

Direct and Indirect Discourse in Koine Greek
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Definitions

- Direct discourse: the reporting of someone's statement (or sometimes, thought) with some indication that the words are exactly as originally spoken.
- Indirect discourse: the reporting of someone's statement or thought in such a way that the content is preserved, but the exact words are not recorded.

English Examples

1.

'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo.
'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all we who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.'
—Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, bk. 1, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, ch. 2, p. 51

2.

'That sounds like a bit of old Bilbo's rhyming,' said Pippin. 'Or is it one of your imitations? It does not sound altogether encouraging.'
'I don't know,' said Frodo. 'It came to me then, as if I were making it up; but I may have heard it long ago. Certainly it reminds me very much of Bilbo in the last years, before he went away.... "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door," he used to say.'
— Ibid., ch. 3, pp. 73–74

3.

'Well, Sam!' he said. 'What about it? I am leaving the Shire as soon as ever I can — in fact I have made up my mind now not even to wait a day at Crickhollow, if it can be helped.'
'Very good, sir!'
'You still mean to come with me?'
'I do.'
'It is going to be very dangerous, Sam. It is already dangerous. Most likely neither of us will come back.'
'If you don't come back, sir, then I shan't, that's certain,' said Sam. '*Don't you leave him!* They said to me. '*Leave him!* I said. *I never mean to. I am going with him, if he climbs to the Moon; and if any of those Black Riders try to stop him, they'll have Sam Gamgee to reckon with,* I said. They laughed.'

—Ibid., ch. 4, p. 87

4.

So refreshed and encouraged did they feel at the end of their supper (about three quarters of an hour's steady going, not hindered by unnecessary talk) that Frodo, Pippin, and Sam decided to join the company. Merry said it would be too stuffy.

—Ibid., ch. 9, p. 154

5.

The Bree-hobbits were, in fact, friendly and inquisitive, and Frodo soon found that some explanation of what he was doing would have to be given. He gave out that he was interested in history and geography (at which there was much wagging of heads, although neither of these words were much used in the Bree-dialect). He said that he was thinking of writing a book (at which there was silent astonishment), and that he and his friends wanted to collect information about hobbits living outside the Shire, especially in eastern lands.

—Ibid., p. 155

Comments on the English Examples

We have a regular system of written conventions in English to indicate direct discourse. The examples above illustrate several of these, including paragraph breaks/indents, quotation marks (both single and double¹), and even italics. We also have standard means of introducing both direct and indirect discourse.

Evaluate the five examples and mark all direct discourse and all indirect discourse. How has the author communicated the intended nature of each statement? How is the speaker identified? List or mark each relevant typographical feature and each introductory statement.

Greek Discourse

The conventions of Greek discourse are quite different from English. That is true of both the original texts and of our modern printed editions. Greek did not use quotations marks or even capitalization during the Koine period. There were only limited indications of discourse such as common introductory phrasing; most was assessed by context. Our modern printed editions have updated these practices slightly, but they are still much more limited than English. Printed texts have no quotation marks and no paragraphing system that is related to discourse. The only addition to the ancient system is the use of an initial capital letter to mark direct discourse—and not all editions are consistent in the use of this convention!

¹ The quote marks used in these examples follow the British conventions (i.e., they start with single quotes and embed double ones; the American practice is the reverse) because the examples are taken from the 50th Anniversary edition which reflects Tolkien's own usage.

Direct Discourse

Direct discourse is usually easy to identify since it is almost always introduced with a verb of speaking (or sometimes thinking)² which may be supplemented with a participle either before or after the main verb, e.g., εἶπεν λέγων or ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν. This sounds redundant in English, but was normal Greek style.

It is also common (more so in some writers than others, e.g., Mark) to use a conjunction following the verb of speaking, typically ὅτι. The technical name for this is a “recitative ὅτι.” In this case the ὅτι clause functions as the complement of the verb of speaking (some would call this the direct object of the verb). In English the ὅτι is represented by quotation marks (do not translate it as *that*). Do not assume that every ὅτι following a verb of speaking is direct discourse because it can also introduce indirect discourse.

Indirect Discourse

Indirect discourse is not always as easy to identify, in part because it can be constructed somewhat differently than the equivalent construction in English. Compare the indirect statement with the original in the following table.

Ex. Indirect Discourse	Original Statement
4. Merry said it would be too stuffy.	“It will be too stuffy.”
5. He gave out that he was interested in history and geography.	“I am interested in history and geography.”
He said that he was thinking of writing a book	“I am thinking of writing a book.”
and that he and his friends wanted to collect information about hobbits living outside the Shire, especially in eastern lands.	“My friends and I want to collect information about hobbits living outside the Shire, especially in eastern lands.”

By comparing the English examples of indirect discourse given above, you can observe two types of changes. First, the tense of the verb is changed when a statement is placed in indirect discourse: the tense is always pushed back one step in time. This is necessary in English because English tense is a time term. Second, the grammatical person of the pronouns are often adjusted to reflect the fact that it is now no longer the speaker himself making the statement, but it is being reported of him by someone else. For

² Technically these are verbs of perception and include not only speaking and thinking, but may also be seeing, hearing, knowing, or remembering, etc. in some cases.

example, in 5a, “I am” becomes “he was” (first person to third and present tense to past).

In Greek there are also several differences between the two statements, but not all the same as in English. The person of the pronoun often changes in a fashion similar to English. The verb, however, never changes tense. This is because the Greek tense-form is not a time category (it expresses aspect), therefore there is no need to “adjust” the time for a later reference point. The context makes such things clear, though when it is translated into English, the *English tense* must be changed to reflect English usage.

The Greek verb *may* be changed in other ways, however. The most common change is for a finite form to be replaced by an infinitive in the same tense-form.³ For example, in Mark 6:45 (see the full text below), **ἡνάγκασεν** τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ **ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον** (he urged his disciples to embark in the boat) probably reflects an original statement something like ἐμβῆτε εἰς τὸ πλοῖον (“Get into the boat”)—a 2P²AAM becoming a ²AAN.

The change in pronoun is one of the most sure ways to identify indirect discourse. Though not every statement can be identified this way, if a first or second person pronoun is changed to third person, it almost surely indirect discourse. For example, in Mark 1:37, λέγουσιν αὐτῷ ὅτι πάντες ζητοῦσιν σε (They said to him, “Everyone is seeking you”) is direct discourse; if it were indirect, the pronoun σε would have been changed to αὐτόν (λέγουσιν αὐτῷ ὅτι πάντες ζητοῦσιν αὐτόν, They said to him that everyone was seeking him).

When indirect discourse is introduced by ὅτι (or sometimes by εἰ, it is represented in English as *that*. Quotation marks are never used in indirect discourse.

Greek Examples

Direct Discourse

Read the following passages in your Greek NT: Mark 1:14–18 and 2:5–12.

Identify each instance of direct discourse and explain how you know it is direct rather than indirect discourse.

³ Less commonly a participle may be used; that is not treated in these notes. In classical Greek, the optative mood was sometimes used in indirect discourse as a substitute for a secondary tense indicative verb in the direct statement.

Indirect Discourse

Both of the following passages also include direct discourse. The indirect statements have been bolded; the direct statements are marked with quotation marks in the parallel English translation.

Mark 6:45–50

⁴⁵Καὶ εὐθὺς **ἠνάγκασεν** τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ **ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαϊδάν, ἕως αὐτὸς ἀπολύει τὸν ὄχλον.** ⁴⁶καὶ ἀποταξάμενος αὐτοῖς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι. ⁴⁷καὶ ὁψίας γενομένης ἦν τὸ πλοῖον ἐν μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ αὐτὸς μόνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. ⁴⁸καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους ἐν τῷ ἐλαύνειν, ἦν γὰρ ὁ ἄνεμος ἐναντίος αὐτοῖς, περὶ τετάρτην φυλακὴν τῆς νυκτὸς ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς. ⁴⁹οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα **ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάντασμα ἐστίν,** καὶ ἀνέκραξαν· ⁵⁰πάντες γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶδον καὶ ἐταράχθησαν. ὁ δὲ εὐθὺς ἐλάλησεν μετ' αὐτῶν, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε.

Mark 8:14–21

¹⁴Καὶ ἐπελάθοντο λαβεῖν ἄρτους καὶ εἰ μὴ ἓνα ἄρτον οὐκ εἶχον μεθ' ἑαυτῶν ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ. ¹⁵καὶ διεστέλλετο αὐτοῖς λέγων· Ὁρᾶτε, βλέπετε ἀπὸ τῆς ζύμης τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ τῆς ζύμης Ἡρώδου. ¹⁶καὶ **διελογίζονται** πρὸς ἀλλήλους **ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχουσιν.** ¹⁷καὶ γνοὺς λέγει αὐτοῖς· **Τί διαλογίζεσθε ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε;** οὐπω νοεῖτε οὐδὲ συνίετε; πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν; ¹⁸ὁφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ

⁴⁵Then *he urged* his disciples to *embark in the boat and to go ahead of [him] to the other side to Bethsaida, while he was sending the crowd away.* ⁴⁶After taking leave of them he went into the hills to pray. ⁴⁷When it was evening the boat was in the middle of the lake and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸Seeing them straining as they rowed (for the wind was against them), about the fourth watch of the night he went to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹but they, seeing him walking on the lake, *thought that it was a ghost,* and they cried out, ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But quickly he spoke with them and said to them, “Have courage, it’s me; don’t be afraid.”

¹⁴Now they had forgotten to take bread, and except for one loaf, they did not have [bread] with them in the boat. ¹⁵He commanded them, “Watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod. ¹⁶So *they were discussing* with one another *that they didn’t have bread.* ¹⁷Knowing this, [Jesus] said to them, “Why are you discussing about not having bread? ¹⁸Having eyes, you do see don’t you? And having ears, you do hear don’t

ὧτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε; καὶ οὐ
μνημονεύετε, ¹⁹ ὅτε τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους
ἔκλασα εἰς τοὺς πεντακισχιλίους, πόσους
κοφίνους κλασμάτων πλήρεις ἦρατε;
λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Δώδεκα. ²⁰ Ὅτε τοὺς ἑπτὰ
εἰς τοὺς τετρακισχιλίους, πόσων σφυρίδων
πληρώματα κλασμάτων ἦρατε; καὶ
λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Ἑπτὰ. ²¹ καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς·
Οὐπω συνίετε;

you? You do remember don't you ¹⁹ when I
broke the five loaves for the five
thousand, how many full baskets of pieces
did you pick up?" They answered him,
"Twelve." ²⁰ "When [I broke] the seven
[loaves] for the four thousand, how many
basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"
They answered him, "Seven." ²¹ He said to
them, "Do you still not understand?"