

# There and back again: On marking the boundaries of free indirect discourse

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# Outline

- ① Theoretical Background: The Ascription Problem
- ② Experimental Evidence on “Shifting There”
- ③ Corpus Evidence on “Shifting Back”
- ④ Discussion

# The Ascription Problem

- The content of a linguistic expression has to be ascribed to an intentional subject, or attitude holder
- Default case: ascription to speaker.

(1)     **CRAIG**: It is raining.

- The content of the utterance in (1) is ascribed to Craig: we interpret (1) as implying that Craig believes that it is raining.
- Ascription is particularly relevant if perspectival expressions like *an enemy* in are involved (s. Partee, 1989, a.o.):

(2)     **CRAIG**: Michael said that an enemy is approaching.

- To whom should the content that the person approaching is an enemy be ascribed: Craig, or Michael? Who is the **perspectival center (PC)** here?

# FID and Content Ascription

- The ascription problem is exacerbated for the content of linguistic expressions that appear in (fictional) narratives. Should their content be attributed to
  - the author
  - the narrator
  - a/the character/protagonist
- One prominent discourse environment that is said to trigger ascription to a protagonist is *free indirect discourse* (FID).

# Free Indirect Discourse

- (3) On her way home, Mary heard a song by Kendrick Lamar that she liked on the radio. **She thought:** “I will buy his new but **overpriced** album **tomorrow**”.

↪ **Direct thought representation**

- (4) On her way home, Mary heard a song by Kendrick Lamar that she liked on the radio. **She thought that she would** buy his new but **overpriced** album **on the following day**.

↪ **Indirect thought representation**

- (5) On her way home, Mary heard a song by Kendrick Lamar that she liked on the radio. **She would** buy his new but **overpriced** album **tomorrow**.

↪ **Free Indirect Discourse**

(ex. adapted with slight changes from Hinterwimmer, 2017)

## FID-Indicators

- Detecting FID is crucial for ascribing the content correctly!
- Linguistic expressions that *mark* a passage as being FID have received a considerable amount of attention in linguistic and literary theory (Banfield 1982, Fludernik 1993, Eckardt 2015)
  - Typographical markers (e.g. italics)
  - Local and temporal deictic expressions like *here* and *now*
  - Epistemic adverbials and evaluative expressions like *maybe*, *unfortunately*
  - Speaker-orientated discourse particles like *ja*
  - Questions and exclamatives
- The potential of some of these FID indicators to induce a reading in which the protagonist is the PC have been tested experimentally.

# Experimental Evidence for Shifiting

- Harris & Potts, 2009:
  - tested effect of appositives and epithets on ascription (3AFC decisions).
  - Main finding: *Non-default*-interpretations for perspectival expressions can be induced.
- Kaiser & Cohen, 2008; Kaiser, 2015:
  - tested effect of expressives and epistemic adverbials ascription (anaphor resolution on 6-point scale).
  - Main finding: Reliable effect of FID on anaphor resolution; epithets are more likely to induce FID-Interpretation than epistemic adverbials.
- Salem, Weskott, & Holler, 2018:
  - tested effect of of discourse particles and exclamation marks (2AFC decisions, SPR reading times).
  - Main finding: robust offline effects (decisions), no effects for online reading times.

## Our Research Question: How About Shifting Back?

- All studies so far only investigated indicators induce a shift **into** an FID interpretation (“Shifting There”) and hence mark that the PC is the protagonist.
- But since the PC will shift back at some point, there must also be an indication of the “backshifting”, i.e. the shift away from the protagonist, and (probably) back to the narrator.
- To our knowledge, these *backshifters* have not been investigated yet.
- Is *backshifting* achieved through
  - unmarking FID (i.e., mere absence of FID markers), or
  - genuine marking of a shift back to the default mode of ascription?

⇒ Exploratory corpus investigation of potential *backshifters*



# Hypotheses

- **H1:** If there are no markers for FID in  $S_1$ ,  $S_1$  is interpreted in default-mode.
- **H2:** If linguistic means in  $S_1$  indicate *backshifting*, these cues do not appear in FID-passages.

# Corpus Study

- Aims:
  - Find linguistic means that mark the default-interpretation after FID
  - Explorative analysis: Potential *backshifters*, derived from literature; 'bottom-up'-approach
  - Marking the boundaries of FID to support experimental evidence and corpus-based approaches (e.g. Kaiser 2015, Brunner et al. 2020)

# Corpus Study

- Corpus: N = 150 FID passages
- “Certified” german FID-Passages (e.g. Neuse 1990, Brunner et al. 2020, Fludernik 1993, Eckardt 2015, Salvato 2005)
- Narrative texts from 1776 - 1985

## Corpus Study

- Results H1 (no FID markers in  $S_1 \Rightarrow$  default mode):
- 150  $S_1$ -sentences (100%), no annotation if DD

|                                           | <b>Absolute Frequency</b> | <b>Relative Frequency (%)</b> |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Epis. Adverbials &amp; Expressives</i> | 3                         | 2                             |
| <i>Epitheta</i>                           | 0                         | 0                             |
| <i>Exclamatives</i>                       | 1                         | 0.67                          |
| <i>Interrogatives</i>                     | 0                         | 0                             |
| <i>Particles</i>                          | 1                         | 0.67                          |
| <i>Deictic (local)</i>                    | 18                        | 12                            |
| <i>Deictic (temporal)</i>                 | 31                        | 20.67                         |

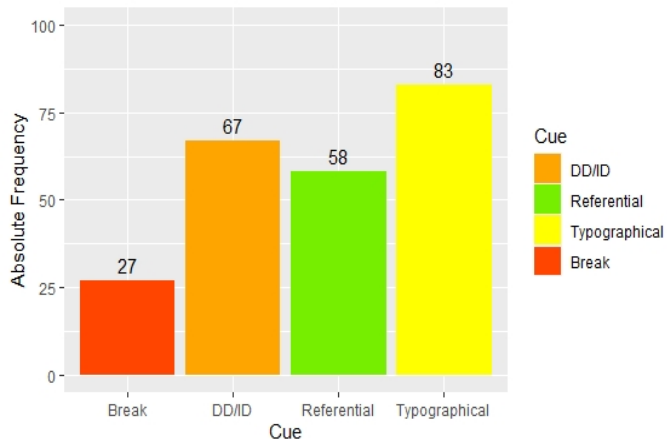
$\Rightarrow$  FID-Shifter in  $S_1$  (especially deictic expressions)

# Corpus Study

- Preliminary conclusion
  - Deictic expressions are unreliable cues for shifting the default-interpretation to FID and vice versa
- ⇒ FID is not only marked by the presence/absence of cues for FID, but terminates with *backshifting*-cues, that are incompatible with FID-Interpretation

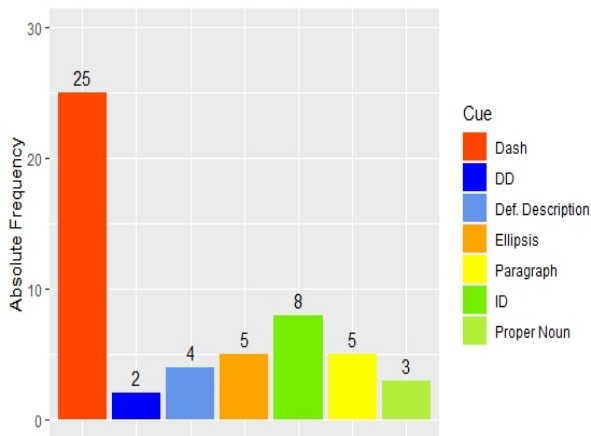
# Corpus Study

- Exploratory Analysis:



# Corpus Study

- Results H2



# Corpus Study

- Typographical Markers:
  - Dashes and ellipses (...) are not considered to be *backshifting-cues*
  - Paragraph breaks in FID passages (N = 5, 3,33%) vs. paragraph breaks after FID passages (N = 71, 47,33%)



# Corpus Study

- Speech and thought representation:
  - Direct discourse and indirect discourse after FID are reliable indicators for the end of a FID interpretation
  - Utterances of protagonists that are distinctive from the perspectival center can sometimes be integrated in FID passages (DD: N = 2, 1.33%; ID: N = 8, 5.33%)

# Corpus Study

Hans sah ihm nach; dann schaute er sich nach dem Schuhmacher um. *Was hatte **der** doch gesagt? Aufs Latein käme es nicht so sehr an, wenn man nur das Herz auf'm rechten Fleck habe und Gott fürchte. **Der** hatte gut reden. Und nun noch der Stadtpfarrer! Vor dem konnte er sich überhaupt nicht sehen lassen, wenn er durchfiel.* Bedrückt schlich er nach Hause und in den kleinen, abschüssigen Garten.

(Unterm Rad, Hermann Hesse (1906))

- ⇒ ID can be integrated in FID, if the speech act gets ascribed to another Protagonist
- ⇒ DPro in FID has to refer to a protagonist that is distinct from the perspectival center (Hinterwimmer & Bosch 2016)

# Corpus Study

- Referential expressions:
    - 3.ps.sg. personal pronouns to refer to the protagonist in FID
- ⇒ the default-interpretation in S1 can be marked by a shift of referential expressions to definite descriptions or proper names

Schauerlich angemutet sah **Aschenbach** ihm und seiner Gemeinschaft mit den Freunden zu. *Wußten, bemerkten sie nicht, daß **er** alt war, daß **er** zu unrecht ihre stutzerhafte und bunte Kleidung trug, zu Unrecht einen der Ihren spielte?* [...]. **Aschenbach** bedeckte seine Stirn mit der Hand und schloß die Augen [...]. (Der Tod in Venedig, Thomas Mann (1911))

# Corpus Study

**Esch** stutzte, da er an Martin dachte, *allein der Teufel mochte wissen, was er, August Esch, heute hier in dieser Redaktion zu suchen hatte! Daß es nicht wegen der Ringkämpfe geschah, das war klar.* Noch beim Eintreten grübelte **er** darüber nach, und [...] erst als die Streikgeschichte erhalten mußte, um solch schlechtem Gedächtnis nachzuhelfen, erst da ging es **Esch** auf, daß es sich ihm um Martin handelte. (Die Schlafwandler, Hermann Broch (1932))

- ⇒ If proper names or definite descriptions occur in FID, they are appositive NPs
- ⇒ Referential expressions are cues for *backshifting*

# Corpus Study

- Breaks
  - Temporal or local relocation in S1
  - Shift of discourse segment

*Ihn lebend wieder zu sehen, dazu war wenig Hoffnung, und jedenfalls nach achtundzwanzig Jahren gewiß nicht.*

**Vierzehn Tage später** kehrte der junge Brandis morgens von einer Besichtigung seines Reviers durch das Brederholz heim. (Die Judenbuche, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1842))

⇒ temporal relocation in S1 *vierzehn Tage später*

# Discussion

- Theoretical Implications:
  - Linguistic means terminate FID interpretations on sentence-level
  - *backshifting* through reference-tracking and paragraph breaks, mental accessibility (Ariel 1990)
- Methodological Implications
  - Experimental items can be designed using *backshifting*-cues to control for effects of perspective-shifting
  - *backshifting*-cues can be used to train AI → detection of FID in extensive corpora

# Conclusion

- Linguistic features of *backshifting* are markers for boundaries of FID
- Reference-tracking is used to model perspective-taking in narrative texts
- FID is often combined with other forms of speech and thought to represent psychological processes of the protagonist

## Further Questions

- Additive effects of *backshifting*-cues?  
⇒ Experimental verification
- Modeling of FID in Discourse segments (DRT)
- Empathy, mental accessibility and reference-tracking (e.g. Ariel 1990, Kuno 1987)
- Diachronic changes in the markedness of FID



Thank you!

# Experimental Evidence for Shifting I

Harris & Potts, 2009

- Indicators tested: Appositives and Epithets.
- Research question: can the speaker-default be overridden by FID cues?
- Sample Item:

(13) **Context:** I am increasingly worried about my roommate. She seems to be growing paranoid.

**Target:**

- A. The other day, she told me that we need to watch out for the mailman, a possible government spy.
- B. The other day, she refused to talk with the mailman, a possible government spy.

Whose view is it that the mailman might be a government spy?

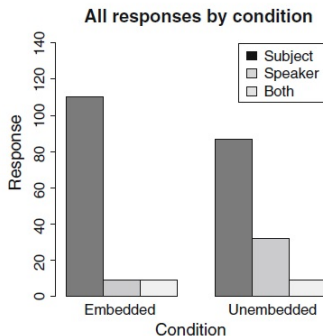
**Response:**

- a. Mine (Speaker)
- b. My roommate's (Subject)
- c. Mine and my roommate's (Both)

# Experimental Evidence for Shifting I

Harris & Potts, 2009

- Method: 3-alternative forced choice decision



(a) Total number of response scores

⇒ *Non-default*-Interpretations for PSIs can be induced by context, especially in “perspectively-rich contexts”

# Experimental Evidence for Shifiting II

Kaiser & Cohen, 2008; Kaiser, 2015

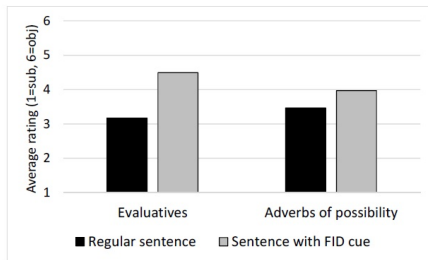
- Indicators tested: Expressives (*poor girl*), epistemic adverbials (*probably*).
- Research question: Which linguistic forms induce a FID-Interpretation, and how strongly?
- Sample item:

- |                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (10) a. Mary looked woefully at Elizabeth. She was sick. [regular sentence]<br>b. Mary looked woefully at Elizabeth. Poor girl; she was sick. [FID cue] |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

# Experimental Evidence for Shifiting II

Kaiser & Cohen, 2008; Kaiser, 2015

- Method: anaphor resolution on 6-point scale (1=subject, 6=object)



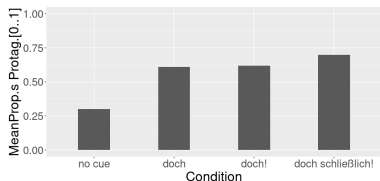
**Figure 3** Experiment 2: Who does the pronoun refer to, in sentences with and without evaluatives/epithets and adverbs of possibility? (The higher the rating, the stronger the preference for an object interpretation)

⇒ Reliable effect of FID on anaphor resolution; epithets are more likely to induce FID-Interpretation than epistemic adverbials

# Experimental Evidence for Shifiting III

Salem, Weskott, & Holler, 2018

- Indicators tested: presence vs. absence of discourse particles and exclamation marks (*doch*, *doch!*, *doch schließlich*) in longer texts.
- Research question: do the off-line effects from Kaiser & Cohen and Harris & Potts replicate (i) for discourse particles, and (ii) in an on-line measure?
- Method: 2AFC (offline) and via anaphor resolution in self-paced reading (online)



⇒ Replication for discourse particles in off-line effects, but not in on-line measures.