

## Chapter 3

### Re-presentation

In the two previous chapters, we have discussed the way in which we make sense of words and utterances, not merely by deciphering each word, but by adding inferences drawn from contextual information and encyclopaedic knowledge. A further dimension of the communication strategy of a speaker or writer is the work of putting thoughts into words. This is a vital but generally ignored aspect of communication.

In describing the way in which speakers communicate with one another, RT claims that every utterance, spoken or written, is a *re-presentation* of the thought of the speaker or writer. In stating this, the theory does not examine the detail of the way in which the mind converts thought into utterance, but limits itself to dealing with the result of such re-presentation. This may seem a quite unnecessary step to most of us, since we may assume that we encapsulate our thoughts into words which give an exact representation of our thoughts, but this is not the case.

Writers on RT go into much more detail concerning this process, and the way in which thoughts are converted to concepts and concepts to linguistic forms which are then subject to inferencing. For the purpose of this discussion, let's begin with the assertion that utterances *resemble our thoughts* as they re-present them, but they do not represent them in an exact form, only a resemblance to that thought.

As explained in the previous chapter, the one who hears such an utterance will make inferences from the linguistic forms used in order to understand what the speaker intends to communicate. As we communicate, however, we regularly re-present not only our own thoughts, but the thoughts of others, either by direct or

indirect speech, thus claiming to *re-present* the utterance of the speaker or writer. In addition to this conscious representation, however, we frequently do this with *no conscious thought of the fact of re-presentation*. I want to examine direct, indirect and ‘unconscious’ representation separately in this chapter, because all three forms are regularly bundled together by biblical scholars in discussing how New Testament writers – in particular Paul – ‘use the Old Testament’. Allusion, echo, and intentionality are part of the ongoing debate on this topic, and these will be dealt with later in this chapter.

### *Direct Speech*

Sperber and Wilson point out that ‘direct quotations are the most obvious examples of utterances used to represent not what they describe but what they resemble.’<sup>1</sup> This needs to be constantly borne in mind, since the expectation of exact resemblance is a modern notion.<sup>2</sup> Even when direct speech is marked as such by textual punctuation, expectations of faithful representation are a modern phenomenon. The lengthy speeches found in the works of Thucydides, Xenophon and others are most unlikely to have been represented in the exact form in which they were spoken, although Polybius, criticising other historians, claims that *he* was reporting what was actually said.<sup>3</sup> The comments of Thucydides on his methodology in dealing with lengthy speeches are well known:

With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one’s memory, so my habit has been to make the speaker say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sperber and Wilson (1995) p. 228.
  2. Direct quotation has been referred to more recently as *metalinguistic representation*, because of the close resemblance between the original and the quotation. Gutt (2004) unpublished paper, Almazan Garcia (2002).
  3. οἱ κατ’ ἀλήθειαν εἰρημένοι λόγοι – *The Histories* 12.25b.1.
  4. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.22.1 LCL 108. Trans. R. Crawley, 1910. London: J.M. Dent.

Regarding the modern assumption of exact correspondence, I am making this point to clear the ground for a recognition that ‘close resemblance’ – to use the RT term – is the most that we should expect and this is not an unreasonable expectation.

As well as direct quotations, however, we refer to the beliefs or comments of others regularly, not only by prefacing the utterance with an introductory ‘She said . . .’ but also by referring to what we have been told tangentially in the form of evidentials.<sup>1</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, in the second chapter of Galatians Paul uses δοκέω three times, and in so doing distances himself from an opinion about those who were leaders or ‘thought to be something’.<sup>2</sup> He re-presents this belief, but by using this Greek verb he distances himself from that opinion. Paul also represents Apollos as being unwilling to visit the Corinthians at this time, but ‘he will come whenever it is suitable’.<sup>3</sup> We do not know what Apollos actually said, but Paul is interpreting his thoughts or his comments in this way.

There are several interesting examples of this in non-biblical literature. Take the following example in *Mansfield Park*, one of many from Jane Austen:

Though the weather was hot, there were shady lanes wherever they wanted to go. A young party is always provided with a shady lane.<sup>4</sup>

The context shows that several of the characters were determined to go on an expedition which the wiser among them felt was injudicious given the very hot weather. This excerpt is echoic in RT terms, but verges on irony (see Chapter Four) where the author states what at first seems to be her own opinion but which is in fact that of some of her characters.

Such representation, which in essence claims to be the words of another, is said to be *interpretively used*. In addition to reporting the utterances of others, humans also seem to attribute to them

1. These may be asides such as ‘it seems’, ‘evidently’, ‘apparently’ etc. but they all presuppose an utterance by a third party. The speaker is not taking responsibility for his own comments, but attributing them to another. Elly Ifantidou (2001) deals with this.
2. Galatians 2:2, 6, 9.
3. 1 Corinthians 16:12.
4. Austen, J. (1833) *Mansfield Park*, London: Richard Bentley. p. 62.

thoughts and intentions, thus *interpretively representing* their thought: ‘Humans can no more refrain from attributing intentions than they can from batting their eyelids.’<sup>1</sup>

Consider the following descriptions and then attributions of ‘purpose’:

- a) George said, ‘I live in Luxembourg to avoid paying taxes in the UK.’
- b) George said that he lived in Luxembourg to avoid paying taxes in the UK.
- c) George lives in Luxembourg to avoid paying taxes in the UK.

Example (a) and (b) represent in direct (a) and indirect speech (b) a purpose that George stated. In example (b), there is an element of interpretation, in that the quotation is not verbatim, but interprets George’s utterance. In both (a) and (b), George may not have been telling the truth, or he may have been using irony: for example, he may be quoting a colleague’s understanding of his living arrangements.<sup>2</sup> The speaker, however, makes no claim about the truth value of George’s statement. He merely reports it descriptively (a) or interpretively (b). In example (c), however, the speaker attributes a purpose to George which does not claim to be based on his utterance, although it may be, but on the speaker’s inference from George’s action. The speaker’s utterance is therefore a re-presentation of a thought he had about the intention of George:<sup>3</sup>

Speaker’s thought: *George lives in Luxembourg to avoid paying taxes in the UK.*

George’s thought as inferred by the speaker: *If I live in Luxembourg I will avoid paying taxes in the UK.*

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- 1. Sperber (1994) p. 187.
  - 2. See Noh, E.J (2000) *Metarepresentation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, for further discussion of the RT approach to irony dealt with here in Chapter Four.
  - 3. The term ‘metarepresentation’ is used throughout RT literature, but for ease of communication I have simplified this to ‘representation’. The reader should understand that this description may indicate several orders of representation: that is, it may indicate a representation of a representation. Although this simplification may not be acceptable to linguists, it has seemed to me to be necessary in presenting this concept to a wider audience.

In addition, then, to re-presenting our own thoughts and the utterances of others descriptively, we may also represent the thoughts of others *interpretively*, attributing intention to them which they may or may not acknowledge, as in (c). This is very clear again in Galatians 6:13:

θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχῶσθωνται.

They want you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

The clause introduced by the particle ἵνα represents an intention or potential state of affairs on the part of the subject of the sentence: ‘we may boast in your flesh’. Now, almost certainly the subjects would not have agreed that this was their purpose or intention, but Paul ascribes it to them as he does also in 4:17 of the same letter. As noted above, this seems to be what humans do on a regular basis, with or without evidence.

Sperber<sup>1</sup> claims that all speakers have such interpretive abilities, although it is also acknowledged that people displaying certain syndromes such as Asperger’s or autism may not have developed the ability to access more complex re-presentation.<sup>2</sup> It has also been observed that very young children do not re-present beyond such level: ironic utterances are usually wasted on young children, as most parents will realise. Nevertheless, the understanding of the crucial role which re-presentation plays in the interpretation of utterances, and of course in communication in general, is a major component in biblical interpretation.

Further, we may make an utterance about the real world, that is, about a *state of affairs* in the real world, or, alternatively, we may express our attitude to the real world or to a potential situation, described as a *potential state of affairs*. Consider the following example:

1. Sperber (1994) p. 187.

2. This aspect of RT is dealt with in much more detail in Wilson (2000) ‘Metarepresentation in linguistic communication’ in D. Sperber (ed.) *Metarepresentations: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 411-48, which includes extracts from L.H. Willey (1999) *Pretending to be Normal: Living with Asperger’s Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Peter came to the house today.

This utterance *represents* the speaker's thought, but is a description of an observable situation in the real world: a state of affairs. If, on the other hand, a speaker says,

I wanted Peter to come to the house today.

he may be 'describing' in saying 'I wanted', but in the following clause he is not describing an actual 'state of affairs' but *representing a desirable* state of affairs.<sup>1</sup> This desirable state of affairs might never happen. The utterance indicates the speaker's attitude to a potential state of affairs: Peter coming to the house.

At the heart of re-presentation, whether of our own thoughts or re-presenting the thoughts of others, is the concept of the transfer of thought to utterance. As noted in Chapter Two, we may assume that we say what we are thinking, that our thought and utterance are identical, but in fact that cannot be proved. An utterance as a representation of a thought will then be enriched by the recovery of inferences which should lead the hearer or reader to an understanding of the communicative intention of the speaker/writer. Sometimes, in order to make a re-presentation more salient, procedural markers will be used to highlight the interpretive nature of the utterance. These will be considered in more detail in Chapter Five.

When a speaker re-presents someone else's utterance and expresses his attitude towards it, that re-presentation is said to be *echoic* in RT terms. Consider a very simple example of this:

A: 'I'm going to town tomorrow.'

B: 'You're going to town tomorrow?'

Here B is not merely repeating what A has just said, but in repeating is giving rise to her attitude and several weak inferences, such as: B is astonished at this information or B is relating this utterance to her own agenda, and plans that A do something for her while in town.

Frequently, a hearer may echo a previous utterance in order to disagree with it, or express surprise at its content. Consider

1. It will be seen that in Koine Greek writers frequently chose to mark such representation of a 'desirable' state of affairs by the use of ἵνα with the subjunctive. This will be dealt with in Chapter Five.

the following dialogue in John 8:56, from many similar in the same chapter:

Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμὴν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη.

εἶπον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτὸν, Πεντήκοντα ἔτη οὐπω ἔχεις καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἐώρακας;

‘Abraham your father was glad that he should see my day; he both saw it and rejoiced.’ So the Judeans said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty and you have seen Abraham?’

The repetition here is not verbatim, but is a loose resemblance of the first utterance. The attitude of the respondents to the first utterance is clear: they echo in order to express incredulity. Of course, the subject is reversed: ‘You have seen Abraham?’ rather than ‘Abraham saw my day’, but it may be seen as a reasonably logical assumption that if Abraham had seen Jesus then Jesus must have seen Abraham!<sup>1</sup>

### *Indirect Speech*

Since Koine Greek introduces both direct and indirect speech by the particle ὅτι, it is only pragmatic clues such as pronomial reference which help us to distinguish the two forms. The particle is nevertheless an indication to the reader of a representation and in certain texts the two forms are combined as we can see from the following examples:

ἔρχεται Μαριὰμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἀγγέλλουσα τοῖς μαθηταῖς ὅτι ἐώρακα τὸν κύριον, καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ.

Mary Magdalene comes announcing to the disciples ‘I have seen the Lord’ and he spoke these words (things) to her.

καὶ συναλιζόμενος παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς ἣν ἠκουσατέ μου, ὅτι ὁ Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἀγίῳ οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας.

1. It is worth noting that there is a variant reading ἐώρακεν σε; ‘he saw you?’ for this echo.

Gathering them together he instructed them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for ‘the promise from the Father which you heard from me that John baptised in water but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days ahead.’<sup>1</sup>

This particle ὅτι will be considered in Chapter Five, but although it signals a representation we discern whether that is direct or indirect by the pragmatics of the sentence as noted above. It has been commonly understood in the past by naïve readers that the indication in a text of direct speech, as compared with indirect, claims to be an accurate transcription of dialogue or teaching. A much more secure hypothesis is that the particle ὅτι alerts the reader to a re-presentation of such dialogue or teaching, but does not claim the exact resemblance to which modern minds have become accustomed.

When comparing the accounts of Jesus’ healing of the ruler of the synagogue’s daughter, we can see that each Synoptic writer gives the most relevant translation or interpretation of this event from the point of view of his audience. Mark will add Aramaic together with a translation:

καὶ κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου λέγει αὐτῇ· ταλιθα κουμ, ὃ ἔστιν μεθερμηνεύμενον· τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε.

And taking the child’s hand he says to her, ‘Talitha Koum’ which is interpreted as ‘Little girl, I am telling you, get up.’

Luke will keep to the Greek:

αὐτὸς δὲ κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς ἐφώνησεν λέγων· παῖς, ἔγειρε.

But he took her hand and called her saying, ‘Child, get up.’

Matthew misses out the direct speech completely:

εἰσελθὼν ἐκρατήσεν τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς, καὶ ἡγέρθη τὸ κοράσιον.

Going in he took her hand and raised the little girl.<sup>2</sup>

1. John 20:18; Acts 1:4-5.

2. Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54; Matthew 9:25.



This is interpretive resemblance, in which a writer selects events and oral records to re-present to others. It is a constant feature of human communication in the present day as in the past. Our current preoccupation with exact resemblance, or an expectation of such, may obscure our understanding of the role of re-presentation, although in oral communication and in relaying information to others we use interpretive resemblance without even thinking about it.

### *Metaphor*

According to RT, the notion of representation is foundational for the understanding of figures of speech such as metaphor and irony, and the latter will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Four. The concept of representation seems to give a more satisfactory account of these tropes than traditional literary analysis. This is based on the notion that when a speaker uses a metaphor, he is loosely resembling his thought or that of someone else. The use of an underdetermined or ‘loose’ expression may give rise to a wider and richer range of inferences for the hearer than a carefully explicit sentence. Consider the following example from Acts 20:29:

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in to you, not sparing the flock . . .

The figurative language begins earlier, with the believers being considered as a ‘flock’, but the strong picture language creates a much richer effect than a straight description of false teachers who will cause trouble to the believers in Ephesus.

The speaker may have been representing his thought: *Men will infiltrate the church and destroy it*, but the use of metaphor, viewed in RT as loose resemblance, allows the hearers to draw a much more vivid conclusion and to have a graphic picture of destruction which a literal representation would not have accomplished.<sup>1</sup> It also allows the drawing of inferences about the speaker’s attitude to those who will ‘come in’, namely destructive predators.

Of course metaphor may be misunderstood as a literal utterance, and the passages below show such a misunderstanding,

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1. This is explained in much more detail in Noh (2000).

which then came to be used as an accusation. Notice both the ‘loose resemblance’ to the original as reported in John 2:19 and the explanation of the misunderstanding, which affected even the disciples, given in the following verses (John 2:20-22). I have given the Greek text along with my own translation so that the resemblance may be judged more accurately.

Matthew 26:60:

ὑστερον δὲ προσελθόντες δύο εἶπαν, Οὗτος ἔφη, Δύναμαι καταλῦσαι τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν οἰκοδομῆσαι.

Afterwards two came and said, ‘This man said “I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it again in three days”.’

Mark 14:57-58:

καὶ τινες ἀναστάντες ἐψευδομαρτύρουν κατ’ αὐτοῦ λέγοντες ὅτι Ἡμεῖς ἠκούσαμεν αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ὅτι Ἐγὼ καταλύσω τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον τὸν χειροποίητον καὶ διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν ἄλλον ἀχειροποίητον οἰκοδομήσω

Some stood up and gave false witness against him saying, ‘We ourselves heard him saying “I will destroy this temple made with hands and in three days I will build another not made with hands.”’

Notice the double representation: the writer represents the words of another character who in turn claims to represent the words of Jesus. It is interesting that the actual statement on which such an accusation might have been based does not appear at all in the Synoptic Gospels, which claim to record the words of the false witnesses, but instead in the Gospel of John where there is no mention of such re-presentation by others:

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν.

Jesus responded and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it.’<sup>1</sup>

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1. John 2:19.

The verses in John's Gospel which follow the original statement explain not only the metaphorical meaning, but also the misunderstanding under which all the hearers laboured and which was resolved for the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus. It seems that it was not understood at all before that. Metaphorical language is rich in contextual implications, but it is significant that this richness was also offset by the deep offence that it caused to the Jews at that time.

The same statement was also echoed by passersby at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, as reported in Matthew 27:39-40:

Οἱ δὲ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτὸν κινεῶντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες, ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις οἰκοδομῶν, σῶσον σεαυτὸν, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, [καὶ] κατάρβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.

And those passing by mocked him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who destroys the temple and builds it in three days, save yourself if you are the son of God and come down from the cross.'

Here again these passersby were echoing what they *thought* Jesus had said, or what they had heard others report, but their distancing attitude is obvious not only from the words of 'mocking', but also from the body language of 'shaking the head'.

In contrast to this, there is the insistence of the Jewish leaders that the inscription on the cross that Pilate had ordered should be changed to reflect not an actual but a reported state of affairs, as they saw it:

ἔλεγον οὖν τῷ Πιλάτῳ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, Μὴ γράφῃ, Ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν, Βασιλεὺς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

So the Judean chief priests said to Pilate, 'Don't write "The King of the Jews"', but that he/that man said, "I am King of the Jews".<sup>1</sup>

Pilate was happy to insult the Jewish leaders by demonstrating that a crucified man was their king, but the revised wording that the leaders wanted stated a personal claim, albeit a claim that this

1. John 19:21.

writer does not record as ever being made by Jesus. Again, there are three layers of representation in this example.

As a contrast, we have a good example in John 21:23 of speech claimed to be direct and compared with a loose resemblance in order to make a point.

ἐξ ἧλθεν οὖν οὗτος ὁ λόγος εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὅτι ὁ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος οὐκ ἀποθνήσκει οὐκ εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι οὐκ ἀποθήσκει ἀλλ' ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι [τί πρὸς σέ];

So the word/report went out to the brothers that that disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say to him ‘he will not die’ but ‘if I wish him to live/remain until I come, what is that to you?’

The common interpretation in biblical studies is that the disciple in question had already died and that this comment on Jesus’ words has been added to show that the original was not a prediction.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Morris points out that the claim to exact representation in this pericope is unusual for this author:

In view of the fact that in this Gospel slight variations when statements are repeated are almost universal, it is noteworthy that here the statement is reported exactly from v. 22.<sup>2</sup>

Morris’ point is that the author of the fourth Gospel regularly aims for loose rather than exact resemblance, but in the example noted immediately above he is claiming to give a close resemblance. While exact representation is not what the ancients focused on, it appears that writers did attempt to resemble the speech of others as accurately as they could. In either scenario, resemblance rather than identity is all that can be claimed and this is acceptable.

### *Dealing with Metaphor in Revelation*

The book of Revelation raises huge interpretative issues, particularly in relation to what is considered to be literal and what metaphorical. In considering metaphor as ‘loose

1. Morris, L. (1984 reprint) *The Gospel According to John*. GR, Michigan: Eerdmans, denies that this is a likely scenario, p. 879.
2. Ibid, p. 878-9.

resemblance' to what 'John' saw in a vision, we may be able to remove some of the difficulties with what appear to be polar opposites from a traditional standpoint. If we are able to view expressions such as 'a third of the earth was burned up and a third of the trees were burned up and all the green grass was burned up' as a loose resemblance indicating great destruction, then we are able to deal with the fact of the grass of the earth, plants and trees being spared destruction in the following chapter.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to recognise that, contrary to what we may believe, literalness is *not* normative or privileged.

If verbal communication were guided by a presumption of literalness, every second utterance would have to be seen as an exception. If it is guided by a presumption of relevance . . . there are no exceptions: the interpretation of every successful act of communication, including utterances in particular, satisfies this criterion.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, we regularly communicate with one another in less than literal language, and so it should come as no surprise that in a literary and even a biblical context loose resemblance is to be expected. Sperber and Wilson give many examples of everyday speech in which we give a relevant, rather than an exact, response to a question about time. If I am asked how long it takes to drive from Glasgow to London I may say '6 hours', but I would be upset if I was accused of lying by someone who had taken 6 and a half hours to complete the journey. Even denoting 'Glasgow' and 'London' is far from exact, but it is relevant, and the estimate of time will also be accepted as relevant.

On the other hand, if I am asked at what time the train leaves for London, then an accurate or literal response such as '9.47am' is more relevant than 'before 10am'. Metaphor, then, is a particular case of loose resemblance which is effective if it is relevant, and will be more powerful in many contexts than a strictly literal representation of a similar proposition.

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1. Revelation 8:7 followed by 9:4.

2. Wilson and Sperber (2012) *Meaning and Relevance*. Cambridge: CUP, p. 89.