DECLARATIVE VERBS AND REPORTED DISCOURSE

Marius-Ciprian CUCUIAT (PhD candidate)
University of Craiova

Abstract

This article tries to resume the most important modes of classification of the verbs introducing Reported Discourse, verbs usually called declaratives. The taxonomies have been created by outstanding Romanian and foreign linguists who have studied the phenomenon of Reported Speech. We shall endeavour to demonstrate with clear examples that the main value according to which the classification of these verbs is realized is a lexical one.

Key words: *declarative verb, secondary declarative verb, communicational act, structural verb, communicational attitude*

Résumé

L'article veut résumer les critères les plus importants en fonction desquels on fait la classification des verbes introducteurs du discours rapporté, verbes nommés, pour la plupart des cas, déclaratifs. Les taxinomies ont été crées par des linguistes roumains et étrangers éminents qui ont étudié le phénomène du discours rapporté. Nous avons essayé de montrer, par des exemples clairs, que la valeur principale qui domine dans les classifications de ces verbes est une valeur lexicale.

Mots-clés: *verbe déclaratif, verbe déclaratif secondaire, acte communicationnel, verbe structurel, attitude communicationnelle*

Most of the times, when we speak about verbs of declaration or declarative verbs, we use semantic criteria to identify them. This is because as a group these verbs have, or should have a common trait – the fact of denoting an enunciative activity. The historic forerunners of these verbs are the Latin *verba dicendi*. Nevertheless, in Latin grammars, these are presented as having a dual function, first as introductive of Reported Discourse and second as main verbs of the Accusative plus Infinitive construction.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

With the Romanian and foreign linguists who have studied this phenomenon we find several modes of identifying, classification and sub-classification of this type of verbs. What can be observed is the fact that, in almost every case, a classification starting from other criteria than the lexical one is inexistent, and this makes us state that their semantic value is primordial for this type of verbs. In the following paragraphs, we shall present the theories we have found most relevant.

In his 1994 article, *Pour une typologie des verbes introducteurs du discours indirect*, Juan Manuel López Muñoz[1] is not in favour of a semantic criterion as the only way of identifying such verbs, because this would lead to an enumeration of verbal families hard to delineate: declarative verbs (*a (se) manifesta*/*to manifest (oneself)*, *a spune/to say*, *to tell*); verbs of opinion (*a considera/to consider*, *a judeca/to judge*); verbs of positive or negative appreciation (*a aproba/to approve*, *a blama/to blame*, *a critica/to criticize*, *a lauda/to praise*); injunction verbs (*a interzice/to interdict*, to *prohibit*, *a ordona/to order*); verbs of demanding (*a implora/to implore*, *a ruga/to pray*); verbs of enunciative modality (*a cere/to ask*, *a striga/to cry*, *a întreba/to question*), etc.

The author considers that a valid sub-classification criterion for declarative verbs would be the way in which the originary discourse is realized (verbally, in writing, through gestures, mentally). Thus he proposes the following classification: a) verbs and verbal phrases that introduce an originary verbal discourse: *a întreba/to ask*, *a striga/to cry*, *a cere/to demand*, *a nega/to deny*, *a informa/to let know*, *a face o promisiune/to make a promise*, *a da un ordin/to order*, *a promite/to promise*, *a zice/to say*, *a spune/to tell*, *a înțelege/to understand*, etc.; b) verbs and verbal phrases that report a previous discourse realized by other means than orally: in writing – *a zugrăvi/to paint*, *a citi/to read*, *a scrie/to write*; through gestures – a *indica/to point* (*out*), *a arăta/to show*; mentally – *a concluziona/to conclude*, *a crede/to consider*, *a gândi/to think*.

In his turn, Joe Larochette advances the proposal to start from a class of heteroscopical verbs, susceptible to "denote either a mental operation, or

[1] Muñoz, 1994, p. 158.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

a communication act, or somebody's ignorance as to the answer to a question"[2]. He classifies these verbs starting from their semantic values and arrives at a functional opposition between Direct Discourse and Indirect Discourse. His classification is presented below:

a) verbs denoting a communication act: verbs reproducing the content and/or the expression of the originary discourse and which accept both Direct and Indirect Reporting: (*a spune/to say*); verbs which only reproduce the content of the Direct Discourse and can be used only in Indirect Reporting: (*a afla/to find out*); verbs which reproduce both the expression and the content of the Direct Discourse, and can be used only in Direct Reporting, sometimes in an interpolated clause (*a rânji/to grin*);

b) verbs denoting a mental operation or a perception: verbs which allow the reproduction of both the expression and the content, or of only the content and which accept both Direct and Indirect Reporting (*a considera/to consider*); verbs and verbal phrases which only admit Indirect Reporting (*a-şi da seama/to realize*);

c) verbs denoting ignorance about an answer to a question: verbs that permit reporting a question Directly and Indirectly (*a întreba/to ask*); verbs which accept an interrogative *if* and which cannot introduce a direct question (*a înțelegeto understand*).

At first sight the above classification doesn't raise any problems, although the last class based on the interrogative modality is rather close to the first one, centered around the communication verbs, as interrogation is one of the main principles of interlocution. That's why the classes which do not accept but one way of reporting seem slightly debatable to us. For instance verbs from the third category of point a), which according to Larochette only accept Direct Discourse, can in some contexts introduce Indirect Discourse as well: "Toată lumea bună a Bucureştiului a ținut să fie prezentă la inaugurarea celui mai nou restaurant de lux din Capitală, un loc despre care se *şuşoteşte* că a costat aproape un milion şi jumătate de euro." (Source: www.acasătv.ro)/"The entire Bucharest High-Life of Bucharest wanted to be present at the inauguration of the newest luxury restaurant in

[2] Larochette, 1980, p. 273.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

the Capital, a place which is whispered to have cost almost a million-and-a-half Euros".

Dominique Maingueneau (1979) proposes the following semantic classification of declarative verbs: a) verbs that suppose the truth or the falseness of the Reported Discourse: *a pretinde/to pretend*, *a revela/to reveal*, etc.; b) verbs that situate the Reported Discourse in a discursive chronology: *a concluziona/to conclude*, *a răspunde/to respond*, etc.; c) verbs that circumscribe the Reported Discourse to a discursive typology: *a demonstra/to demonstrate*, *a povesti/to narrate*, etc.; d) verbs which specify the phonetic realization the utterance: *a mormăi/to mutter*, *a striga/to shout*, *a şuşoti/to whisper*, etc.

Harald Weinrich introduces the syntagm *structural verb*, which brings into the class of communicational verbs a defining relationship between a given semantic content (the transmission of a message, which implies the existence of a sender, and of a receiver) and the syntactic representation of this content: communicational verbs are trivalent, realizing the structure Subject (sender) – Direct Object (the message) – Indirect Object (receiver). According to the author, structural verbs would be verbs whose semanticism gave them a suitable form to the content. Structuration can be realized starting from the scheme of an external (*a auzi/to hear*, *a vedea/to see*, *a simți/to feel*) or internal (*a-şi imagina/to imagine*, *a gândi/to think*, *a visa/to dream*) perception, from the expression of volition (*a dori/to want*, *a voi/to wish*, *a spera/to hope*) or from assessing a given situation (*a aproba/to approve of*, *a dezavua/to disapprove*, *a recunoaşte/to confirm*, *a infirma/to deny*).

Communicational verbs would therefore be structural verbs as they supply specific communication forms which match the communication contents[3].

Starting from the Latin classification of communicational verbs (*verba dicendi*, *putandi*, *sentiendi*), the author states that these serve to the transmission of a message and to its structuration, as well as the fact that we also generally use a communicational structural verb as a marker for

[3] Cf. Weinrich, 1973, p. 468.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

Reported Discourse. “Even if an opinion was only thought of, and not verbally expressed, it becomes the subject of communication once it is reported”[4]. The author therefore considers the three categories of structural verbs (namely the verbs of pure communication – Lat. *dicendi*, of expressing opinion – Lat. *putandi* and of perception – Lat. *sentiendi*) as fundamental ways of the Reported Discourse.

For Weinrich, all structural verbs (*a aproba/to approve, a dezavua/to disapprove, a dori/to wish, a gândi/to think, a-şi imagina/to imagine, a înţelege/to understand, a recunoaşte/to admit, a spera/to hope, a simţi/to feel, a visa/to dream, a vrea/to want*) can be used as declarative verbs. He explicitly states that a communicational verb can *sometimes* report the words of a third party, so he doesn’t see this feature as defining for this class of verbs, and he doesn’t pretend that reporting can be monopolized by them.

In his *Grammaire du sens et de l’expression*, Patrick Charaudeau proposes another way of filing the verbs introducing the Reported Discourse, according to the way the originary “enunciation mode” may be described. This enunciation mode can be described by the way of speaking which characterizes the communicational attitude of the source-speaker (*a chestiona/to question, a răspunde/to answer, a vehicula/to purport*) or by reporting the uttering act made by that speaker in the form of a speech act (allocutive: authorization, interdiction; ellocutive: opinion, obligation; delocutive: affirmation)[5].

For the mode of endorsing speech or for some communicational attitudes there will be: interlocutive roles: *a declara/to declare, a informa/to inform, a întoarce cuiva/to answer someone back, a raporta/to report, a răspunde/to reply, a repeta/to repeat, a spune/to say, a transmite/to transmit, a vehicula/to purport, a zice/to tell*, etc.; voice attitudes: *a chema/to summon, a-şi da duhul/to gasp, a murmura/to murmur, a şuşoti/to whisper, a striga/to shout*, etc.

As for modal speech acts the author distinguishes between: allocutive acts: *a autoriza/to authorize, a avertiza/to warn, a cere/to demand, a interzice/to interdict, a judeca/to judge, a solicita/to elicit, a sugera/to*

[4] Weinrich, 1973, p. 564
[5] Charaudeau, 1992, p. 725.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

suggest, etc.; ellocutive acts: *a accepta/to accept*, *a aprecia/to appreciate*, *a declara/to declare*, *a fi obligat/to be obliged to*, *a fi convins/to be convinced*, *a ignora/to ignore*, *a presupune/to suppose*, *a proclama/to proclaim*, *a şti/to know*, *a vrea/to want*, etc.; delocutive acts, which cannot be the object of reporting except for the rare cases when they are integrated in a summatory Reported Discourse. This is because the delocutive speech acts cannot generally be attributed to a given illocutor. However, we could find examples such as: "Şeful statului a spus că *este evident* că blocarea dosarului lui adrian Năstase în Parlament este unul din elementele care aruncă o lumină foarte proastă asupra Parlamentului ca instituție."/"The head of the state said that *it is obvious* that the blocking of Adrian Nastase's file in the Parliament is one of the elements which shed an extremely bad light on the Parliament as an institution." (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 13.07.2009)

Michel Martin-Baltar (1976) uses a semantic-pragmatic criterion (taking into consideration both the sense of the verb, and the typology of the speech acts they indicate). In the field of thought, the author interprets what the Reported sender thinks or utters. Here the verbs, called descriptive, are organized on two axes: a subjective one (the verbs denoting the subjective representations of the Reported sender) and an objective one (the verbs denoting objective discoursive operations realized by the sender's words. The subjective axis groups, on the one hand, the so-called verbs of propositional attitude, or modal verbs, which comprise three categories: judgement: *a crede/to think*; volition: *a prefera/to prefer*, *a dori/to want*; feelings: *a spera/to hope*, *a regreta/to regret*, *a se teme/to fear*.

On the other hand, also on the subjective axis we have verbs denoting perception, a process considered to be a centripetal one (from the object perceived to the perceiving subject: *a (se) simți/to feel*) or a centrifugal one (from the perceiving subject to the perceived object: *a constata/to notice*, *a remerca*, *a observa/to observe*).

On the objective axis are situated the operational verbs, named thus because they denote objective discoursive operations realized by the words of the Reported sender. The reporter's discourse doesn't take into account the subjectivity of the quoted sender, but the form and/or the content of the latter's words; from this point of view, verbs realizing the Reported

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

Discourse can be: verbs which describe the original discourse from a content perspective: *a analiza/to analyze, a concluziona/to conclude*; verbs which describe the original discourse from a form/content perspective *a evoca/to evoke a face aluzie/to hint*; verbs which describe the original discourse from a form perspective: *a pronunța/to utter, a repeta/to repeat, a sublinia/to underline*.

In the field of speech acts, the reporter does not interpret what the quoted sender thinks or utters, but identifies and repeats the speech act he has performed: *a accepta/to accept, a acuza/to accuse, a afirma/to state, a avertiza/to warn, a mărturisi/to confess*, etc.

The category of discoursive effects sums up verbs which denote consequences the sender's discourse has had on the reporter or the receiver: *a alarma/to alarm, a descuraja/to discourage, a îngrijora/to worry*, etc.

In the first grammar of the Romanian Academy, Laura Vasiliu, the author of the chapter dedicated to the direct and indirect speech, states that "The Direct Speech is the reproduction of a communication introduced by one or more declarative words"[6]. There are verbs or verbal phrases, sometimes nouns or idioms which can replace these verbs. The author gives then a short list of proper declarative verbs (*a spune/to say, a întreba/to ask, a răspunde/to answer*).

Besides this category clearly declarative, Vasiliu also mentions verbs, verbal phrases or idioms which express "actions accompanying the speech act" and which can be used to resume the words of a third party. Examples offered by the author place in this category verbs and verbal phrases such as *a-şi răsfrânge buzele/to lick one's lips, a râde/to laugh, a face rânduială/to set matters straight*[7]. The author mentions some nominal expressions which in popular discourse can introduce the Reported Discourse (*vorba ceea, povestea cântecului/ as the saying/the story/the song goes*, etc.).

The enumeration of declarative words closes with the presentation of an example of DD introduced by a noun semantically linked to the domain of the declarative verbs: "Cuvintele mamei lui: *să nu întârzii la masă*!, l-au

[6] GLR, 1966, p. 342.
[7] GLR, 1966, p. 343.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

urmărit toată dimineața."/"His mother's words: *don't be late for dinner*!, stayed with him the entire morning."

We have also found examples of such Direct Reporting instances: "Cuvinte ca *nesimțire* și alte cuvinte indecente nu ar trebui să se regăsească pe fișele de externare ale pacienților, a mai spus ministrul sănătății."/"Words such as *grossness* and other indecent words shouldn't appear on the patients' release papers, added the Minister of Health." (*Libertatea*, 28.07.2009)

In his book dedicated to the Reported Discourse in popular discourse, Cezar Bălăşoiu succeeds in achieving an extremely detailed and well-founded classification of introductory verbs for the Reported Discourse (2004). For the declarative verbs, the author proposes the following classification criteria: a semantic-pragmatic criterion (declarative verbs oriented towards a receiver of the message/declarative verbs oriented towards a listener of the message); the property of quoting (declarative verbs able to form the Reporting Discourse/declarative verbs unable to form the Reporting Discourse); the semantic case and the syntactic function granted to the receiver (Indirect Object, Direct Object, Subject); the type of reported discourse it introduces (direct, indirect); its position towards the Direct Discourse (initial, median, final).

In the new Grammar of the Romanian Academy, within the chapter dedicated to the Direct and Indirect Speech, the author Ileana Vântu treats separately the classes of verbs that introduce DD and DI respectively and mentions the exceptions to the rule rather than the canonic verbs themselves. Starting from the premise that "the quoted Discourses present in the Direct Speech cannot appear after any declaration verb utilized in any communication situation"[8], the author proposes the following restrictions, mainly for DD: verbs which can quote directly only initially and finally, often accompanied by the anaphors *so/thus*: *a vorbi/to speak*, *a rosti/to say*; declarative verbs which cannot form a frame discourse, so they cannot introduce DD: *a demonstra/to demonstrate*, *a dovedi/to prove*, *a slăvi/to*

[8] GALR, 2005, p. 820.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

praise; the author herself admits the use of some explicit performative verbs to introduce DD: *a permite/to allow*.

The author also proposes the term of secondary declarative verbs, a class of verbs with other main meanings and functions, but which can serve the purpose of introducing DD: verbs denoting the production of certain sounds: *a chicoti/to giggle*, *a geme/to moan*, *a ofta/to sigh*, *a plânge/to weep*; verbs denoting natural phenomena used metaphorically: *a tuna/to thunder*; verbs denoting body movements: *a se crispa/to shrug*; verbs denoting a social behaviour: *a (se) disculpa/to exculpate (oneself)*; verbs implying conversational strategies: *a întrerupe/to interrupt*, *a replica/to reply*; verbs denoting emotional attitudes: *a se mira/to wonder*, *a se indigna/to fume*; verbs denoting oriented movement: *a avansa/to advance*, *a se întoarce/to turn around*; psychological verbs: *a se căi/to repent*, *a se îngrijora/to worry*, *a se mira/to wonder*, *a medita/to meditate*, *a se veseli/to cheer (oneself).*

We will end this short presentation of the main types of verbs introductory of the Reported Discourse with some considerations made by Rodica Zafiu in her article dedicated to the declarative verbs published in the volume *Romanian Language and Literature*. The author defines the class of declarative verbs as "inhomogeneous and open"[9] and mentions the existence of an extended series of declarative verbs which allows for "stylistic variation and adaptation to a given situation"[10]. The author states that, through metonymy the following classes of verbs join the class of declarative verbs: a) verbs denoting opinion: *a crede/to believe*; b) verbs denoting a psychical state: *a se enerva/to get angry*; c) verbs denoting acts associated to speech: *a suspina/to sigh*; d) verbs denoting effect: *a convinge/to convince*; e) verbs appearing on the foreground of something already stated, verbs of addition, insistence, repetition: *a adăuga/to add*, *a preciza/to specify*, *a observa/to observe*, *a menționa/to mention*, *a aminti/to remind*; f) verbs denoting specific speech acts (which the author considers remote from the core of declarative verbs): *a întreba/to ask*, *a răspunde/to answer*, *a promite/to promise*, *a cere/to demand*, *a ruga/to pray*, *a*

[9] Zafiu, 1994, p. 15.
[10] Idem, *ibidem*, p. 16-17.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

mulțumi/to thank, a propune/to propose, a avertza/to warn, a amenința/to threaten, a protesta/to protest; etc.) verbs of opinion (according to the author, the most interesting and the most widespread): *a crede/to think, a considera/to consider, a aprecia/to appreciate.*

In conclusion, we can underline once again the fundamentally semantic character of all classifications concerning the verbs introducing the Reported Discourse, as well as the fact that, at least in the case of modern languages, only at a lexical level are we able to create a functional and pertinent taxonomy of the verbs used to accomplish the Reported Speech, a process erroneously considered by many as strictly morphosyntactic.

BIBLIOGAPHY

Academia Română, *Gramatica limbii române*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1966.

Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti", *Gramatica limbii române, I. Cuvântul, II. Enunțul*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2005.

Bălăşoiu, Cezar, *Discursul raportat în textele dialectale româneşti*, Bucureşti, Editura Universității din Bucureşti, 2004.

Charaudeau, Patrick, *Grammaire du sens et de l'expression*, Hachette, Paris, 1992.

Larochette, Joe, *Le langage et la réalité. L'emploi des formes de l'indicatif en français*, Ed. Fink, München, 1980.

Maingueneau, Dominique, *Initiation aux méthodes de l'analyse du discours*, Hachette, Paris, 1979.

Martin-Baltar, Michel, *Les verbes transcripteurs du discours rapporté*, in *Pédagogie du discours rapporté* (Hélène Gauvinet ed.) Didier, Paris, 1976.

Muñoz, Juan Manuel López, *Pour une typologie des verbes introducteurs du discours indirect*, in *Estudios de Lengua y Literatura francesas*, Madrid, 1994.

Weinrich, Harald, *Le Temps. Le récit et le commentaire*, Ed. Du Seuil, Paris, 1973.

Zafiu, Rodica, *Verbe de declarație*, in LLR, XXII, 2/1994.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)

SOURCES

Evenimentul Zilei – 13.07.2009.
Libertatea – 28.07.2009.
www.acasătv.ro.

BDD-A3795 © 2009 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:39:33 UTC)