

*A Didactic Proposal for Learning Reported Speech through Celebrity Gossip Blogs*

Margarita Esther Sánchez Cuervo

University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain

0380

The European Conference on Education 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013

Abstract

Reported speech is usually referred to as a grammatical phenomenon that involves a transformation like the backshift of tenses. In many cases, certain uses of reported speech involve a stylistic device that writers may use when others “claim” to express certain opinions. This practice is frequent in celebrity gossip blogs, where bloggers portray celebs reporting the voices of anonymous sources in order to transmit their comments. The writer thus seeks to shift responsibility for his words to an external source, attributing the utterance, in many cases, to another speaker.

This study is aimed at second year Spanish students of oral and written communication for the degree in English Primary Education. I first describe some activities intended for reviewing the categories of reported speech through Leech and Short’s taxonomy in their book “Style in Fiction”. I will then show some significant instances from the corpus, considering that, in gossip blogging, three main types of verbal processes for reporting others’ words include hearsay, mindsay and perception verbs. Finally, I propose activities so that students recognise and further categorise the utterances, including some notions related to the topic of reported forms like summarising and paraphrasing. Furthermore, they will try to identify whether the blogger is responsible for the act of attribution. Some sociolinguistic considerations like the inclusion of informal language and the inventiveness that is typical of spoken discourses are also regarded.

The corpus for the analysis consists of fifty posts belonging to high-traffic celebrity gossip blogs. The methodological approach is mainly qualitative.

## Introduction

Reported speech is usually defined as a grammatical phenomenon by which we report what another person has said without quoting their exact words. When we turn direct speech into reported speech we change the tense of the main verb by putting it one step further into the past. In many cases, certain uses of reported speech involve a stylistic device that writers may use when others “claim” to express certain opinions. This practice is frequent in celebrity gossip blogs, where bloggers portray celebs reporting the voices of anonymous sources in order to transmit their comments. The writer thus seeks to shift responsibility for his words to an external source, attributing the utterance, in many cases, to another speaker.

Blog genre has been characterised as a new genre of computer mediated communication, and has been defined as “an identifiable and well-recognised name for a type of communicative action” (Mauranen, 2013, p. 54). Some of its features are the following (Herring and Paolillo, 2006, pp. 442-443):

- They have now become a primary source of information.
- Dated entries are displayed in reverse chronological sequence.
- They possess a culturally-recognised name.
- They have a general purpose of sharing content with others through the Web.
- Audiences are huge and can participate with their comments.

As regards motivations for blogging, I stress the following (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht and Swartz, 2004, pp. 43-45):

- Documenting one’s life. Depending on the audience and content, a blog can become a public journal, a photo album, or a travelogue.
- Providing commentary and opinion.
- Expressing deeply felt emotions.
- Articulating ideas through writing. Blogging provides two main benefits related to this notion that includes an audience to shape the writing and an archive of potentially reusable posts.
- Forming and maintaining community forums, by which readers express their view to one another in community settings belonging to different fields.

Blogs usually encompass two categories: diary (or personal journal) and filter. This twofold distinction is related to its overall objective: the diary category reports on the author’s life and the filter comments on happenings external to the author. Celebrity gossip blogs join the filter category because they report on other people’s affairs and encourage readers to respond. They usually follow the same general format in which a picture is posted, and this picture is accompanied by a comment, story, or a link to a more detailed article (Petersen, 2007). Talking about gossip is a widespread practice nowadays, and the Internet is transforming the nature and effects of gossip. Furthermore, gossip is becoming more permanent and prevalent, but it is not so selective when it comes to having a definite audience (Solove, 2007, p. 63). They can be seen as an interpretive approach to celebrity culture that call attention to audience meaning-making practices like gossip in the production of media texts (Meyers, 2012, p. 1030).

Traditionally, the use of newspapers in education is extended due to its focus on contextualised language. Similarly, celebrity gossip blogs offer stimulating material

that attracts young readers and is continuously updated. Celebrity gossip blog material fulfils several objectives in this study:

1. It brings about trendy topics reflected in a lively prose that is similar to oral language.
2. Due to variety of voices in the text, it can be used to explore the diverse uses of reported speech.
3. It proposes activities for the recognition and practice of this grammatical unit.

## Methodology

The corpus for the analysis contains sixty posts belonging to high-traffic celebrity gossip blogs, during May 2010 and October 2012. The sites are the following: *Perez Hilton*, *Ted Casablanca's The Awful Truth*, *Lainey Gossip*, *Pink is the New Blog*, *Just Jared*, *Allie is Wired*, *I'm not obsessed! Gossip... without the guilt*, *The Superficial*, *Dlisted*, *Radaronline.com* and *TMZ*. The final corpus amounts to 17,563 words. The methodological approach is quantitative and qualitative. It is a text-driven approach, based on the manual search of small-scale text corpora. Students will look for instances in the sites provided during the dates selected.

This study is aimed to second year Spanish students who take the compulsory subject on oral and written communication for the degree in English Primary Education. Spanish speakers at this intermediate level usually classify reporting verbs into the following categories: statements, questions, orders and suggestions. They are supposed to express the different functions contained within these categories in the appropriate communicative context. They will revise their previous knowledge and acquire a new taxonomy of learning based on Leech and Short's (2007) model of speech and thought presentation.

## Theoretical background

Initially, Leech and Short's model was devised for authors of literary texts. The model mainly refers to the presentation of a narrator of others' words, written or spoken, of their thoughts (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). Although this model starts basically from functional concerns, it establishes linguistic criteria that can be applied to a teaching context. In this study, the model proves to be useful as far as bloggers frequently report on what other people have said. The original model includes several categories of speech and thought presentation.

### Taxonomy for speech presentation:

- Narrative report of speech (NRS): *Paul agreed.*
- Indirect speech (IS): *Paul said that he agreed.*
- Free indirect speech (FIS): *Paul was in agreement.*
- Direct speech (DS): *Paul said 'I agree'.*
- Free direct speech (FDS): *I agree.*

### Taxonomy for thought presentation:

- Narrative report of thought (NRT): *Paul decided.*
- Indirect thought (IT): *Paul thought that he should do it.*
- Free indirect thought (FIT): *Paul should do it.*

- Direct thought (DT): *Paul thought 'I should do it'.*
- Free direct thought (FDT): *I should do it.*

The following changes occur when converting from Direct Speech and Thought into indirect forms of speech:

- The inverted commas are removed.  
*"I'm going to the cinema," he said.*  
*He said that he was going to the cinema.*
- The speech is marked by a subordinator (e.g. "that").  
*"I'm travelling to Paris next week."*  
*She told us that she was travelling to Paris the following week.*
- Any first and second person pronouns change to third person.
- The direction of movement verbs change (e.g. "go – come").  
*"I'll go in a minute," he promised.*  
*He promised that he would come in a minute.*
- Any present tense verbs change to past (including auxiliaries). Tenses are placed in their 'backshifted' forms.  
*"I haven't changed the paragraph."*  
*She said that she hadn't changed the paragraph.*
- Any proximal deixis changes to distal (e.g. "this – that").  
*"Please, pass me this bottle."*  
*He asked me to pass him that bottle.*

Some categories have some formal features that distinguish them from the two traditional categories of direct and indirect speech presentation. For example, NRS does not include references to the real speech but it indicates the speech act used, as in "He agreed". NRS often appears to avoid the report of a conversation that may not interest the reader. This category also entails the most intrusion by the narrator (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010, pp. 88-89). In the example below, the blogger summarises the content of the conversations that has supposedly occurred between actress Tori Spelling and her former friends. It is improbable, however, that the blogger has access to private conversations, so he simply reports on the knowledge he possesses.

- *When Tori Spelling calls all her old 90210 cast mates, they either hang up on her face or pretend to be the maid and tell her they are dead and not to call again. That's because they are all co-presidents of the I HATE TORI SPELLING club. That's what Tori says anyway.*  
<http://dlisted.com/2010/06/21/everybody-hates-tori/>, [Accessed 21 June 2010]

Whereas NRS represents a clear intrusion of the narratorial voice, the direct forms of speech and thought are not mediated by a reporter. In the discourse that I am considering, examples belonging to these categories are infrequent. It does not occur the same with indirect forms of speech and thought, where utterances must be carefully analysed inside context in order to decide whether they belong to the writer or the character under scrutiny. The forms belonging to free indirect speech usually merge the narrator's voice with the original speaker's voice. In the example below, the reader can't be certain about who says "she's more than a sick body". It is possibly the blogger's voice but from a strictly linguistic perspective there is no clear evidence whether he is giving his opinion or he is reporting what the girl has said.

- (...) *Eva thinks it's more than just her looks. She told Allure that she's into art and reads the Fountainhead. Saying she reads Ayn Rand automatically means she's more than a sick body. As for that body...*  
<http://www.laineygossip.com/SIT-DOWN-Eva-Mendes/17269>, [Accessed 14 July 2010]

#### Averral and attribution

In non-fiction texts like gossip blogs, free indirect utterances can create certain effects on their readers, for the utterance can be attributed to either the author or the celebrity under discussion. In this respect, an important issue concerning the use of different voices in the text includes the distinction between averral and attribution. Hunston explains that “[i]f a piece of language [...] is attributed, it is presented as deriving from someone other than the writer. If a piece of language is averred, the writer him/herself speaks” (2000, p. 178). The next example is an averral:

- *So I guess there will be no more photo ops, no more paparazzi extravaganza and no more of this douchebag team. Speidi is no more! Yay.*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/05/heidi-montag-spencer-pratt-divorce-2/>, [Accessed 28 May 2010]

When someone other than the writer speaks, the piece of language is attributed. For example:

- *Charice, in the same interview, said last week's face makeover was part of her big preparations for her appearance on the hit show's second season.*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/07/charice-gets-botox-for-glee-video/>, [Accessed 19 July 2010]

In this blogging practice, the writer avers the utterance wherein the attributed proposition is embedded in those cases in which someone else reports some news about celebs. In the following example (1), the blogger is the source of the whole utterance (Hunston, 2000; Bednarek, 2006):

- *But at an event last week in New York, one source states Gwen "was pulling at her shirt to keep it away from her body. It seemed really strange - but then, when she turned to the side, I could see why. She definitely had a baby bump!"*  
<http://perezhilton.com/2010-05-12-gwen-stefani-pregnant#sthash.ai8osIHf.dpbs>, [Accessed 12 May 2010]
- The blogger avers that  
*But at an event last week in New York, one source states Gwen "was pulling at her shirt to keep it away from her body. It seemed really strange - but then, when she turned to the side, I could see why. She definitely had a baby bump!"*  
 (source = Self), and within this averral attributes the proposition

*"was pulling at her shirt to keep it away from her body. It seemed really strange - but then, when she turned to the side, I could see why. She definitely had a baby bump!"* (source of embedded proposition = Other).

(1') *But at an event last week in New York, one source states Gwen "was pulling at her shirt to keep it away from her body. It seemed really strange - but then, when she turned to the side, I could see why. She definitely had a baby bump!"*

Source of utterance: Self (blogger)

Basis of Self's knowledge of attributed proposition: hearsay ("states")

Certainty of Self's knowledge: not explicitly marked

(1') *"was pulling at her shirt to keep it away from her body. It seemed really strange - but then, when she turned to the side, I could see why. She definitely had a baby bump!"*

Source of proposition: Other ("one source")

Basis of Other's knowing: perception

Certainty of Other's knowledge: high ("definitely")

The blogger knows about the proposition "was pulling...baby bump!" because an unidentified source states so. The basis of knowledge is based on hearsay ("state"). Besides, I recognise the category of perception as the basis of Other's knowledge, as signaled by the verbs "seemed" and "see", and the adverb "definitely".

Self does not usually comment on the certainty of his/her knowledge. In fact, most examples contain hearsay verbs like "tell", "claim", and "report". Likewise, the basis of Other's knowledge is not explicitly marked in many cases. Although the complexity of this analysis is not part of the didactic proposal of this study, it offers an overview for the reader who is interested in the study of different voices in the text.

In celebrity gossip blogs, the most frequent verbal forms relate to how the blogger transmits the information, either attributed or averred. I include the following classification (Sánchez-Cuervo, 2013):

1. Hearsay verbs: "claim", "say", "look like", "tell", "add", "report". For example:

– *The Daily Mail claims that the Sex and the City Franchise has come to an end.*

<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-06-29/is-sex-and-the-city-over-for-good>, [Accessed 29 June 2010]

– *Our spy tells us Mandy seemed to think she accidentally cut someone else in line and so she let that person? as well as a couple others, just to be safe? order ahead of her.*

<http://uk.eonline.com/news/183692/caught-mandy-moore-being-just-the-nicest-ever>, [Accessed 1 June 2010]

- *The snitch added, “Ryan was adamant he didn’t want anyone to know he was in Nashville to see Julianne...because their relationship is still in early stages and Ryan really, really likes her.”*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/07/julianne-hough-thought-ryan-seacrest-was-gay/>, [Accessed 22 July 2010]
- *Page Six reports that in Tim's newest book "Gunn's Golden Rules", he writes all about Anna Wintour and Andre Leon Talley's ridiculous ways.*  
<http://dlisted.com/2010/06/21/look-at-this-fancy-bitch/>, [Accessed 21 June 2010]

2. Mindsay verbs: “think”, “know”, “guess”, “be sure”. For example:

- *Sure, there were a few arm gropes here and there, some giggles and ear whisperings going on, but we don't think Bar has much to worry about. What's a bachelor to do when his go-to gal isn't around? Flirting only comes naturally for the stud.*  
<http://uk.eonline.com/news/182067/caught-is-leo-still-on-the-prowl/>, [Accessed 20 May 2010]
- *Sorry, Twi-Hards! We know how hard it is for you when all the behind the scenes dramz compromises the integrity (ha!) of the films! LOLZ!*  
<http://perezhilton.com/2010-05-12-wtf-greene-and-lutz-want-how-much-for-breaking-dawn>, [Accessed 12 May 2010]
- *Don't worry Twi-hards, I'm sure Taylor's glorious abs will be in many more movies to come.*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/06/taylor-lautner-to-quit-acting-for-college/>, [Accessed 6 June 2010]
- *This is insane. Talk about getting every last DETAIL. I am GUESSING the waiter who tended to Jennifer Aniston and actor Christopher Gartin during their date at the Sunset Tower Hotel and Restaurant in LA had an agenda.*  
<http://imnotobsessed.com/2010/07/06/a-little-birdie-took-notes-during-jennifer-anistons-recent-date/>, [Accessed 6 July 2010]

3. Perception verbs: “seem”, “appear”, “look”, “sound”, “see”, “reveal”, “show”, “confirm”. For example:

- *(...) According to an investigation, it appears that Gaga and her fans may have been the victim of a very cruel hoax.*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/06/lady-gaga-falls-for-twitter-hoax/>, [Accessed 3 June 2010]
- *He's definitely had a rough few years, but it sounds like Steven Tyler of Aerosmith is getting back on his feet!*  
<http://perezhilton.com/2010-06-28-aerosmiths-steven-tyler-talks-addiction-band-drama>, [Accessed 28 June 2010]

- *See the way I remember it was that Hilary Duff looked really healthy. And then all of a sudden, around when she was dating Joel Madden, she looked really unhealthy.*  
<http://www.laineygossip.com/Miley-Cyrus-on-holiday-with-dad-Billy-Ray-in-Mexico-May-2010/16851?celebrityId=20334>, [Accessed 25 May 2010]
- *"By setting a precedent and suing Closer, Prince William is making a stand for the future," a source previously revealed.*  
<http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2012/09/kate-middleton-nude-photos-legal-fees-free-prince-william/>, [Accessed 17 September 2012]

### Proposal of activities

The development of the activities relies mainly on the identification and practice of different categories of speech and thought presentation. Students will apply this taxonomy bearing in mind the triple classification of verbs for the transmission of knowledge. Most exercises will be done in pairs or small groups of three students. They are to be carried out in two sessions of two hours.

1. Identify the speech categories in the following utterances according to Leech and Short's model:
  - *What's next? Babies getting work done right out of the womb? Seriously, she's only eighteen.*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/07/charice-gets-botox-for-glee-video/>, [Accessed 19 July 2010]  
Answer: FDS
  - *Sharon Waxman's TheWrap is reporting Megan Fox really did quit Transformers 3 because Michael Bay was "verbally abusive toward her" (...).*  
[http://www.thesuperficial.com/megan\\_fox\\_quit\\_because\\_michael-05-2010](http://www.thesuperficial.com/megan_fox_quit_because_michael-05-2010), [Accessed 21 May 2010]  
Answer: IS
  - *She asked what the lamest Hole song was and cursed at people when they gave the wrong answer.*  
<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-06-29/hole-performs-a-disastrous-3-hour-concert-in-washington-dc>, [Accessed 29 June 2010]  
Answer: IS
  - *A source tells Radar that Jeremy will check into Celebrity Rehab early next week.*  
<http://dlisted.com/2010/07/07/you-saw-this-coming-37948/>, [Accessed 7 July 2010]  
Answer: IS
  - *The controversy article talks about Ricky as a father and reveals the he is happily attached to a Puerto Rican man.*



<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-06-10/ricky-martin-twins-do-people-en-espanol-magazine-again>, [Accessed 10 June 2010]

Answer: NRS

2. Try to identify whether the previous utterances are averrals or attributions. Justify your answer.

Answers:

- Averral. The blogger gives her opinion about the dangers of surgery at an early age.
- The whole utterance is an averral that contains an attribution starting with the verb phrase “is reporting”.
- The whole utterance is an averral that contains an attribution starting with the verb phrase “asked”.
- The whole utterance is an averral that contains an attribution starting with the verb phrase “tells”.
- Averral. The blogger summarises the content of the article about singer Ricky Martin.

3. Label each verbal form according to the classification into hearsay, mindsay and perception verbs.

Answers:

- This extract does not contain any verbs found in the categorisation given to specify the source of knowledge.
- The verb “report” is within the hearsay group.
- The verb “ask” is within the hearsay group.
- The verb “tell” is within the hearsay group.
- Being a narratorial report of speech, it includes one hearsay verb and another one belonging to the perception class.

4. Find other five examples that correspond to this triple arrangement from the sites selected.

Answers:

- *I think it's fairly obvious that she's sleeping in the photos - are there no boundaries as to how creepy you can get Michael Lohan?*  
<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/07/michael-lohan-sold-nude-photos-of-kate-major/>, [Accessed 25 July 2010]  
(Mindsay verb)
- *A new still from the film shows the actor in peak condition, with his tanned torso looking incredibly toned and taught.*  
<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-05-28/james-mcavoy-has-been-cast-as-professor-xavier-in-x-men-first-class>, [Accessed 28 May 2010]  
(Perception verb)
- *He praised the new film Eclipse saying it was his favourite in the series.*

<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-05-31/kristen-stewart-taylor-lautner-answer-fan-questions-in-oz>, [Accessed 31 May 2010]  
(Hearsay verb)

- *But it appears no one had given Hilton any advice on the local customs, after opted for a revealing, backless maxi dress with plunging neckline.*

<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-06-04/paris-hilton-goes-to-egypt>, [Accessed 4 June 2010]  
(Perception verb)

- *I think McAvoy’s casting as Professor X is genius ... I cannot wait to see who they will cast opposite him as a young Magneto/Max Eisenhardt.*

<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com/2010-05-28/james-mcavoy-has-been-cast-as-professor-xavier-in-x-men-first-class>, [Accessed 28 May 2010]  
(Mindsay verb)

5. Rewrite the examples using synonyms belonging to the same category of hearsay, mindsay and perception. For example:

- “I know/ guess/ am sure that it’s fairly obvious that she’s sleeping in the photos (...).”
- “A new still from the film reveals/confirms the actor in peak condition (...).”
- “He praised the new firm *Eclipse* telling us/claiming/reporting/adding it was his favourite in the series.”
- “But it seems/looks like/ sounds no one had given Hilton any advice on the local customs (...).”
- “I guess McAvoy’s casting as Professor X is genius (...).”

6. Rewrite these sentences from the corpus into indirect speech using the same reporting verb:

- He previously said, “the thing I love is that my home hasn’t changed. I still help out with the garbage.” (...)

<http://allieiswired.com/archives/2010/06/taylor-lautner-to-quit-acting-for-college/>, [Accessed 6 June 2010]

*He previously said that the thing he loves was that his home hadn’t changed. He still helped out with the garbage.*

- He had more than \$700 million in assets under management, the feds claimed.

<http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2010/05/read-court-document-celebs-caught-30-million-ponzi-scheme/>, [Accessed 27 May 2010]

*The fed claimed that he had had more than \$700 million in assets under management.*

- They carried her to the car. And I thought: “I will never forget this.”  
<http://dlisted.com/2010/06/21/more-of-this-tim-gunn-more-of-this/>,  
[Accessed 21 June 2010]  
*He thought that he would never forget that.*
- “She was super friendly to the other people waiting in line,” another afternoon eater dished.  
<http://uk.eonline.com/news/183692/caught-mandy-moore-being-just-the-nicest-ever>, [Accessed 1 June 2010]  
*Another afternoon eater dished that she had been super friendly to the other people waiting in line.*
- “I think we can get awfully sexy with a PG-13,” Rosenberg said nodding her head. (...)  
<http://uk.eonline.com/news/188670/breaking-dawn-screenwriter-final-films-will-be-way-hot->, [Accessed 4 July 2010]  
*Rosenberg said that she thought they could get awfully sexy with a PG-13.*
- “This is a movie for the girls because women like action too,” Jessica insisted.  
<http://www.justjared.com/2010/06/04/jessica-biel-women-like-action-too/>, [Accessed 4 June 2010]

*Jessica insisted that that was a movie for girls because women liked action too.*

7. The following extract is an example of NRS (narrative report of speech). It summarises the content and is useful to progress the narrative (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). Transform the narrated sequence into hypothetical original speech using various reporting verbs. For example:

- *LeAnn Rimes has finally had enough of Twitter. The singer posted a series of Tweets last night to announce that she is taking a “break” from Twitter for a while. The decision comes on the heels of photos showing LeAnn kissing her boyfriend, Eddie Cibrian, while wearing a “skimpy” bikini and his young son sitting right to him.*  
<http://imnotobsessed.com/2010/07/08/leann-rimes-quits-twitter-after-fannbacklash/>, [Accessed 8 July 2010]

*“I’ve had enough of Twitter”, LeAnn Rimes complained.*

*“I’m having a break from Twitter for a while,” the singer announced.*

*“LeAnn is kissing her boyfriend, Eddie Cibrian,” said the source.*

*“She was wearing a skimpy bikini and Eddie’s young son was sitting right to him,” added the source.*

8. Find other two examples of paraphrasing and summarising in the corpus provided and rewrite it using direct speech forms.

– Example 1

*Clinton told cops at the scene that Connelly had come over “to borrow \$150.” He insisted that he hadn’t seen the brawl and speculated the women were tussling over a boyfriend. Police were called to the scene but didn’t have enough evidence to file charges. So now the victim is suing Clinton and the other woman for more than \$500,000!*

<http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2012/09/bill-clinton-brother-roger-clinton-paid-women-fight-court-documents-lawsuit/>, [Accessed 25 September 2012]

– Example 2

*The housekeeper alleged that she was terminated from her employment because she was an illegal immigrant and that could have derailed Whitman's quest to become California's first female governor.*

<http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2012/10/mitt-romney-october-surprise-gloria-allred/>, [Accessed 19 October 2012]

As said above, the analysis of indirect forms of speech poses some problems pertaining to the source of the utterance. Jeffries explains that this is due to “an ambiguity between the implication that these words are somehow quoted from the character concerned and the interpretation by the reader that there is a narrator giving his/her opinion or an omniscient narrator ostensibly presenting the ‘truth’” (2010, p. 136). In this line, the opinion section that is represented in a post must be studied considering the authority of the text producer, the context, and content of the text. The reader must also regard the manner of speech and thought presentation (2010, p. 137). After putting into practice Leech and Short’s model through several exercises, students are asked a more difficult task that involves the writing of a short piece of news about a celebrity that they admire or they just want to criticise. This activity will foster their creativity while they get familiar with recent Hollywood talk.

Before doing the activity, students analyse the following excerpts and discuss whether the words belong to the character under discussion or to the narrator:

– Excerpt 1

*I asked about them when I was in Cannes. With local freelancers and European reporters permanently assigned to the couple in Italy and France. They’re happy. It’s all fine. There’s nothing remotely scandalous to go on. Us Weekly claims in fact that the two were quite affectionate and loving at the party.*

<http://www.laineygossip.com/Brad-Pitt-Angelina-Jolie-with-Maddox-and-Pax-at-Malibu-party-Memorial-Day-weekend-31may10/16897>, [Accessed 31May 2010]

This passage concerns Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie’s relationship. When readers examine the statements “they are happy” and “it’s all fine”, they must decide whether it is the reporters, the blogger or the actors’ opinion.

- Excerpt 2  
*Robbie lives in LA now with Field and is currently selling his country estate at a loss, not only because he's never there, but also because he can't afford to maintain it anymore.*  
<http://www.laineygossip.com/Ewan-McGregor-and-Robbie-Williams-at-LAX-May-2010-01june10/16908>, [Accessed 1 June 2010]

In this instance, similarly, readers must interpret who says “he’s never there” and “he can’t afford to maintain it anymore”. Is it the writer’s speculation, or singer Robbie Williams’ report? It is not clear whether the content is verbatim. The choice of informal words in both quotes suggests that they could be the actual words used, so there appears a form of FIS where the voice of the writer comes through the narrative style (Jeffries, 2010, p. 139).

9. Create a short piece of gossip about a current celebrity in about 100 words. Use some of the verb forms discussed in this type of discourse, and include the following:
  - Direct and indirect form representations.
  - Narrative report of speech in the form of paraphrasing or summarising.
  - Some language expressions used in informal language.

## Conclusion

Gossip celebrity blogs embody a lively discourse that contains genuine and contextualised pieces of language. With this proposal, students have encountered a motivating and attractive approach to the English language that is not usually found in textbooks. They have also got familiar with popular culture elements related to entertainment and the world of celebs.

Students have used the corpus to practise grammar content related to the subject of oral and written communication in English and have improved their reading and writing production skills. In particular, students have used this corpus to reinforce and expand different occurrences of reported speech. In addition, they have learned a new taxonomy of speech and thought presentation through Leech and Short’s model. They have looked for the most common occurrences in the report of gossip through a triple classification of hearsay, mindsay and perception verbs. They have also learned to distinguish between averral and attribution and have tried to establish the authorship of several utterances that contain paraphrasing and summarising. In this line, they have improved some aspects of their communicative competence:

- The linguistic competence that concerns the learning of new words related to informal language, and the transformation of syntactic structures present in the practice of reported speech.
- The sociolinguistic competence that entails the use of certain structures associated with the playful tone of gossip blogs.

Some suggestions for further research include the ideological implications of the gossip blog that are particularly present in the study of indirect forms of speech. The range of voices and the ambiguity in the identity of characters may become a challenge for the student interested in the study of the different forms of speech presentation.

## References

- Bednarek, M., 2006. Epistemological positioning and evidentiality in English news discourse: A text-driven approach. *Text & Talk*, 26 (6), pp. 635-660.
- Herring, S.C. and Paolillo, J.C., 2006. Gender and genre variation in weblogs. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 10, pp. 439-459.
- Hunston, S., 2000. Evaluation and the planes of discourse: Status and value in persuasive texts. In: S. Hunston and G. Thomson, eds. *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 176-207.
- Jeffries, L., 2010. *Critical Stylistics. The Power of English*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jeffries, L. and McIntyre, D., 2010. *Stylistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leech, G. and Short, M., 2007. *Style in Fiction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Longman.
- Mauranen, A., 2013. Why Take an Interest in Research Blogging? *The European English Messenger*, 22 (1), pp. 53-58.
- Meyers, E. A., 2012. 'Blogs Give Regular People the Chance to Talk Back': Rethinking 'Professional' Media Hierarchies in New Media. *New Media & Society*, 14 (6), pp. 1022-1038.
- Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M. and Swartz, L., 2004. Why We Blog. *Communications of the ACM*, 47 (12), pp.41-46.
- Petersen, A., 2007. Celebrity Juice, not from Concentrate: Perez Hilton, Gossip Blogs, and the New Star Production. *Jump Cut. A Review of Contemporary Media*, Spring, 47. <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/PerezHilton/index.html> (accessed 9 April 2013).
- Sánchez-Cuervo, M. E., 2013. 'OMG. You Ready?': Rhetorical Argumentation in Celebrity Gossip Blogs. In: H. van Belle, P. Gillaerts, B. van Gorp, D. van de Mierop and K. Rutten, eds. *Verbal and Visual Rhetoric in a Media World*. Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, pp. 329-345.
- Solove, D. J., 2007. *The Future of Reputation. Gossip, Rumor and the Privacy of the Internet*. New Haven and London: London University Press.

## Blog websites

*Allie is Wired.*

<http://allieiswired.com>.

*Dlisted.*

<http://www.dlisted.com>.

*I'm not obsessed! Gossip... without the guilt.*

<http://www.imnotobsessed.com>.

*Just Jared.*

<http://justjared.buzznet.com>.

*Lainey Gossip.*

<http://www.laineygossip.com>.

*Perez Hilton.*

<http://perezhilton.com>.

*Pink is the New Blog.*

<http://www.pinkisthenewblog.com>.

*Radaronline.com.*

<http://www.radaronline.com>.

*Ted Casablanca's The Awful Truth.*

[http://uk.eonline.com/uberblog/the\\_awful\\_truth/index.html](http://uk.eonline.com/uberblog/the_awful_truth/index.html).

*The Superficial.*

<http://www.thesuperficial.com>.

*TMZ.*

<http://www.tmz.com/>

