

**Fictive interaction within the sentence:  
A communicative type of fictivity in grammar**

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*Abstract*

*This paper examines the intersection of language, interaction and cognition. Specifically, a communicative type of fictivity is discussed, which I call fictive verbal interaction or simply fictive interaction (Pascual 2002). This constitutes a self-sufficient discourse unit conceptualized within a non-factive communicative occurrence, which functions syntactically and semantically as a grammatical constituent. Attested examples at different syntactic levels are dealt with. These levels are: i) the clause (e.g. “the attitude that, yes, I can do it”); ii) the phrase (e.g. “the attitude of yes, I can do it”); and iii) the lexical item (e.g. “the ‘yes, I can do it’ attitude”).*

*Keywords: fictive interaction, fictivity, face-to-face conversation, direct speech, communicative metonymy, intersubjectivity.*

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**1. Introduction**

This paper deals with a poorly studied phenomenon in which a direct speech constituent –typically not involving a literal or loose quotation– appears filling the grammatical slots of clauses, phrases, and lexical items. Consider the examples below, extracted from the internet by means of the search engine Google (my italics, capitals and boldface as in the originals):

- (1) a. You need to go in with the attitude that *yes, I can do this* [...]. (allnurses.com forum)
- b. You'll learn the winning attitude of **YES, I CAN DO IT!** (personal training website)
- c. Develop a "*Yes, I can do it*" attitude. ('Twice-Exceptional Students' Newsletter)

Note that despite their dialogue-internal features in none of these examples do the strings in italics constitute independent utterances in the situation of communication in the here and now. Also, their tense and deixis is independent from that of the matrix clause. More stunningly, their syntactic structure seems to clash with that of the embedding clause. Indeed, they show some resemblances with what George Lakoff (1974) has called "syntactic amalgams", that is, "chunks of material not corresponding to anything in the logical structure of the sentence" (p. 321).<sup>2</sup> However, they seem significantly different in form and function from the classical instances of syntactic amalgams, such as "John invited *you'll never guess how many people* to his party" and "Irving's gone *God knows where*". Notice that the examples in (1) are not direct quotations or paraphrases of actual utterances produced in some real or imaginary communicative exchange either. Rather, they seem to set up a type of communicative occurrence in order to demonstrate –rather than describe– a particular kind of attitude.

Examples such as these may come across to some as bad or inaccurate English, since they have been rarely mentioned in grammars or discussed in the literature. This notwithstanding, I believe that they are too pervasive in English and other languages to be discarded as anecdotal. In fact, a simple Google search for variations of the examples in (1), with different head nouns and embedded clauses involving the same phenomenon, provided thousands of examples of each syntactic level. Moreover, as will be shown in the

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Ron Langacker for bringing this to my attention and to Alan Cienki for helping with the bibliographic search.

following pages, the phenomenon is also manifested in a few conventionalized lexical items. Take for instance the colloquial adjective “*can-do*” (e.g. a “(no) *can-do* attitude”) and its noun equivalent, i.e. “(no) *can do*” (e.g. “Tomorrow is a *no can do*”), to name just a couple.

In the present paper I discuss examples such as those in (1) within the context of a larger phenomenon, namely what is known as fictivity. Cognitive linguistics has shown time and again that fictivity is absolutely fundamental in thought and language. It is generally assumed that linguistic expressions are only indirectly linked to their intended referents and that non-veridical scenarios are often introduced by language users in order to gain mental access to actual ones. The distinction between what Talmy ([1996] 2000) calls ‘fictive’ and ‘factive’ representations can be illustrated by the well-known examples below (my italics):

- (2)
- a. The highway *runs* from San Francisco to New York.
  - b. Higginbottom’s paper *gets longer* every year.
  - c. *Hamlet moves to center stage. He pulls out his dagger. He examines it.*

In (2a), an objectively stationary scene is presented through the motion verb ‘to run’, evoking direction from one point, i.e. San Francisco, to another, i.e. New York. Such type of motion is considered fictive, since it is projected by the conceptualizer, rather than it being the subject referent itself that undergoes motion. Similarly, in (2b) it is not an individual paper that changes in length, but the different instances of the paper at different points in time. Change does not occur in actuality, only as a result of the mental scanning of its different instances. Lastly, the stage directions in (2c) can potentially be read by anybody in any place and at any point in time. Thus, although the particular piece of paper on which the playwright once wrote these instructions was a specific physical document, its content is aiming at a fictive reader, as opposed to any actual one.

These examples illustrate common types of fictivity, vastly studied in the cognitive linguistics literature, namely: *fictive motion* (Langacker 1987, 1991b; Talmy [1996] 2000); *fictive change* (Matsumoto 1996; Sweetser 1997); and *fictive entities and events* (Talmy [1996] 2000; Langacker 1999). These phenomena share the peculiarity of occurring in mentally constructed worlds, as they constitute cases of meaning construction of entirely conceptual entities and relationships. Hence, it is generally accepted that they may help us

understand the nuances of thought and language. Critically, despite their departing from the direct description of reality, instances of fictive reality are understood as emerging from and being fundamentally structured by actual reality (Talmy [1996] 2000).

The phenomenon illustrated in (1), which I call *fictive interaction* (Pascual 2002, in press), comes somewhat close to Langacker's concept of 'virtual speech act' (1999), that is, of "fictivity at the level of illocutionary force" (p. 90). Langacker notes that language users can employ a 'schematized interactive frame' abstracted from specific usage events without fully identifying its elements with an actual speech event. Thus, an abstract interactive frame can be embedded within another interactive frame that has counterparts in the local situation of communication. Instances of virtual speech acts are cases of irony and rhetorical questions, such as the following:

- (3) a. That was a brilliant move. [in response to something stupid]  
 b. Who needs that car? ['Nobody needs that car']

Clearly, the assertion in (3a) does not correspond to the state of affairs in the world as the utterer intends to present them. Rather, a speech act of praising is introduced for the addressee to notice how unworthy of praise the target actually is. In (3b) the utterer only pretends to ask a question. It is used to "render evident the impossibility of providing a truthful answer that satisfies the question's existential presupposition" (p. 90-91). Therefore, whereas the production of the utterances in (3) is quite real, the speech acts of praise and question they introduce are fictive.

Contrary to Langacker's virtual speech acts, the phenomenon I deal with in this paper involves a conceptual channel of communication between at least two fictive interactants, who do not always correspond to the addresser and addressee in the actual situation of communication, or even to referents in the current discourse space. Moreover, as will hopefully become evident in the following pages, the fictive usage of the interactional frame in fictive verbal interaction is not restricted to what have traditionally been called 'speech acts'. In fact, counter to virtual speech acts, in fictive verbal interaction the focus is not so much on the clash between the speech act overtly introduced (e.g. question) and the one ultimately aimed at (e.g. assertion), as on the presentation of a non-interactional referent (e.g. standpoint) in interactional terms (e.g. question-answer

exchange). In other words, the notion of fictive interaction highlights the fictive nature of the communicative channel introduced by language, rather than the fictivity in the speech act it may help to set up.

## 2. Fictive interaction

Since fictive phenomena seem to arise from their factive counterparts, I will introduce the discussion of fictive interaction with an extreme case of non-veridical communication at both the perceptual and the conceptual levels. The example comes from a newspaper article about a young hiker who survived four days alone in a natural forest. The relevant fragment from the article reads (my italics):

- (4) Parven began hallucinating early in his odyssey. [...] At one point, he said, the clouds formed the shape of two helicopters, and he believed rescue was imminent. When that didn't happen, *the clouds formed another message: 'Relax.'* He began *talking to himself*, and *devised his strategy out loud using the word 'we,'* though he was quite alone. 'The loneliness is what kills you,' he said [...] I think my mind had to make [the signals] real or I would have stopped. They guided me down'. (*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 11, 2001)

Although to be sure the boy's conversational hallucinations were the result of dehydration and fatigue, the phenomenon still needs to be explained. Why should one's mind create talking clouds and turn one into two communicative partners? In this paper, I suggest that the answer to this question is found in the important role of face-to-face conversation in our everyday life, together with our reliance on direct experience for the structuring of our mental world. It is from the link between situated verbal interaction and fictivity that the idea of fictive interaction emerges. Thus, in the same way that the appearance and prominence of say fictive motion is motivated by our everyday experience with factive motion (Matlock 2001), the emergence and importance of fictive interaction to be discussed in the following pages is claimed to be inspired by our everyday experience with factive communicative interactions with others. More specifically, my main theoretical assumption is that one of the basic underlying structures of cognition, discourse, and language derives from our life-long experience as social beings constantly exposed to and engaged in situated communicative exchanges with fellow speakers. Hence, the basic hypothesis underlying the notion of fictive

interaction is that speech, linguistic meaning, and language in general are fundamentally interactional in nature (cf. Voloshinov [1929] 1986; Bakhtin 1973, 1975; Vygotsky 1962, 1978). Specifically, the assumption is that the pattern of ordinary face-to-face communicative interaction partially structures: i) the conceptualization of experience (e.g. speech metaphors); ii) the structure of thought (e.g. internal dialogues); iii) the structure of discourse (e.g. dialogic monologues); and iv) the structure of language and its use (e.g. rhetorical questions).

This paper focuses on the linguistically manifested type of fictive interaction, what could be called *fictive verbal interaction*, *fictive talk-in-interaction* or *fictive address*.<sup>3</sup> This embodies the relation between language –both language structure and use– and interaction through the mental projection of the conceptual frame of situated face-to-face conversation to sentential and intra-sentential structures. It is in this sense that I view it as the point of intersection between grammar, interaction, and cognition.

It should be noted that the conversational event set up by fictive interaction constituents are more often than not only explicitly presented through one conversational turn. This notwithstanding, I will still speak of fictive verbal *interaction*, fictive *talk-in-interaction* or fictive *address*, instead of the possible alternatives ‘fictive talk’ or ‘fictive speech’. This terminological decision is motivated by consideration of the fact that speech is always addressed to someone (even if this is oneself), it most commonly constitutes a reaction or response to a previous comment or behavior of the addressee, and it invariably involves making or behavior of the addressee, and it invariably involves making mental contact with the addressee’s knowledge and expectations.

### **3. Fictive verbal interaction**

Fictive verbal interaction constitutes a productive linguistic phenomenon involving the grammatical embedding of a fictive verbal exchange presented through direct speech or, alternatively, a communicative gesture. In other words, it represents the incorporation of a fictive communicative transaction –more often than not set up through only a part of it– into an utterance, clause or phrase. In order to understand how fictive

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<sup>3</sup> Line (Brandt forthcoming) has also suggested the name ‘fictive enunciation’ for the linguistic manifestation of fictive interaction.

verbal interaction may have come to occur, consider the example below. This example comes from a televised interview to a writer working on a non-fiction book dealing with the international trial in The Hague against the former president of Serbia:

- (5) his [Milosevic's] first sentence when ehm he came to the tribunal, he said *'I don't recognize this court'*. However, he now is, you know, he's listening to the witnessing– the witnesses, he's preparing his defense... So there is no longer this kind of arrogance saying eh ehm *'I don't recognize this court'*. His arrogance has melted a little bit. (Slavenka Drakulic, *Netwerk*, NL1, Febr. 24, 2004)

Note that in (5), a situation of communication is first reported in which a defendant verbally confronts the international court judging him. A paraphrase of the statement that individual actually produced in his very first address to the court is subsequently presented as an illustration of that individual's arrogance. By saying to the court that was judging him that he did not acknowledge it as a legal institution, the utterer makes his attitude towards the process manifest. This is what allows that piece of verbal exchange to be used in order to characterize his "kind of arrogance".

Taking this one step further, one may also define or characterize a particular kind of attitude in conversational terms as the type of verbal utterance that would most clearly illustrate it. Critically, this may occur even when no instance of the verbal utterance presented has ever been produced by the individual to whom the attitude referred to is ascribed. Consider for instance the examples from Google below (my underlining and italics, capitals as in the original):

- (6) a. A POSITIVE ATTITUDE means saying, *"YES I CAN DO IT."* (Christian Bible study site)  
 b. An attitude that says *YES, I CAN DO OR LEARN ANYTHING.* (official job hunting site)

Counter to (5), in these examples the pieces in direct speech represent entirely constructed communicative occurrences. They stand for the type of utterance that –if produced in earnest– would be interpreted by addressees and/or overhearers as indicating the kind of attitude referred to. Notice that the understanding of a relation between attitudes and their possible verbalization in some verbal exchange is such that attitudes themselves can be presented as doing the fictive talking, as in (6b). Critically, once language allows direct

speech to be introduced by a verb of saying as an instance of grammatical subordination, then a fictive verbal occurrence can also appear embedded in a larger syntactic structure. Indeed, as the examples in (1) –and many others in Google– illustrate, fictive verbal occurrences can appear filling the slots of: i) complement clauses (e.g. “the attitude that *yes, I can do this*”; “an attitude like, *hey I’m happy*”); ii) prepositional complements (e.g. “the winning attitude of *YES, I CAN DO IT!*”; “the attitude of *Hey, you’re lucky to have a job*”); or iii) compound specifiers (e.g. “a *‘Yes, I can do it’* attitude”; “a *‘nice to see ya!’* attitude”).

In the following subsections I discuss (semi-)conventional and (semi-)creative instances of fictive verbal interaction at the level of: i) the clause (e.g. relative clauses and verb complements); ii) the phrase (e.g. nominals and prepositional complements); and iii) the lexical item (e.g. verbs and compound specifiers). Empirically, the paper is based on a collection of over 500 conventionalized and creative examples of spoken and written language in English, Dutch, Spanish, Catalan, and Belgian French. For reasons of space and simplicity, the examples to be discussed are only a small selection of the English corpus. All examples are attested and documented, coming from different social and communicative domains. These domains are: literature, advertising, law, and interviews in the serious press and in documentary films. The type of medium chosen as well as the content of the fragments selected for analysis have to do exclusively with their suitability to illustrate the phenomenon under discussion, rather than ideological or political views. All italics and underlinings in the data are mine. In the examples from written language, the original spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

### *3.1. Clausal level*

In this section, I deal with instances of clausal talk-in-interaction. These are simple and complex grammatical units displaying the pronominalization and deictic orientation of direct speech, but which do not constitute direct or loose quotes. I will discuss different examples that function as verbal complements or appositive clauses of head nouns, following or not the ordinary complementizer ‘that’. Semantically, three types of examples are defined. These serve to express: i) a type of attitude and a belief; ii) a realization and a feeling; and iii) an inference to be drawn from a situation or state of affairs. Consider first the following attested examples, from the official written report of a police officer and from an interview with a professional critic in a documentary film:

- (7)a. His [Dennis'] attitude towards the offence and authority and society in general is such that 'I'm smarter than you are and I only get caught occasionally'. (quoted in Cicourel, A.V. 1968. *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice*, p. 318).
- b. ...then we're gonna have people who believe, *Look! Life is simply utility, it's commercial fare*. (Jeremy Rifkin, "The Corporation", by M. Achbar et al., 2004)

In (7a), the attitude of a young offender, introduced through the third person possessive pronoun "his", is presented in the first person as a verbal confrontation between himself and a fictive addressee standing for those affected by his recent offence or responding to it (e.g. police officers) as well as "authority and society in general." This fragment of discourse is not an objective description of the offender's attitude. Rather, it constitutes a demonstration of the offender's arrogance through a verbal utterance that this individual most probably never produced (Aaron Cicourel, p.c.). In (7b), the imperative "Look!", introducing what some "people" may come to believe, suggests that the utterer is using what Tannen (1989) calls 'choral dialogue'. The utterer adopts the joint fictive voice of the people referred to in a fictive verbal argument in which they present their belief in unison to some addressee, probably representing the rest of the population.

The use of choral dialogue, as in (7b), is common in fictive interaction constituents. Take for instance the examples below, from a prosecutor's discourse to the jury in a criminal trial and from a newspaper interview with a former candidate to the U.S. presidency:

- (8) a. They didn't quit. They kept going. Knowing that, *hey I may find some evidence here that excludes him*. (People vs. David Westerfield, August 2002)
- b. I think that there are a lot of people within the Democratic Party who [...] felt like, 'okay, I don't want to go through that again'. (Al Gore, *BBC World news*, Dec. 16, 2002)

In (8a), a realization, conviction or piece of knowledge of a group of individuals', i.e. forensic investigators, is set up as a verbalized personal thought in the direct speech and in the first person singular form. This serves to represent the inner speech that is supposed to apply to the whole group. Similarly, in (8b), the utterer presents what "a lot of people" felt through a single voice, expressing this feeling verbally and in a clear conversational

style. Just as (8a), this stretch of discourse in the direct speech does not seem to constitute a case of ordinary reported thought. The utterer merely sets up what seems as internal dialogue as a means to present something that he ascribes to a group of individuals. Note, however, that the utterer in (8b) most probably learned about his colleagues' feelings through hearing them talk about them. Thus, the use of direct speech in (8b) serves to present both that which is ultimately referred to (e.g. a particular emotion) and the means through which one knows, might or could know about that (i.e. the referred individuals' verbalization of that emotion). Hence, the fictive verbal occurrence seems to function somehow as an evidential, in a similar manner as reported speech often does (Mayes 1990; Besnier 1993).

Finally, consider the examples below, produced by a prosecutor in a feedback interview on a murder trial and in his discourse to the jury in that same trial:

- (9) a. The mere question of that, after the jury's noticed he's a crook, means that *how could this guy ever counsel anybody on debt!?* (Pascual 2002: 197)
- b. He's creating the appearance that everything's hunky-dory, that, "*Look, everybody, look at what a great husband I am.*" (Pascual 2002: 246)

In (9a), a situation is set up in which a fictive utterer, mapped with the factive prosecutor speaking and those who agree with his line of reasoning, expresses indignation and strong conviction on the topic of discourse through a rhetorical question. In example (9b), this same prosecutor paraphrases the first subordinate clause defining the kind of appearance the defendant was allegedly creating (by organizing a party for his wife shortly before she was murdered), by means of a fictive address. This usage of the direct speech mode is obviously meant to represent the *message* the defendant allegedly intended to send, that is, what the defendant was fictively *saying* to the guests by organizing that party. Note that, as is also the case for ordinary quotatives (Tannen, 1989; Sanders and Redeker 1996), fictive interaction constituents as the one in (9b), allow the simultaneous presentation of what is talked about and the blended perspectives of the utterer and the character enacted.

The use of (non-quotative) direct speech in a subordinate clause, as in the examples discussed in this section, is more common than one may at first be inclined to believe. A conventionalized example is the formulaic English *(be) like* construction (e.g. "It's like *why not?*"; I'm like *Oh God!*"), which has equivalents

in many Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages.<sup>4</sup> In fact, non-quotative embedded direct speech does frequently occur in natural discourse in contemporary English after verbs of thinking, guessing, and feeling (Mayes 1990; Myers 1999). Furthermore, in Old English texts and various varieties of English spoken in Great Britain, the use of (non-quotative) direct discourse, manifested in an interrogative clause, is grammatically conventionalized after verbs such as ‘to ask’, ‘to wonder’, ‘to figure’, ‘to think’, and occasionally even ‘to know’ and ‘to see’ (see Filppula 2000 for references). Critically, the same seems to be the case for contemporary Standard English, in which these verbs may appear followed by an interrogative or any other sentence type. A simple Google search for occurrences of these verbs combined with a conversational word, such as ‘hey’ or ‘yes’, followed or not by ‘that’, resulted in thousands of examples (e.g. over 25.000 occurrences of “figure hey”, e.g. “they’ll figure *‘Hey, I only paid \$2.50’*”; over 50.000 occurrences of “know that yes”, e.g. “let the caller know that *‘yes, I’m alive and accepting calls over this line’*”). Similarly, the same seems to hold for the nominal versions of these verbs (i.e. ‘thought’, ‘realization’, ‘knowledge’, ‘feeling’, etc.). This is clearly demonstrated by the thousands of examples in Google in which non-quotative direct speech appears after such nouns followed or not by complementizer ‘that’ (e.g. “the knowledge that *YES, YOU APPRECIATE ART*”; “the feeling *‘Hey, this is great!’*”).

Significantly, the occurrence of direct speech clauses after verbs of knowledge, feeling, seeing and action is conventionalized in some non-Indo-European languages lacking an indirect speech construction (Haiman 1989; de Vries 1993, Reesink 1993).

In my view, the existence and frequency of occurrence of conversational constituents with a non-quotative function deserves the attention of theorists. In particular, it seems to call for a redefinition of the notion of direct speech. Indeed, fictive verbal interaction seems to contradict the idea of a clear dichotomy between direct and indirect speech. On the one hand, the cases discussed in this section share all the formal characteristics of direct speech. On the other hand, their possible appearance after complementizer ‘that’, their multifunctionality, and their type rather than token interpretation (see the discussion section) constitute features traditionally associated with indirect speech.

### 3.2. *Phrasal level*

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<sup>4</sup> See Foolen (2005) for references and for an account of the *be like* construction in different languages from a fictive interaction perspective.

Just as subordinate clauses, constituents functioning as phrases can consist of a grammatical unit with all the internal characteristics of ordinary direct speech. Thereby, such phrases display a syntactic form commonly associated with sentences, clauses, or even pieces of discourse and conversation. This notwithstanding, they display the semantic function and syntactic position of a phrase. Therefore, their internal syntactic structure as sentences, clauses, or discourse fragments does *not* make them sentences, clauses or pieces of discourse once their external syntax is considered.

This section discusses phrasal verbal interaction through real-life examples of constituents embedded within verbal and nominal phrases, and following or not a preposition. In particular, the instances to be discussed serve to enact: i) internal dialogues; ii) views and beliefs; and iii) attitudes and behaviors. Consider first the attested examples below, from interviews with two political critics in a documentary film:

- (10) a. So, the ideal [of corporations] is to have individuals who are totally dissociated with one another, whose conception of themselves, eh,... their sense of value, is just, *how many created wants can I satisfy?* (Noam Chomsky, “The Corporation”, by M. Achbar et al., 2004)
- b. There’s no connect between, *I’m just an assembler, on an assembly line, building a car, which is good for people and society and moves them around* and never stop to think about the larger picture, and the larger responsibility of what we’re doing. (Michael Moore, “The Corporation”, by M. Achbar et al., 2004)

In (10a), a group of individuals’ self-perception or “sense of value” is presented through the internal dialogue of an idealized –indeed fictive– consumer, who stands for the whole group. The piece of constructed inner speech set up serves to demonstrate the main preoccupation of that group. That is, the constituent in italics constitutes an enactment or performance of that which defines these individuals’ “sense of value”, presented from the factive utterer’s worldview but taking the joint fictive voice of the individuals referred to. In (10b), a relatively long string in the first person, describing the enunciator’s professional occupation is introduced as a means to present a particular realization of a group of workers. Critically, the discourse preceding (10b) framed its fragment in direct speech as the verbalization of a flow of thought. In particular, the piece of discourse immediately preceding (10b) was: “There is not a single one of us [...] who ever stopped to think:

*'this thing we do for a living, the building of automobiles, is probably the single biggest reason why the polarized caps are gonna melt, and end civilization as we know it'!*"

Take now the following examples of prepositional complements with the internal syntax of a sentence or clause:

- (11) a. I don't think the President [Ronald Reagan] ever changed his views to *'I love communism'* (George Bush Sr., *Time*, June 14, 2004, p. 62)
- b. The Christian fundamentalist movement is one that believes in, *we're right, you're wrong, no matter what*. (Joseph Cafasso, "Outfoxed," by Robert Greenwald, 2004)

In (11a), the simple SVO structure 'I love communism' is presented as something the late American President would never have said honestly, thereby serving to stand for the particular view or ideology that would transpire if somebody were to say 'I love communism' in earnest. In (11b), what a religious group believes in is set up through a non-factive verbal interaction between the members of the group referred to and addressees representing non-members of the group, introduced by the first and second person plural pronouns, respectively. Again, despite consisting of three clausal structures, the whole string in italics has the semantic function and syntactic position of a phrase, since it can be replaced by a nominal pronoun, as in the fragment that immediately followed (11b): "And I saw a lot of that at Fox. *We're right, you're wrong, no matter what!*".

Consider now the following examples of phrases with complex internal syntax, referring to particular attitudes and behaviors:

- (12) a. ...that is where externalities come from, that notion of *let somebody else deal with that, I've got all I can handle myself.*" (Ray Anderson, "The Corporation", by M. Achbar et al., 2004)
- b. George W. Bush is playing follow the leader yet again, (John Kerry's campaign, *The New York Times*, Aug. 12, 2004, p. A22).

In (12a), the italicized fragment of conversation verbally expresses a particular attitude, policy, or decision, which in its turn serves to define a kind of idea or notion. The fictive interaction instance set up needs to be

understood as produced by a fictive communicator representing corporations in general, which in themselves are constituted by a group of individuals. In this particular case, the discourse grounds for the usage of a fictive verbal exchange in order to mentally access a non-communicative notion overtly unfolds in the fragment immediately preceding (12a): “Running a business is a tough proposition. There are costs to be minimized in every kind. And at some point the corporation says, y’know, *‘let somebody else deal with that. Let, let somebody else supply the military power to the Middle East to protect the oil and its source, let, let somebody else build the roads that we can drive automobiles on, let somebody else have those problems’.*”

In (12b), an imperative is used to present an individuals’ attitude or behavior towards others. The imperative in question, ‘follow the leader’, is conventional in American English to refer to a children’s game in which one child is followed by a line of other children, who have to copy everything the first child does. The name for the game thus represents the verbal expression of the unwritten command players need to comply with in this game: “Follow the leader!”. The command is fictive since it is addressed to a fictive game player who may stand for anyone at any point in time and at any place in space.

Interestingly, in English the use of a (supra)sentential structure filling the grammatical slot of the phrase, after a preposition for instance, is not just possible. It is actually also frequently used in everyday language. This can be checked with a quick Google search for combinations that seem to involve a fictive conversational exchange, such as “feeling of I” (almost 35,000 occurrences, e.g. “this feeling of *‘I am doing something, I am getting results’*”; “a feeling of *‘I’ve seen you before’*”) and “attitude of I” (almost 30.500 occurrences, e.g. “an attitude of *‘I’m great, and you’re not’*”; “the attitude of *‘I want what I want when I want it!’*”).

### 3.3. *Lexical level*

Once the mechanism is there in language and language use to express states of mind, moods, desires, expectations and events through the use of the frame of ordinary verbal interaction, (at least) Germanic language users allow these to appear in the grammatical functions of noun, verb, adjective or adverb. The cases discussed in this section share grammatical characteristics with sentences, clauses, or pieces of discourse as well as lexical items. Unlike ordinary lexical items, they exhibit internal syntactic structure. Yet, distributionally these syntactically complex constituents are words, because they fill the corresponding slots. Here, full (supra-)sentential structures appear in the position of noun modifier and specifier of a compound

head, respectively. This entails that they are halfway between syntax and morphology (Toman 1983; Hoeksema 1988; Lieber 1988). This section deals with words with internal syntax functioning as: i) phrasal heads expressing the fictive interactants' communicative relationship or their communicative pattern of behavior; ii) phrasal heads serving to mentally access one of the fictive communicators, or their mindset; and iii) noun modifiers and compound specifiers depicting aspects characterizing the head.

As a way of illustration of the first class, consider the following examples from an informal conversation between friends and from a novel dealing with the German unity:

- (13) a. The Russians will rattle their sabers, the French will wave their arms, the British will *um* and *ah*.  
(Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, Vintage, 1998, p. 72)
- b. A: Oh, poor thing! Here you are...  
B: Oh, don't you dare *poor-thing* me. (Pascual 2002: 219-220)

In (13a), the utterer, i.e. a fictitious novel character standing by the just fallen Berlin wall, expresses in a demonstrative manner how he thinks the British will respond to the historical event. A non-factive situation of communication is set up in which a fictive communicator, standing for the majority of the British population and/or the British Members of Parliament, makes their joint mental and emotional processes towards the event explicit through interjections commonly produced to express hesitation and surprise. In (13b), the originally genuine exclamation "poor thing!" is used fictively in the next conversational turn as a verb meaning "to pity" or "to feel sorry for" somebody. Clearly, in (13b) the new verb created by B applies directly to the situation in the here and now. However, once it has been created it could of course also be used to characterize other situations, real or imaginary. This possible fictive reading of what may be regarded as a mere literal quote or paraphrase of previous discourse illustrates the assumed pragmatic nature –and consequently inherently ambiguous character– of fictivity. Moreover, it seems to indicate the existence of a continuum between the factive usage of verbatim quotation and the fictive usage of constructed speech ascribed to an abstract entity, relationship, or process.

Consider now the examples below, from an autobiographical novel and from a newspaper article on the resignation of a prominent politician:

- (14) a. He relegated me to the role of “*gopher*” –go for coffee, go for this book or that book, go for anything he could think of for me to fetch. (Abagnale, F.W. 1980. *Catch Me If You Can*. New York: Broadway Books, p. 105)
- b. This resignation is a personal tragedy, so it complicates the *let's-get-behind-the-new-person...* (Ingrid Reed, in *The New York Times*, Aug. 12, 2004, p. B6)

In (14a), the narrator introduces the role assigned to him by his boss by means of a conventionalized lexical item meaning ‘errand boy’ or ‘dogsbody’. Interestingly, this noun serves to simultaneously refer to that professional role and act out the type of instructions the worker in question used to receive from his boss, thereby illustrating his function. The spelling out of different instances of commands (e.g. “go for coffee,” etc.) makes overt the process of grammaticalization that seems to have been involved, in which a case of fictive verbal interaction emerged as a substantive with the corresponding derivational morphology (‘-er’). In (14b), a ‘let’s’ imperative appears as a manifestation of the positive predisposition of a work team to support their new boss. Rather than present this predisposition by referential means (e.g. “the eagerness to...”), the utterer voices this sentiment through a fictive address that would only be produced honestly and genuinely in a situation in which such a mindset existed. Note that the fictive utterance is introduced by a definite article with the separate words being hyphenated, which indicates that it is conceptualized as a unit.

Take now the pair of examples below, involving syntactically complex lexical items:

- (15) a. ...in direct violation of the content requirement and the *what-you-see-is-what-you-get* spirit of cognitive grammar... (Langacker, R.W. 1991. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. Vol. 2. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 465)
- b. It’s a calling plan, not a *sorry-I-can-only-talk-during-obscure-inconvenient-off-peak-hours* plan.” (VoiceStream telephone plan, *Newsday*, March 30, 2001)

In (15a), the conventionalized “*what-you-see-is-what-you-get*”, originating from the advertisement for user-friendly computers, is used as a nominal modifier. This sentential expression with deictic orientation is commonly used “to show that there is nothing hidden” (*Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 2003).

This is set up as a means to introduce the most salient property of what is shown, that is, its transparency. Thus, the second person plural does not refer directly to the reader in the factive situation, but to a fictive addressee in a fictive verbal interaction. In (15b), a clearly non-veridical language production is used to define the product introduced with the noun “plan”. Again, the embedded sentence serves as an extract of a fictive instance of conversations among unsatisfied consumers, which ideally the ad reader can recall, understand, or picture. That fictive instance is used metonymically to set up a prototypical conversation of this type, and thereby mentally access properties of the product that make the fictive –but socio-culturally meaningful– communicative situation relevant.

Critically, the use of a constituent in the direct speech as compound specifier is productive, not entirely uncommon, and has even resulted in some conventionalized instances in Germanic languages such as English, German, and Dutch (see Pascual and Janssen 2004 for examples and references). When novel, instances of complex compound specifiers created through fictive interaction often emerge from the use of a prototypical or symbolic sentence or conversational exchange. Examples are: “*‘I do!’ Dishes*” (Pascual 2002: 206); “*Will you marry me? ring*” (100 instances in Google); “*my dog ate my homework excuse*” (362 instances in Google), and “*the how are you fine approach to life*” (1 instance in Google). A particularly productive construction in English is the one using a fictive verbal interaction preceding or following the ‘type/kind of’ combination. Examples are: “a ‘*the-party-is-tonight-so-how-can-I-look-beautiful-in-eight-hours?*’ type of spa” (Pascual 2002: 211) and “a kind of “*who needs THIS? – lemme outa here!*” reaction” (Janssen in print). More generally, even though most lexical instances of fictive talk-in-interaction are created as discourse unfolds, conventionalized cases can also be found. Examples of these in English are: “*not-in-my-back-yarder(s)*” (Eve Sweetser, p.c.), “*forget-me-not(s)*”, “*do’s and don’ts*”, “*no-no*”, “*must-see/have*”, “*whatsyourname*”.

#### **4. Theoretical discussion**

As illustrated by the examples discussed in this paper, fictive verbal interaction shares numerous formal and pragmatic features with more prototypical usages of direct speech, as they have been described in the literature on ordinary direct quotation and speech representation in general (cf. Clark and Gerrig 1990). In particular, instances of the phenomenon display the following formal features: i) they usually involve

prototypical, relatively simple, polished and straightforward occurrences; ii) they can involve all tenses and moods, as well as all four illocutionary sentence types, or comprise two or more asyndetically connected structures constituting a piece of discourse or dialogue; iii) they frequently contain dialogue-internal features (e.g. voice modulation, gestures), expressive and emotive elements and constructions (e.g. “God!”, “Oops!”), as well as truncations, vocatives, and discourse particles (“well”, “ok”); iv) their deictic orientation can be independent of that of the matrix discourse, and thus they allow new referents for the first and second person pronouns; v) they often involve theatricality and exaggeration; vi) they may involve a different style, vocabulary, and even language than the embedding discourse; and vii) in oral language use they are usually preceded, and at times also followed, by a pause, and in written language, they often appear between inverted commas.

From a pragmatic or or discourse perspective, they also share fundamental features with direct quotation or speech representation in general. Specifically: i) they set up a non-genuine communicative exchange, in the sense that –just as is the case for quotation– they are not to be interpreted as directly applying to the situation of production; ii) they involve acting out rather than describing their referent; iii) they constitute selective depictions of their referent; iv) they often involve the blending of different voices and subsequently of different viewpoints; and (v) they often seem to be motivated by the ineffability of describing their referent.

Despite all the features shared with ordinary direct quotation, fictive verbal interaction does not seem to function as an ordinary quotative. Rather, it seems to open up a mental space in which a verbal interaction takes place, typically not constituting a report of an actual one. Indeed, that (piece of) conversation is typically entirely novel. Moreover, contrary to what occurs in the case of ordinary direct quotation, instances of fictive verbal interaction invariably have a reading as types rather than tokens, as has already been suggested to be the case for the *(be) like* + direct speech construction (Foolen 2005). That seems to be the case even when the fictive reading emerges from a factive one, as in examples (13b) and (14a).

It should be noted at this point that the use of a fictive verbal exchange to talk about a non-communicative reality is not exceptional. In everyday language use, it is not uncommon to present an imaginary conversation or piece of discourse to attain particular communicative aims. The discursive power of this usage should not be underestimated. The use of direct speech serves to (re)create a staged verbal performance in the current interaction as though it were occurring at the time of speech. By such usage, a story becomes more vivid (Wierzbicka 1974; Chafe 1982); it constructs a sense of immediacy (Tannen 1986); and it attains

conversational involvement (Tannen 1982, 1986, 1989; Rosen 1988). As it is, direct speech presents what is talked about as concrete subjective (re)enactment, rather than abstract objective description. This allows the audience to live the situation and appreciate for themselves that which the narrator attempts to express. Indeed, the audience of a piece of (quotative or non-quotative) direct speech are no passive listeners. They are drawn into a reported or constructed dialogue as temporary addressers, addressees or overhearers. It is from this position that they are to infer that which may have motivated the type of communicative performance dramatized. Therefore, the use of non-quotative direct speech within the matrix clause is merely the grammaticalization of an already available narrative device (Reesink 1993; de Vries 1993; Pascual and Janssen 2004).

A further fundamental characteristic of fictive verbal interaction is that all its instances share a metonymic usage. That is, they are invariably introduced to make mental contact with its overall fictive situation of communication (with particular frames and cultural models retrievable by the addressee). By so doing, a relevant aspect of it becomes highlighted. In the examples discussed in this paper, the piece of speech introduced mainly served to make mental contact with: i) its fictive addressee (e.g. “*gopher*,” 14a); ii) its fictive addresser (e.g. “*not-in-my-back-yarder(s)*”); iii) the fictive addresser’s mental, attitudinal or behavioral state (e.g. 1, 6, 7, 9a, 8b, 9b, 10, 11, 13b, 14b); iv) the situation which the fictive addresser and/or addressee create or find themselves in (e.g. 9b, 12b, 15); and v) the type of interaction itself (e.g. “*poor-thing me*,” 13b). Taking these examples into account, I believe that fictive verbal interaction invalidates Banfield’s (1973: 25) assumption –shared by traditional linguists– that “direct speech represents the act of communication”, so that “reported beliefs, thoughts, feelings and mental acts can only appear in the language in the form of an indirect rather than a direct speech clause” (p. 29). More specifically, the data analyzed seem to call for the existence of a continuum between direct and indirect speech in languages such as English, as has already been suggested for different world languages (Güldemann and von Roncador 2002).

I hope to have succeeded in showing that the use of embedded direct speech as in fictive verbal interaction is neither anecdotal nor trivial. I claim such a usage to be mainly motivated by speakers’ overall conceptualization of talk-in-interaction as doors to the interactant’s mental, emotional, and behavioral world. Indeed, in our cultural understanding linguistic exchange appears as informational, so that in the default case what one says is regarded as entailing what one believes and also what is objectively true (Sweetser, 1987:47-48). Moreover, in social life instances of face-to-face interaction are often used as the most concrete

and graspable indications of the interactants' thoughts, emotions, intentions, knowledge and social activities (Wierzbicka, 1974; Cicourel 1974, 1978; Haiman, 1989). Note too that, as Fauconnier (1981) points out, when a specific symbolic act (e.g. a wedding ceremony) always co-occurs with a particular linguistic manifestation (e.g. "I do!"), the latter is conceptualized as a symbol of that act. It should then not be surprising that the symbolic utterance type were introduced through fictive verbal interaction to make mental contact with the whole act, and thereby also to an entity associated with that act (e.g. "'I do!' Dishes"). Naturally, what goes for symbolic acts also goes for more mundane ones.

## **5. Summary and conclusions**

The language material discussed in this paper shows that languages such as English allow the appearance of (non-quotative) direct speech within the sentence, filling the grammatical slots of clauses, phrases, and words. The phenomenon argued to be involved in these cases is what I called *fictive verbal interaction*. This constitutes a self-sufficient discourse unit conceptualized within a non-factive communicative occurrence, which functions syntactically and semantically as a grammatical constituent. It involves the use of the schematic structure of ordinary inter-subjective communication as an organizing frame to think and talk about apparent non-interactive realities, such as non-living entities, inner thoughts, and physical or emotional states. In a nutshell, all instances of fictive interaction within the sentence share: i) a fictive interpretation; ii) a demonstrative rather than descriptive nature; iii) a representation as types; and iv) a metonymic function.

I believe that the study of fictive verbal interaction can provide some insight into the nature of language structure and use, which should be of interest to the cognitive linguist. First, the apparent mismatch between the internal and external syntax of these constituents seems to confirm the cognitive grammar tenet according to which grammatical functions and categories constitute schematic symbolic units, which are not entirely determined by their syntactic form (Langacker 1987, 1999a). At the same time, the occurrence of direct speech within the sentence reinforces the hypothesis that the different language 'modules' need to be understood along a continuum (Langacker 1987, 1991a).

Second, the inherent metonymic function of intra-sentential fictive interaction occurrences, whereby the direct speech fragments overtly expressed are only portions of more extensive fictive exchanges, provides further evidence for an equal primacy of denotation and connotation (Fauconnier [1985] 1994, 1997; Lakoff

1987; Langacker 1987, 1991). This also seems to be supported by the fact that the expressed piece of speech in fictive interaction constituents is introduced in order to make mental contact with an entity or process related to it (e.g. wedding ceremony in “*I do!*’ Dishes”).

Third, the possible fictive reading of literal quotes and paraphrases of surrounding discourse (as in examples (13b) and (14a)), seems to indicate that fictive verbal interaction belongs to and constitutes in itself a radial category with fuzzy boundaries, along the continuum of the various ways of introducing dialogue established by Tannen (1986: 323). Similarly, the online creation of novel occurrences of fictive verbal interaction, often directly motivated by the discourse immediately preceding it (e.g. 13b), seems to confirm the assumption that conventional grammatical structures emerge from language use, and hence that the boundary between competence and performance is a fuzzy one (Langacker 1987, 1991a).

Finally, the treatment of say an intra-sentential interrogative as a fictive question (as in examples (6a) and (9a), see also Pascual in press), is consistent with the assumed correspondence between syntax and semantics (Langacker 1987, 1991a; Lakoff 1987; Goldberg 1995). Critically, I believe that a phenomenon like fictive verbal interaction may also indicate the existence of some sort of correspondence between form and interactional function (Pascual in press). Along this line, I suggest that a phenomenon such as fictive verbal interaction is consistent with a cognitive linguistics theory that studies language as grounded in social interaction (cf. Croft 2000, 2005; Zlatev 2005a, 2005b). That is, a theory that integrates intersubjectivity as a fundamental dimension of linguistic meaning (cf. Sinha 1999, 2005) as well as grammar (Verhagen 2005; Janssen in print). Indeed, all the examples discussed in these pages seem to have more to do with the human cognitive capacity to view others as mental agents like oneself, and thus to take other peoples’ points of view and coordinate these distinct perspectives, than with describing the world. I suggest that the link between grammar and intersubjectivity needs to be further explored, since the internal structure of language may not only reflect its semantic aspect –arising from our embodied socio-cultural experience and broader cognitive abilities of the human mind– but also its interactional dimension and communicative function.

Further research based on ethnographic language data and oral as well as written corpora should teach us more about the relation between fictive interaction and its context of occurrence. Also, a comparative corpus study should reveal its frequency of use in different languages and language varieties. In the meantime, I hope to have shown that fictive interaction within the sentence constitutes a non-trivial phenomenon in thought and language resulting from the grammaticalization of ordinary face-to-face conversation.

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