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Strategies for delivering novel expressions:

A case of direct speech compounds in English*

Ryota HOSOYA

1. Introduction

The term “novel expressions” is used in this paper to refer widely to linguistic expressions that show some idiosyncrasies and are not part of the inventory of conventional expressions shared by the members of a speech community. Using novel expressions comes with risks, as they may be unintelligible to the listeners and may interfere with the smooth flow of conversation. The speaker may be greeted with an awkward silence or a wry smile, so using novel expressions can be viewed as face-threatening to some extent.

Despite the possible negative consequences, people do use novel expressions from time to time. This seemingly contradictory behavior leads us to make the following two predictions: (i) people employ some tactics for their novel expressions to be accepted by their interlocutors with ease; (ii) successful acceptance of novel expressions by the other participants in communication brings some rewards or communicative effects that make the attempt at using them worth the risk. This study contributes to understanding the first prediction with a focus on one type of novel expression called a “direct speech compound (DSC)” (Pascual, 2006, 2014).¹

By analyzing English DSCs occurring on films and TV dramas, I aim to reveal the tactics consciously or unconsciously employed by the speaker to facilitate the acceptance of novel expressions by their interlocutors and show that various strategies are at play in the production of novel expressions. Selecting DSCs as the object of inquiry allows for further investigation of this understudied type of expression and fosters our understanding of the productive mechanism of novel expressions in general. As part of the line of research that sees grammar

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¹The communicative effects of using DSCs and novel expressions in general will be investigated in a separate paper.

as inextricably tied to interaction (e.g., Hopper, 1998; Du Bois, 2014; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018), this study focuses not only on the utterance containing the target DSC but also on the preceding and following utterances and the overall flow of interaction.

The rest of the article is structured into five sections. Section 2 familiarizes the readers with some key analytical concepts, such as resonance (Du Bois, 2014), and offers a brief explanation of the features of DSCs based on the existing literature. Section 3 explains the rationale for selecting DSCs as the type of novel expression to study and the procedures used to collect examples from films and TV dramas. Section 4 is an in-depth analysis of the excerpts to illustrate how DSCs are used in context, specifically from the perspective of identifying the speaker's tactics. The analysis shows that the concepts introduced in Section 2 are at play in the production of DSCs. Section 5 discusses each of the identified tactics and how these tactics contribute to making the acceptance of novel expressions easier and smoother. Concluding remarks are provided in Section 6.

2. Key concepts

2.1. Resonance and ad hoc constructions

When we produce utterances, formal and semantic affinities often exist at multiple levels, such as in words, meanings, and syntactic structures. These are easily observable between pairs of utterances in the same dialogue. These affinities “link the paired utterances along multiple dimensions of linguistic form and meaning” (Du Bois, 2014, p. 360). A key concept in dialogic syntax, “resonance” is defined as “the catalytic activation of affinities across utterances” (Du Bois, 2014, p. 372). It is “an effect of formally arraying words parallel to each other,” and “speakers who activate resonance achieve intersubjective engagement, which can range from full agreement to strong pragmatic differential” (Brône & Zima, 2014, p. 463). Resonating utterances that show structural parallelism are analyzed in Section 4 and are shown to play an important role in the smooth and natural production of novel DSCs.

Another key concept for the analysis of novel DSCs is “ad hoc construction.” This term was devised by Brône and Zima (2014), who thought that the basic assumptions of Construction Grammar can be naturally extended to the realm of interaction.

... by virtue of getting reinstated repeatedly in the course of an interaction, these resonating constructional patterns become a highly salient, locally entrenched means to express a particular content [...]. In other words, the conceptual pact that interlocutors set up in an ongoing interaction manifests itself in the local salience of these grammatical constructions. They become local routines that serve

interlocutors as productive schematic resources within a given stretch of conversation. (Brône & Zima, 2014, pp. 482–483)

Brône and Zima (2014) defined an ad hoc grammatical construction as “a grammatical pattern that emerges in the course of an ongoing interaction through the known processes of schematization, instantiation and extension” (p. 467). In the analysis section, many structural patterns that become schematic resources available in an ongoing interaction are identified.

2.2. Direct speech compounds

DSCs, also called “fictive interaction compounds” (Pascual, 2006, 2014), are compounds consisting of two parts, which I call the “direct speech” part and the “head” in this paper. In English, they have the structure [<direct speech> + head], with the head being either a noun or an adjective. The highlighted part of (1) is an example of a DSC with the direct speech part being “oh-crap-I-forgot-about-that” and the head noun being “feeling.”

- (1) “I was just getting home and ready to go to bed; I had been up for more than 24 hours,” Nelson says. He checked his email before going to sleep and was hit by that **oh-crap-I-forgot-about-that feeling**. (Hosoya, 2022, p. 53)

There are few studies devoted to this type of expression, and the scant literature available has focused almost exclusively on the mechanism of how people interpret the meaning of such expressions (Pascual, 2014). Moreover, except for Yokomori (2021), almost no researchers have dealt with DSCs that appear in spoken interaction. By using the spoken data of DSCs from films and TV dramas, this study approaches the subject from a new angle to ask what strategies speakers use to facilitate the smooth acceptance of DSCs by their interlocutors. With this new perspective, the aim is to contribute to the study of DSCs and the productive mechanisms of novel expressions in general.

3. Data collection methods

This study focuses on DSCs because they are prime examples of novel expressions. Almost every DSC is a one-off nonce expression that has never been used before and will never be used again in another interaction. The assumption is that the higher the degree of novelty of expressions, the easier it will be to observe the strategies and rewards for producing them.

For this study, it was decided that DSCs from films and TV dramas would be used for two reasons. First, to confirm that the DSCs are accepted smoothly without preventing a natural

flow of communication, the ability to observe the interlocutor’s response is critical, and this is not possible if only written DSCs are investigated. Second, as subtitles of films and TV dramas are readily available and searchable online, I was able to collect DSCs much more effectively than, for instance, by randomly watching YouTube videos in the hope of encountering them by chance.

The procedure for finding DSCs began by searching online English subtitles of films and television for authentic examples of DSCs. I searched for quotation marks (“ ”) and hyphens (-), as these often appear in the direct speech part of DSCs. However, this alone does not guarantee that all instances can be retrieved since the use of quotation marks or hyphens depends on the practice of each individual transcriber. Hence, the next step was to watch the films and TV dramas used in the study to confirm that all the DSCs in those sources were found and retrieved. The total number of collected samples is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sources and counts of DSCs

Title	Year	DSC count
<i>Jerry Maguire</i>	1996	3
<i>My Spy</i>	2020	3
<i>The Intern</i>	2015	3
<i>Girlboss</i> (S1, 13 episodes)	2017	5
<i>The Bold Type</i> (S1 Ep1–S2 Ep8, 18 episodes)	2017–2021	4

4. Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the collected DSCs in interaction and identifies the strategies employed by the speaker for making DSCs occur smoothly without interrupting the flow of the conversation.

The first example comes from the film *Jerry Maguire* (Brooks, et. al., 1996). Before the excerpt, the protagonist Jerry, a sports agent, was grieving all day because he was fired from his job and left by both Cush, a top athlete he had represented, and Avery, his girlfriend. The only athlete who stayed with him, football player Rod, was fed up with Jerry’s lamentations and his lack of effort to win a sizable contract for him.

(2)

- 1 R So, I don’t wanna hear your shit, Jerry.
- 2 I don’t wanna hear your “na na na ooh I lost Cush, Avery” shit.
- 3 J Give me another drink please.

- 4 R Anybody else would have left you by now, but I'm sticking with you.
 (Brooks, et. al., 1996, 52:46)

The DSC (“na na na ooh I lost Cush, Avery” shit) appears in Rod’s utterance in line 2 and is preceded by his own utterance in line 1. A clear structural parallelism can be observed across the two utterances; the pattern [I don’t wanna hear your X shit], where X means that some words may fill the position, is shared by Rod’s utterances. In the former utterance, X is empty, whereas in the latter, X is filled by the direct speech part of the DSC (“na na na ooh I lost Cush, Avery”). The parallelism between the two utterances becomes clearer when they are juxtaposed in diagraph format (Figure 1).

Line	Speaker						
1	R	So,	I don't wanna hear	your		shit	, Jerry
2	R		I don't wanna hear	your	“na na na ooh I lost Cush, Avery”	shit	

Figure 1. Diagraph for (2)

Structural parallelism invites resonance (Du Bois, 2014). Since both utterances at issue are produced by the same person, it can be said that self-resonance is at play here. By consecutively producing two utterances that incorporate the shared pattern [I don’t wanna hear your X shit], with the former one being normal and showing no grammatical deviation, and the latter one being abnormal and showing a complete oddity, the speaker Rod delivers his DSC not abruptly but gradually. Before he produces the utterance containing the DSC, he has produced a grammatically common utterance that shares the same template, and thereby prepares the ground for the ensuing novel expression to come into being. This step-by-step process of delivering DSCs through self-resonance triggered by structural parallelism is one of the tactics that speakers employ for facilitating the acceptance of DSCs by their interlocutors.

Self-resonance as a strategy for the smooth introduction of DSCs can also be observed in the next example. The following self-resonating utterances produced by Annie and directed at Sophia are about a web designer that Annie recently hired without consulting Sophia, who is worried about her business going bankrupt:

- (3)
- 1 S You know, we can't afford to bring on new help right now.
 2 A We can't afford not to. April is coming up fast, and the site still isn't done.

- 3 Just give her a chance. She was super cheap.
 4 Like, **there-might-be-something-wrong-with-her cheap**.
 5 K This conversation is not private.

(Cannon, et. al., 2017, Season 1, Episode 12, 11:31)

Here again, the speaker Annie produces a structurally analogous pattern [X cheap] before delivering a novel DSC. In the first utterance, the X slot holds the common adjective “super,” whereas in the subsequent utterance, the X slot holds the novel direct speech part of the DSC (there-might-be-something-wrong-with-her). Producing the resonating two utterances sharing the pattern [X cheap] and changing the degree of novelty of the content of the X slot, Annie successfully delivers her DSC in a step-by-step fashion.

The third example comes from the film *My Spy* (Bender, et. al., 2020). Sophie, a schoolgirl, was looking forward to going ice skating the next day, but shortly after returning home, her mother Kate, a nurse, received a message that she would have to do an extra shift at the hospital the next day. Sophie, upon seeing her mother, sensed something bad had just happened.

(4)

- 1 K Hey. Close the door, please. Thank you.
 2 S I know that face.
 3 K What face?
 4 S **The “I’m about to drop some disappointing news on you” face.**
 5 K No. This is ... this is my “Should we have spaghetti tonight?” face.
 6 Which also looks like my “I can’t take you to ice-skating tomorrow” face.
 7 S Mom!
 8 K Many women will do an extra shift at the hospital, Sophie. I’m sorry.

(Bender, et. al., 2020, 19:10)

Three DSCs appear in this excerpt, all of which are in structures that resonate and/or self-resonate. In line 2, Sophie produces the ordinary phrase, “I know that face.” This opens up the successive production of utterances containing the pattern [<determiner> X face]. In line 3, Kate responds by saying, “What face?” There is nothing special about the grammatical aspect of this utterance, but its structure is analogous to the “that face” of Sophie’s “I know that face,” thereby showing resonance. In response to Kate’s question, Sophie delivers a novel DSC using the structure [<determiner> X face], where the determiner is “the,” and X is filled by the direct speech part of the DSC (“I’m about to drop some disappointing news on you”). This production

is not heard as abrupt because it is already prefaced by two utterances that share the structure [<determiner> X face]. Quickly following, Kate negates Sophie’s speculation and produces her first DSC using the template [<determiner> X face], where the determiner is “my” and X is filled by the direct speech part of the DSC (“Should we have spaghetti tonight?”). However, after a moment in which Sophie wears a dubious expression and gives some gestures of doubt, Kate tells her daughter the bad news by producing her second DSC, which also comes in the format [<determiner> X face]. The determiner is again “my,” and X is filled by the direct speech part of the DSC (“I can’t take you to ice-skating tomorrow”). The two DSCs produced by Kate are neither unexpected nor confusing, because they are prompted by previous utterances that incorporate the shared structure. It can also be said that Kate’s second DSC is prompted by her first DSC, which makes this an instance of self-resonance, as in excerpts (2) and (3). Overall, this excerpt contains five instances of the structure [<determiner> X face], and [X face] constitutes a DSC in three of them. Structural parallelism can be seen clearly when the five utterances are shown in a diagraph (Figure 2). It is evident that the pattern [<determiner> X face] has acquired the status of ad hoc construction (Brône & Zima, 2014) and that the cumulative use of this pattern has gradually led to the creation of an atmosphere where inserting direct speech into X to produce a novel expression is not seen as abrupt but as a reasonable act of creation.

Line	Speaker			
2	S	I know	that	face
3	K		What	face?
4	S		The	“I’m about to drop some disappointing news on you” face
5	K	This is... this is	my	“Should we have spaghetti tonight?” face
6	K	Which also looks like	my	“I can’t take you to ice-skating tomorrow” face

Figure 2. Diagraph for (4)

The fourth example comes from the film *Jerry Maguire* (Brooks, et. al., 1996). Matt had previously promised to ask Jerry to represent his son, Cush, a top football player. However, when meeting Jerry the day before the draft, Matt revealed that he and his son had signed a contract with another agent, Sugar.

(5)

- 1 J You didn’t sign anything with Sugar, right?
- 2 Matt...? Tell me you didn’t sign.
- 3 Tell me you didn’t sign ’cause I’m still sort of moved by

4 your “**my word is stronger than oak**” thing.

5 M We signed an hour ago.

(Brooks et. al., 1996, 47:56)

A DSC appears in Jerry’s fourth utterance (line 4). The beginning of this utterance (line 3) contains the phrase “tell me you didn’t sign,” which is an exact repetition of Jerry’s utterance in line 2, which itself is built on the first three words of his first utterance (“You didn’t sign”). These three utterances show self-resonance because of their shared phrase, “you didn’t sign.” Therefore, Jerry’s DSC becomes less abrupt because the utterance containing it is a gradual extension of his own preceding utterances.

However, there is another reason Jerry’s DSC is easily accepted in this instance. The direct speech part of this DSC (“my word is stronger than oak”) refers to something Matt had said to Jerry previously. Prior to the scene with excerpt (5), Matt had promised Jerry that he could represent his son Cush, saying, “You know I don’t do contracts, but what you do have is my word. And it’s stronger than oak.” The repetition of the phrases “my word” and “stronger than oak” in the direct speech part of the DSC, even though the repetition is delayed, is another factor that makes the novel DSC sound familiar and not surprising to the interlocutor. In this instance, Matt himself had said those words previously, but it could also be a repetition of words previously only heard.

The fifth and final example also comes from the film *Jerry Maguire* (Brooks, et. al., 1996). Jerry, heartbroken over the loss of his girlfriend and the player he represented, calls Dorothy and arranges to meet her at her house, but Laurel, Dorothy’s sister, does not take it well.

(6)

1 D He’s coming over.

2 L Tonight?

3 D He just lost his best client. I invited the guy over.

4 L Dorothy, this is not a guy. It’s a syndrome, early mid-life, hanging onto the bottom

5 rung, **dear-god-don’t-let-me-be-alone-I’ll-call-my-newly-long-**

6 **suffering-assistant-without-medical-for-company syndrome,**

7 and if knowing all that you still want him to come over, I’m not saying a thing.

8 D Honey, he’s engaged. And for the first time in my professional life, I’m part of

9 something that I believe in.

10 L Okay... but he better not be good-looking.

(Brooks et. al., 1996, 53:56)

A rather long DSC is produced by Laurel in lines 5–6. As a setup for delivering the DSC, Laurel first produces “this is not a guy” as a [<pronoun> is (not) a X] template. Then, replacing “this” with “it” and “guy” with “syndrome” and omitting “not,” she creates a parallel: “It’s a syndrome.” This short phrase is then expanded into a very long one with the structure [X Y Z syndrome], where X corresponds to “early mid-life,” Y corresponds to “hanging onto the bottom rung,” and Z corresponds to the direct speech part of the DSC, “dear-god-don’t-let-me-be-alone-I’ll-call-my-newly-long-suffering-assistant-without-medical-for-company.” It is important to recognize that X, Y, and part of Z (“don’t-let-me-be-alone”) are all fixed expressions remembered by people like a single word. Using fixed expressions for X, Y, and the beginning of Z and putting an ad hoc phrase in the latter half of Z (“I’ll-call-my-newly-long-suffering-assistant-without-medical-for-company”) is a transition from the old pre-existing material to the new ad hoc material, which makes the novel DSC come across as less abrupt. Moreover, it can be seen that the lengths of X, Y, and Z gradually grow from the shortest to the longest. This may be an instance of what Suzuki (2020) calls “the triple jump utterance,” which is an utterance consisting of three consecutive similarly structured expressions (p. 200). By using a prefabricated template of the triple jump utterance, as well as employing self-resonance and fixed expressions, Laurel’s DSC occurs naturally as a terminal point of her step-by-step creation of expressions.

5. Discussion

Since DSCs are rare and novel, they can easily be startling or abrupt if the speaker has not made advance preparations. That abruptness may invite negative consequences, such as not being understood, spoiling the conversation, or obstructing the flow of interaction. To avoid these risks, a speaker can consciously or unconsciously draw on some strategies for better reception of their DSCs.

At least four such strategies have been identified in this analysis: (i) generating resonance through the use of structurally parallel utterances, (ii) using intertextual reference to a previous phrase that all the interactional participants know, (iii) using the triple jump prefabricated template, and (iv) using fixed expressions. All of these tactics can be seen as using formulaicity: (i) resonance occurs through the repeated use of a certain structural template, or a formula in interaction; (ii) a previous phrase intertextually referred to can be thought to be a fixed expression within the interaction group; (iii) the triple jump template is a formula that we all share; and (iv) fixed expressions are by definition formulaic.

The main argument of this paper is that these strategies, based on formulaicity, facilitate the interlocutors' acceptance of DSCs. This is a step-by-step process. By using particular structures, such as [I don't wanna hear your X shit], [X cheap], and [<determiner> X face], which are shared by the participants of the ongoing interaction, the speakers produce new utterances by changing the content of the X slot. This change is gradual, and a smooth transition from common expressions to novel expressions can be observed. Speakers also intertextually refer to previous phrases shared by the participants and show the cohesion between their DSCs and the referred phrases, thereby making their DSCs sound more familiar. Speakers also use the prefabricated triple jump template, as in [X Y Z syndrome], and progressively insert novel material into X, Y, and Z, with X and Y being fixed expressions and Z being the most novel one. By so doing, the speaker helps the interlocutors prepare to accept the upcoming novel expression in a hop-step-jump manner. All in all, speakers do not present novel DSCs in one fell swoop. They consciously or unconsciously employ tactics based on formulaicity, gradually change the inserted material of a shared formula, make progressively novel expressions, prompt the interlocutors to be prepared, and deliver their novel DSCs as their final blow.

There are a couple of limitations that may affect the generalization of these findings. First, as no systematic procedure was followed for selecting sources, there may be a lack of balance in terms of genre and time period. Moreover, since the number of sample sources is small, any generalization about DSCs and novel expressions cannot be easily drawn from the findings of this study. These are the points that need improvement in future research.

6. Conclusion

Delivering novel expressions involves risks. Hence, it is expected that the speaker who produces novel expressions draws on some strategies to have them smoothly accepted by their interactional participants. By collecting examples of undoubtedly novel English DSCs from films and TV dramas and analyzing the process leading up to their delivery, four strategies for facilitating the acceptance of DSCs by interactional participants were identified. These strategies are (i) generating resonance or self-resonance through the repeated use of a certain structure, (ii) intertextual reference to a previous utterance that all the interactional participants know in common, (iii) the use of the triple jump format, and (iv) the use of fixed expressions. Often using these tactics in combination, speakers can gradually change their utterances, make progressively novel expressions, slowly but steadily prepare their interlocutors for the upcoming novelty, and deliver the novel DSC as the final declaration. They do not present

novel DSCs with no warning but in a step-by-step fashion. Only after a sufficient amount of approach run can speakers leap high and excite their interlocutors with novel expressions.

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