to be there.[1] The literary discourse examined consists of excerpts from novels. The American novel used is *Household Words* by Joan Silber (Viking, 1976), an enormously moving and beautifully written novel which won the Hemingway Award for first novels. The Greek novel used is *To Trito Stefani* ("The Third Wedding") by Kostas Taktsis (Ermis, 1970), a work which has been the focus of analysis by Kazazis (1979). The novel is taken by modern Greek scholars to accurately represent middle class Athenian dialect. Hence a secondary gain in this study is to see to what extent it does.[2]

2. Reported speech is constructed dialogue

It cannot be the case that dialogue presented in oral storytelling is being reported exactly as it was spoken, unless the report is based on the deliberate memorization of a transcript which was based on a tape-recording of the talk.[3] Experiments have proven what is intuitively obvious – that humans cannot keep in their minds the precise words they have heard, even for a moment. They listen for the meaning and, when called upon to remember what was said, may reconstruct it into words, much as Bartlett (1932) discovered that memory for objects and events is constructive.

When one examines closely instances of what has been called reported speech in spontaneous spoken narratives, it becomes clear that such lines of dialogue are not reporting speech actually spoken. Some "quotations" are of dialogue that was never spoken:[4]

You can't say, "Well Daddy I didn't HEAR you."

Others are represented not as something that was said once but as an illustration of a general phenomenon:

Daisy:	The minute the kids get old enough to do these things themselves, ⌈ that's when
Mary:	⌊ You do it yourself
Daisy:	Yeah that's when I start to say … "Well … I don't think I'll go in the water this time. Why don't you kids go on the ferris wheel. I'll wave to you."

The reference to both swimming and a ferris wheel in the same "quote" makes it clear that the quote does not purport to represent a single instance of speech. Moreover, the introduction is phrased in terms of a general time span: "when the kids get old enough" ("the minute," of course, is a graphic exaggeration).

The preceding example also includes a line of dialogue that is constructed not by the storyteller but by a listener, who can't possibly be reporting what she observed because she wasn't there. When Mary says "You do it yourself," she is casting herself in Daisy's role and role-playing what Daisy (might have) said to her children, following the story line that Daisy has established – offering a line of dialogue as a form of participatory listenership to demonstrate her attentiveness and understanding of Daisy's perspective.

Another instance of this device is found in a narrative that will be

excerpted at length in a later section. In that excerpt, a medical resident tells about an event that took place while he was on duty in a hospital emergency room. At one point a listener offers the line, "We're okay," representing the thoughts or dialogue of patients in the emergency room – dialogue that she is obviously constructing, not reporting, since she wasn't there.

In other instances, a line of dialogue is presented as the production of more than one speaker – an impossibility, unless one is talking about a Greek chorus, which the following speaker is not:

And then all the Americans said "Oh in that case, go ahead."

In a number of the narratives analyzed, speakers "report" the thoughts of other people – information they could not know – as when a Greek woman "reports" what a man thought about her:

Sou leei, "Afti den echei kalo skopo."
[He says to himself, "She's up to no good."]

Sometimes an indirect quote fades into a direct one:

It was like he was telling everybody to have your wisdom teeth taken out and I didn't see any point as long as they weren't bothering me.

In the process of quotation, the addressee metamorphoses from "everybody" to "you" to "me".

Finally, it is clear that dialogue is not really reported when it includes vague referents that would have made no sense had they actually been uttered:

He was sending me out to get tools or whatever (imitates father) "Go get this and it looks like this and the other."

In these examples, for the various reasons given, the "reported speech" is clearly constructed dialogue. But even when dialogue could conceivably have been spoken by the person to whom it is attributed (and the narrator was in a position to hear) our understanding of the powers of memory indicate that it probably wasn't.

3. Introducing constructed dialogue

In the discourse samples, I examined all instances of constructed dialogue, focusing in particular on how it was introduced. Results are shown in figure 1.[5]

Figure 1. Constructed dialogue in four discourse types

	Eng. spoken		Eng. novel		Gr. spoken		Gr. novel	
Say	36	(43%)	72	(49%)	85	(71%)	41	(69%)
Ø	22	(26%)	24	(16%)	26	(22%)	11	(19%)
Thought	1	(1%)	6	(4%)	–*		4	(7%)
Tell	3	(4%)	4	(3%)	–**		–**	
Ask	1	(1%)	–		–		2	(3%)
Go (Gr.: Kano)	11	(13%)	–		4	(3%)	–	
Like	7	(8%)	–		–		–	
Other	3	(4%)	40	(27%)	4	(3%)	1	(2%)
Total	84	(100%)	146	(100%)	119	(99%)	59	(100%)

* Included in "say" since the expression used (twice) is "sou leei," lit. "s/he says to you" for "s/he says to him/herself".
** Included in "say" since Greek does not have two different words, "say" and "tell."

He said/she said

The most frequent introducers are forms of the verb "say" (Greek leo). Some typical examples:
English conversation:

Well I went because my-my regular dentist said, "You should have your wisdom teeth taken out."

American novel:

"Doesn't he look handsome?" Hinda said. (p. 84)

Greek conversation:

Tou leo "En taxei tha'rtho ti Triti to vrady."
(I say to him "Okay I'll come Tuesday evening.")

Greek novel:

De me noiazei, elega.
(It doesn't bother me, I said.) (p. 73)

The extent to which the verb "say" (or "leo") is favored differs for the various discourse types. It is most overwhelmingly favored in the Greek samples. In the Greek spoken stories, forms of the verb leo ("say") account for 71% of instances of dialogue. In the excerpt from the Greek novel it is a strikingly similar 69%, suggesting that in this sense the novel accurately represents the spoken idiom, as it purports to do.

In the American spoken stories, forms of "say" constitute a majority

of the introducers used, but this majority is less than half (43%). In the sample from the American novel, forms of "say" constitute a majority of just about half (49%).

A small part of this disparity between the English and Greek samples is accounted for by the use in English of a variant verb of saying, "tell", which has no Greek counterpart; however, forms of "tell" constitute only 4% and 3% respectively of the English conversational and literary instances of dialogue. Thus, adding these percentages to those for "say" yields 47% for the American spoken stories and 52% for the American novel – still about half.

Yet another small influence on the higher percentage of forms of "leo" ("say") in the Greek samples as compared to "say" in the English samples is that the count for Greek includes instances of an expression reporting characters' thoughts: "sou leei" – literally, "she/he/one says to you," but figuratively, "she/he/one says to her/him/oneself".[6] This usage is seen in the following excerpt from a woman's narrative about a university professor who told her to return on an evening to take an individual oral exam and then, when they were alone in the deserted building, made improper advances. The next time she had to appear before him he again suggested that she return later in the evening to be examined; this time she insisted on being admitted to the exam immediately. He complied, and she suggests the thoughts that might have led him to his compliance:

    (1)   kai sou leei xero 'go
    (2)   "borei nachei kai kanena afto
    (3)   na mou kanei kamia zimia"

[idiomatic gloss]

    (1)   and he says to himself yknow
    (2)   "she might have some
    (3)   make some kind of scandal for me"

The form "sou leei" is found once in the Greek novel as well. The narrator is telling her friend how her husband chose her as a wife: "Sou leei: afti edo den einai san tis alles" (p. 69). This may be glossed: "He thinks, 'This one here isn't like the others'."

Nonetheless, if instances of "sou leei" are subtracted from the count of instances of "leo" in the Greek data, the percentage of "leo" is still 70% for the stories and 68% for the novel.

Thus, despite the language differences noted, the verb "say" is the favored dialogue introducer, accounting for roughly half the instances of dialogue in the American and more than two-thirds of the instances of dialogue in the Greek discourse samples.

"Go" and "kano" as verbs of saying

Of the introducers that are not forms of "say" (or "leo"), there is a type found only in the spoken narratives. This variant in English, associated with a very informal register, is the use of a form of "go" as a verb of saying. The Greek counterpart, kano (ordinarily translated into English as "make" or "do"), was not found as frequently as the English "go", possibly because of the prevalence of this form in a single English narrative.

13% of the lines of dialogue presented in the English spoken stories are introduced with forms of "go". But of the 18 speakers whose narratives make up the English stories examined, only 3 use "go" in this way. 9 of the 11 instances are found in a single narrative, an excerpt from which follows.[7]

In this story, a hearing woman tells that she left a friend (who knows some sign language) alone with her mother, who is deaf. When the mother produced a sign that the friend didn't understand, he panicked and called for her to come and help. She returned and inspected the sign that her mother was making:

        (1) 'n I look at it
→ (2) 'n I go
        (3) Gee I don't know what the sign is either.
        (4) Mom, what's the sign?
→ (5) 'n she goes
        (6) Chair.
        (7) CHAIR?

Forms of the verb "kano" were used by 2 of 25 Greek speakers, once each. The continuation of the story about the university professor illustrates this:

        (4) en taxei, en taxei mou leei
→ (5) "Peraste" mou kanei
        (4) okay, okay (he) says to me
→ (5) "Come in" he goes

Thus the informal forms "go"/"kano" distinguish the conversational narratives from the literary ones.

Unintroduced dialogue

The American conversational and literary narratives differ widely in how they introduce dialogue when they don't use "say".

Prior to this study, I thought that a typical page of dialogue in fiction is one in which lines of dialogue are presented with no introducers, made possible by the written convention of quotation marks and indentation (in Greek fiction sometimes represented by dashes and indentation). I will illustrate this with a short segment from another novel: Judith Rossner's *August* (Houghton Mifflin, 1983). In all but one line, speakers are identified only by their place in the sequence of dialogue. This segment is from a therapy session between a psychotherapist and her young patient, Dawn, who speaks the first cited line:

> "... How come you're so quiet? What are you thinking about?"
> "I was wondering whether Tony happened to mention where you were when the accident took place."
> "Accident?"
> "Your father's drowning."
> "In the house," Dawn said promptly. "With the housekeeper. I mean, she didn't mention it, but that's where I would've been."
> "Mmm."
> "Why'd you ask?"
> "Because it would be interesting to know the answer."
> "I gave you the answer."
> "Perhaps."
> "I don't like the way you said that."
> Silence.
> "You're making me nervous."
> "Oh?"
> "I feel as though you know something, and you think I know it, too, but I'm keeping it from you." (p. 132)

In speaking, I thought, it is necessary to mark dialogue explicitly with such expressions as "he said"/"she said". But this study revealed otherwise. The use of no lexicalized introducer accounted for a significant percentage of all the discourse types examined, but the percentage was larger rather than smaller in the conversational narratives.

The conversational stories present dialogue with no introducers in 26% – more than a quarter – of the instances in which they present dialogue. The Greek conversational stories do so in a comparable 22%. In contrast, the American novel presents dialogue with no introducers in only 16% of the instances of dialogue, and the Greek novel a comparable 19%. (The difference between the Greek stories and novel – 19% as compared to 22% – is not as striking as the difference between the English stories and novel – 16% as compared to 26%.)

How then do speakers mark dialogue as such, changing their footing (Goffman 1981) from that narrator to that of character in the drama they are creating? They do so by changing their voices to take on the characters' voices.

This device is seen in the segment cited earlier from the story told by a hearing daughter of a deaf mother, repeated here with arrows indicating instances of elided introducers:

> (1) 'n I look at it
> (2) 'n I go
> (3) Gee I don't know what the sign is either.
> → (4) Mom, what's the sign?
> (5) 'n she goes
> (6) Chair.
> → (7) CHAIR?

In (4) the speaker switches from addressing her friend to addressing her mother, and in (7) she switches from portraying her mother's words to portraying her own words in reaction.

The great versatility of the voice in presenting the dialogue of characters without introducing them is seen in the following excerpt from a narrative told by a medical resident who had just returned from an all-night stint at a city hospital about an incident in the emergency room.[8] Three young men appeared, one with a cut on his arm that was bleeding profusely but was not serious. In telling about the incident, the resident alternately took on the voices and gestures of himself, other hospital staff, the wounded young man, the other two young men, other patients in the emergency room, and a policeman who came to investigate.

> (1) They come bustin' through the door –
> (2) blood is everywhere
> (3) on the walls
> (4) on the floor
> (5) everywhere
> → (6) [raised pitch] It's okay Billy
> → (7) it's okay
> → (8) we're gonna make it
> → (9) [normal voice] What's the hell wrong with you
> (10) We ... we look at him.
> (11) He's covered with blood yknow?
> (12) All they had to do was take a wash cloth at home
> (13) and go like this [pause]
> (14) and there'd be no blood

(15) no blood
        [listener: You put pressure on it]
  (16) These drunk guys come bustin' in
→ (17) all the other patients are like Ugh Ugh
  (18) They're bleedin' everywhere yknow
  (19) People are passin' out just lookin' at this guy's blood here
  (19) [listener: We're okay]
→ (20) I'm like "Get the hell out of here"

The speaker takes on the voices of characters by shifts in pitch, amplitude, voice quality, prosody, and pacing. The number of speakers who can be thus role-played is not limited to two, as in writing, since the speaker can affect a range of voices, whereas a writer can not simply alternate voices in a printed dialogue sequence.

In the novel *Household Words,* 16% of the lines of dialogue presented are not lexically introduced. However, there are no extended sequences of unintroduced dialogue like the one quoted from the novel *August.* The closest thing to that in *Household Words* is the following interchange between Rhoda and her husband. Although the identities of the speakers could easily be understood from the sequence, the author marks Rhoda's dialogue with "said", but not her husband's:

> Rhoda stood at the stove. "Dinner," she said, forking pieces of chicken onto the plates.
> "We have to eat fast. The men are coming in for pinochle at eight. Did you forget?"
> "Sort of," Rhoda said.
> "But you wanted them to come. You told me to invite them, it was your idea."
> "I know," she said. "Don't tell me. I made cookies. I know."

The use of the verb "said" for Rhoda, along with her name, though not for her husband, keeps her in focus as the protagonist.

Household Words has a literary (one might say poetic) sounding prose style. In contrast, *August* is more conversational sounding, as observed by Kendrick (1983) who described its style as "documentary" realism, commenting that in it, "The give-and-take of real conversation, its hesitations, repetitions and Freudian slips – all are reproduced with exact fidelity". To a conversational analyst who has studied transcripts of real conversation, the attribution of "exact fidelity" seems naive to the point of absurdity, but presenting dialogue with no lexical introducer is indeed typical of spoken conversational storytelling; therefore this feature may contribute to the conversational sound of *August,* and use of lexical introducers may contribute to the literary style of *Household Words.*

Thus, the use of quotation marks in writing, which seem at first to provide enhanced ability to mark dialogue as such, is actually a very poor substitute for the great versatility of the human voice to do so.

"Be" + "like" for "say"

A type of introducer that is akin to using none at all is a device found only in the spoken English stories. It does not appear in the English novel, and there is no counterpart in Greek in the stories analyzed. This is the introduction of dialogue with the word "like" following a form of the verb "to be". Examples are found in the emergency room story excerpted earlier:

(17) all the other patients are like "Ugh Ugh"

(20) I'm like "Get the hell out of here"

The line of dialogue "Get the hell out of here" does not represent what the speaker actually said at the time; perhaps it is what he was thinking, or what he would have liked to say. It is simply the line spoken in the drama he created based on the night's events, by the character based on himself.

8% of the lines of dialogue presented in the English spoken stories were introduced by such forms. Besides the two cited above, the following occurred:

> It was like [spoken with foreign accent] "Would you stay. Why you why you leaving Santorini?"

> He was like [accent] "I give you a week of my life. Will you stay."

> I was like – "Nice sister, right?"

> 'n it's like "Mary, I understand ..."

> And he was like, like "I feel like a failure. Yknow, even, even Brit could do it."

This usage is less idiosyncratic, in the present study, than "go" as a verb of saying; the 7 instances were produced by 5 different speakers, almost a third of the speakers represented in the sample.

"To be" + "like" thus functions as a formulaic introducer, not by its literal meaning but simply by convention. If the literal meaning functions at all, it is to suggest that the dialogue is not being quoted but simply represents the kind of thing that character was saying or thinking.

Graphic introducers in literary narrative

The characteristic that sets the novel *Household Words* off most noticeably from the other three discourse types studied is the category "other" in Figure 1. 4% of the instances of dialogue in the English spoken stories, 3% in the Greek spoken stories, 2% in the Greek novel, but 27% in the American novel are introduced by verbs other than "say," "tell," "think," "ask," "go"/"kano", or "be" + "like." The verbs thus used are: "explain," "complain," "croon," "coo," "demand," "call (Ø/ down/out)," "wheeze," "cry out," "mutter," "bellow," "murmur," "go on," "titter," "grumble," "gasp," "whisper," "hiss," "sob," "scream," "suggest," "groan," "intone," "grimace," "yip," "warn," "sniff," "want to know," "shout," "wail," "repeat," "supply," "yelp," "snap." Of these, only five are repeated, once each ("explain," "whisper," "scream," "shout," and "suggest").

Following is an excerpt showing how such verbs work in the novel. In this passage, Rhoda serves lunch to her fifth-grade daughter Suzanne and Suzanne's classmate Ina Mae. (Verbs other than "say" introducing dialogue are underlined.)

> Suzanne . . . reached out to give Ina Mae a "feeny bird," a rap on the skull with flicked fingers, as Ina ducked away, <u>screaming</u>, "Get away from me!"
>
> "How about," Rhoda <u>suggested</u>, "clearing off the kitchen table so you can have some good old peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?"
>
> "Oh boy," Suzanne <u>groaned</u> sarcastically. "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy."
>
> "THE BOY," Rhoda <u>intoned</u>, beating time with a spoon at the kitchen sink, "STOOD ON THE BURNING DECK,/ HIS FEET WERE FULL OF BLISTERS,/ HE TORE HIS PANTS ON A RED-HOT NAIL/ SO NOW HE WEARS HIS SISTER'S." The girls, unfamiliar with the original poem (a staple of recitations in Rhoda's childhood) failed to find this wickedly amusing. "Oh, Mother," Suzanne <u>grimaced</u>. "Ina, for Christ's sake, would you please pass the jelly? I'm starving, you know."
>
> "You poor old thing," Rhoda said. "You're so hungry you could dydee-dydee-dydee-die." Ina giggled. Rhoda poured a glass of milk for the guest. "Say when," she <u>suggested</u>.
>
> "I HATE milk," Ina <u>yipped</u>.
>
> "Oh, we never serve milk in this house. This is cow juice. Don't be fooled by the carton." Rhoda smiled mysteriously.
>
> "She thinks she's funny," Suzanne said. (p. 104)

Graphic introducers are an evaluative device, to use a term coined by Labov (1972) to describe elements in oral narratives. The author uses them to hone her description of the characters, their personalities and states of mind, and their relationships to each other.

Another characteristic of the dialogue in this segment, as in the rest of the novel and in the Greek novel examined, is the interruption of lines of dialogue to insert the narrator's commentary:

> "How about," Rhoda suggested, "clearing off the kitchen table so you can have some good old peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?"

This does not happen in the spoken stories, where introducers may be repeated between but not in the midst of spurts of speech which Gumperz (1982) calls "tone groups" and Chafe (1980) calls "information units". Because language in print does not follow the breath units of speaking, such line breaks can come in places they would not in speech. In this way, the Greek novel departs from the conventions of spoken discourse.

Another characteristic of the excerpt from *Household Words* which is also characteristic of literary writing is that some verbs introducing dialogue do not really describe the way the dialogue was spoken but, under the guise of such service, actually describe something else about the action or the actors. For example, in: "'Oh, Mother,' Suzanne grimaced," Suzanne could not so much have grimaced "Oh, Mother" – grimacing is not a behavior that produces speech – but rather she spoke those words and grimaced. Since this fact is self-evident, using the word "grimaced" to describe the speech is a more concise and effective way of describing how Suzanne spoke than would be a more pedestrian sounding, "Suzanne said with a grimace".

A continuum

I suggest that these various ways of introducing dialogue fall along a continuum. At one pole is no introducer at all, used in informal conversational narrative because of the great expressive power of the human voice. At the other pole is the use of graphic verbs as introducers – a form typical of literary narrative. Perhaps this is a way of compensating for the loss of expressive voice quality in print by packing more expressive power into the words chosen – more work is done by the meanings of the words, less by the way they are spoken. This supports Chafe's (1982) finding that written discourse is more integrated (packing more information into fewer words), and Tannen's (1982) hypothesis that written fiction combines the integration Chafe found in written discourse with the involvement he found in speech.

On the continuum posited, "be" + "like" is next to no introducer, depending for effect on the way the dialogue is voiced. The form "go" is similar to "say" in meaning, but it is similar to "be" + "like" in register. These two forms co-occur in the sign language story (and, it seems, in the casual speech of middle class American teenagers).

4. Constructed dialogue in action: Greek stories

When hearing some of the Greek stories included in this study, in the original Greek or in translation, listeners find them very vivid. This impression seems to reflect a phenomenon frequently observed, and supported by folk wisdom, that Greeks are good storytellers. Elsewhere (Tannen 1983) I identify and illustrate the linguistic features that contribute to that impression – features which I suggest contribute to the creation of involvement: both the involvement of the audience and the sense of the speaker's own involvement in the storytelling.[9] I found that involvement is created by (1) immediacy, portraying action and dialogue as if it were occurring at telling time and (2) forcing the hearer to participate in sensemaking.

The features which typify the Greek narratives and which contributed to involvement are:
1) repetition
2) direct quotation in reported speech
   a) dialogue exchanged
   b) thoughts of speaker
   c) thoughts of man
3) historical present verbs
4) ellipsis
   a) deletion of verb of saying
   b) deletion of copula
   c) deletion of comment or proposition
5) sound-words
6) second person singular
7) minimal external evaluation

Thus, constructed dialogue is one of a range of features that create involvement, and vividness, in the Greek stories.

15 of the 25 narratives told by the Greek women used constructed dialogue. The remaining 10 did not report dialogue at all. It would be mistaken, however, to conclude that the 15 stories which present dialogue do so because talk occurred during the incidents they report, whereas talk did not occur during the other 10.

The Greek oral narratives studied are about being molested by men. At the same time that I collected those stories, I also collected narratives told by American women about being molested. The reason I did not use them for comparison with these Greek stories is that in all of them I found only one instance of constructed dialogue. I do not believe that this is because the incidents reported by the American women happened not to involve talk, whereas those reported by the Greek women did. Rather, I believe it is characteristic of Greek storytelling conventions to construct dialogue.

Similarly, it would be misleading to measure the incidence of constructed dialogue as a percentage of the instances of dialogue. The representation of speech in dialogue is a narrative act, not the result of the occurrence of speech in the episode. By setting up a little play, the speaker can portray motivations and other subtle evaluations internally – from within the play – rather than externally – by stepping outside the frame of the narrative to make evaluation explicit. (The terms and concepts internal and external evaluation are from Labov 1972).

For example, a speaker I will call Marika "reports" her decision to call the friend of a friend during a trip to Rhodes in the form of her comment to her traveling companion:

Tis leo tis xadelfis mou,
"Kaiti, den pame kai ston systimeno ton anthropo
na mi fygoume apo tin Rodo
kai den echoume patisi to podaraki mas?"
"Pame," mou leei.

I say, to my cousin,
"Katie, shouldn't we go see the fellow
we were told to look up,
so as not to leave Rhodes
without having set foot [on his doorstep]?"
"Let's go," she says to me.

By casting the decision in the form of dialogue, Marika creates a dramatic scene and is thus able to show by her phrasing (i.e. internal evaluation) that she was motivated by a sense of obligation to behave properly, not by any desire to spend time with this or any man.

Marika then tells that the man insisted on taking them for a tour of

Rhodes, for which excursion he showed up with a friend. She lets us know what she feared – and builds suspense – by reporting her thoughts in the form of direct quotation:

> Leo, "ti thelei
> dyo ekeinoi, dyo emeis,
> ti echei skopo na mas kanei?"
>
> I say [to myself], "what does he want,
> two [of] them, two [of] us,
> what does he intend to do to us?"

In four stories Marika represents her thoughts as direct quotations to herself, sometimes even addressing herself by name:

> "Kala" leo, "Marika edo eimaste tora."
>
> "Okay" I say [to myself], "Marika, here we are now."

Like the Greek speaker previously cited who told about her university professor, Marika casts the (projected) thoughts of another character as dialogue. In telling how she chased off a man who had been harrassing her and her friend, she tells what the man (must have) thought upon seeing her step toward him brandishing a rock: "sou leei 'afti den echei kalo skopo'" ("he says to himself, 'she doesn't have a good purpose'," i.e. 'she's up to no good').

A variation on constructed dialogue – something that is constructed but not exactly dialogue – that is prominent in the Greek spoken stories is the use of sound words, or sound non-words, to represent action.[10] There are 13 instances of sound words in the 25 Greek narratives. A few examples follow.

> peftei aftos apano mou
> xereif apano mou BAM.
>
> he falls on top of me
> yknow on top of me BOM.

In this example, as in the following one, the sound word "BAM" (/bam/) illustrates the action that has been described.

> opou vlepeis ton [name]
> opos einai kontochondros
> na pesi epano mou paidia
> etsi epese PLAF
>
> when you see [name]
> as he is short-and-fat
> falling on top of me, guys,
> like that he fell PLAF

And, finally, an example in which three successive sound words are used to represent action which is not otherwise described:

> vgazo tin petra – DAK!
> pali do etsi – DOUK!
> ekane TAK!
> kai exifanisthi aftos.
>
> I take out the rock – DOK!
> again here like that – DUK!
> he went TOK!
> and he disappeared.

I can not reconstruct the actions that the sound words represent, but I can reconstruct that Marika's "DAK"/"DOUK" (/dak/ /duk/) represented some form of attack with the rock. "Ekane TAK!" ("[It/He] went [lit. made] /tak/!") would have been disambiguated by a gesture as well.

The sound words that appear in the narratives are: /bam/, /gan/, /ga/, /dak/, /duk/, /tak/, /mats/-/muts/, /plaf/, /ax/, /a/, and /psit/-/psit/. The last is somewhat different, I believe; it represents onomatopoetically the sound with which Greek men get the attention of women and chase away cats. All the other sound words are composed primarily of the large-sounding back vowels /a/ and /u/; the abrupt voiceless and voiced stops /k/ /g/, /t/ /d/, and /p/ /b/; and consonant clusters /ts/ /pl/. The sound words are phonologically graphic, patterning with similar phenomena in many other languages (Ohala 1983, 1984), and they contribute to involvement by forcing the hearer to recreate the action represented by the sound.

5. Constructed dialogue as vivid storytelling

Thus, constructed dialogue in the Greek stories is part of a network of features which create involvement. It seems likely that the use of constructed dialogue is associated not only with Greek but also with other ethnic styles that come across as "vivid" – as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1974) and Tannen (1984) have shown for East European Jews, and Labov (1972) and others have demonstrated for American Blacks.

There is some evidence that Brazilian speech falls into this category as well, and that constructed dialogue is a dimension of that effectiveness. In a pilot study comparing how Brazilian and American speakers told the story of Little Red Riding Hood (Ott 1983), Brazilian speakers used far

more constructed dialogue. The American man in the study used 6 such instances, all formulaic for this fairy tale:

> "Grandma, what a big nose you have."
> "All the better to smell you my dear."
> "Grandma, what big ears you have."
> "All the better to hear you my dear."
> "Grandma, what a big mouth and big teeth you have."
> "All the better to eat you with my dear."

The American woman in the study used 15 instances of dialogue, including the formulas found in the American man's story, but also including some improvised variations on them ("What long whiskers you have"; "The better to wiggle them at you my dear") and the casting of other parts of the story in dialogue. For example, she has the mother tell Little Red Riding Hood, "Go to your grandmother's house ..." The Brazilian woman who told the same story used 20 instances of dialogue, and the Brazilian man used 43!

The Brazilian man's version of Little Red Riding Hood represents almost all action in dialogue which makes the story rich in particularity. For example, at the beginning (as translated into English by Ott):

> One time on a beautiful afternoon, in her city, her mother called her and said:
> "Little Red Riding Hood, come here."
> "What is it, mother? I am playing with my dolls, can I continue?"

Long segments are composed only of dialogue. For example, when she is accosted by the wolf on her way to her grandmother's house:

> "Little Red Riding Hood, Little Red Riding Hood".
> And Little Red Riding Hood stopped and looked: "Who is there?"
> "Ah, who is talking here is the spirit of the forest."
> "Spirit? But I don't know you."
> "No, but I am invisible, you can't see me."
> "But what do you want?" (imitating child's voice)
> "Where are you going, Little Red Riding Hood?"
> "Ah, I'm going to my granny's house."
> "What are you going to do there, Little Red Riding Hood?"
> "Ah, I'm going to take some sweets that my mother prepared for her."
> "Ah, very good ... the sweets are delicious, they are, they are, they are, they are ..." (licking his lips)
> "Do you want one?"
> "No, no, no, no. (Accelerated) Spirits don't eat.
> Okay, okay. Then, now, yes, yes, you are going to take it to your granny ... remember me to her, okay?"
> "Okay, bye."

Thus, through constructed dialogue and other features, this Brazilian speaker created a vivid new story out of a standard fairy tale.

6. Dialogue in a writer's conversation

I had a rare opportunity to observe a naturally-occurring instance of the sort of linguistic comparison that I have set up experiments to achieve. Two people independently and spontaneously recounted to me the same conversation. One was a writer and the other an employee of a publishing company which was publishing the writer's book. It happened that I knew them both, and in the course of conversation with me, each one, knowing I knew the other, told me about a long distance telephone conversation they had had. The author had been dilatory about obtaining permissions to reprint illustrations in his book. Publication was delayed as a result; the publisher had spent a great deal of time trying to track down the copyright holders himself; and the author had repeatedly failed to respond to the publisher's phone messages and letters. The author finally called the publisher to give him the necessary information. Both men agreed that these were the circumstances.

The author described the conversation in this way:

> I said, "I'm sorry to have been so exasperating." [pause] And there was a long silence.

The publisher described it this way:

> He apologized, but when the time came for me to say "That's all right," I didn't say it, so there was a long silence.

Though the two accounts do not disagree on facts, I believe the author's recount of this conversation is more effective, in an aesthetic sense. Both accounts include constructed dialogue, but for different functions. The author gave a line of dialogue to represent what he'd said ("'I'm sorry to have been so exasperating'"). The publisher reported that utterance by naming the speech act, "He apologized". The publisher used a line of dialogue to represent what he didn't say ("'That's all right'"). The author left that line unstated, assuming that I know what is omitted when silence follows an apology. In other words, the dialogue the author included was partistet dialogue – what he said. The dialogue that the publisher included was a general representation of the kind of statement

that could have been said but wasn't. (The author's omission of such dialogue constitutes another poetic process – using ellipsis to force the hearer to supply part of the meaning).

I think it is not a coincidence that the more effective story (minimal though it was) was told by the author – a writer of fiction. I don't know whether or not the words he reported are exactly the words he spoke. I don't think it matters. It may be that as a writer he has a good memory for exact wording. But it may also be that he has a good sense of possible wording, that the words he reported were not exactly the ones he had spoken, but they had an authentic ring. He seems to have a sense that retelling his apology in the form of constructed dialogue will be vivid – a particular apology – and make the sense of what should come next vivid also.

If I am right about the differentially poetic use of constructed dialogue in the conversation of different speakers, then the notion of a continuum from conversational to literary narrative is not a linear one, but rather various of the devices discussed may turn up in different genres, depending upon the register employed and the effect desired. In any case, I hope to have demonstrated that what has been called reported speech or direct quotation is constructed dialogue, that it makes story into drama, and that through such drama talk builds on and creates interpersonal involvement.

Notes

1. The English stories were recorded, selected, and transcribed by students in my Discourse Analysis class Fall 1983: Gayle Berens, Gina Doggett, Dianne Falvo, Matthew Glotfelter, Susan Hoyle, Aziz Kamel, Deborah Lange, Kimberly Murphy, Tulinabo Mushingi, Faith Powell, Fran Smith, and Joseph Wieczorek. Terry Waldspurger helped identify constructed dialogue and count words in these narratives. I recorded the Greek stories in Athens, Greece, in a small group or in dyads. Fileni Kalou transcribed them; Maria Spanos checked transcriptions and helped with identification of constructed dialogue and translation. I gratefully acknowledge all this help.

2. Peter Mackridge, an authority on the modern Greek novel, suggested that I use the Taktsis novel. I chose the Silber novel not only because I admired it but also because I was able to tape record its author in casual conversation and thus obtain a discourse type I needed for another phase of the larger study of which the present analysis is part.

3. Even in transcribing talk from a tape, one must continually replay because one cannot be sure that one has transcribed correctly. Replaying and carefully listening to the smallest segments of tape proves that the words "transcribed" were not exactly those that were heard.

4. Punctuation has different meanings in excerpts from transcripts of talk and printed sources. In spoken segments, dialogue is bounded by quotation marks to facilitate reading; commas indicate phrase-final intonation ("more to come"); periods indicate sentence-final intonation. Three dots (...) indicate pause. In some cases transcription is set out in poetic lines rather than run together as prose to facilitate reading. The lines represent audible chunking, by intonation and prosody, into "tone groups" (Gumperz 1982) or "information units" (Chafe 1980). Italics indicate emphasis. Excerpts from literary samples are reproduced exactly as they appeared in print. (In the Greek novel quotations are variously marked by a combination or none of: quotation marks, dashes, indentation). Here, three dots (...) indicate ellipsis. Transliteration of Greek follows guidelines established by Peter Bien and Julia Loomis for the Modern Greek Studies Association.

5. The discourse samples consist of 18 English conversational stories (about 8000 words), 25 Greek conversational stories; about 9,600 words of the English novel and about 3,000 words of the Greek novel. Because numbers of words in the samples differ, as well as numbers of instances of dialogue, results are presented in percentages. No attempt was made to obtain equal numbers of words in samples because this would imply that there is objective significance in the number of instances of constructed dialogue – an assumption for which there is no foundation, given the impossibility of determining the relationship between instances of constructed dialogue and occurrence of talk in the events on which narratives were based (a non-existent variable for fiction, in any case). Rather, what is significant is the percentage of each type of introducer in the instances that occur, and the function of each type, which is not a matter of numbers at all.

6. There is also a Greek verb skeptomai ("think"), which is found in the sample from the Greek novel but not in the conversational stories.

7. This story was tape recorded and transcribed by Matthew Glotfelter. Its effectiveness depends on the knowledge that the person the story is about was present at the time of its telling. The speaker exaggerates his incompetence and the extremity of the incident as a way of teasing him and making him the protagonist of a story.

8. This story was taped and transcribed by Kimberly Murphy.

9. This section is based on material included in Tannen 1983. It is improved by comments by Kostas Kazazis on that paper, for which I am grateful.

10. I did not originally think of these as constructed dialogue; the connection was pointed out to me by Florian Coulmas.

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