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ENUNCIATION, REPORTED SPEECH AND DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This article develops an exploratory comparative account of enunciation and reported speech in four works of Francophone African fiction: Une si longue lettre, Les Soleils des indépendances, La Vie et demie and Petit Bodiel. Drawing on enunciative linguistics and literary discourse analysis, it examines how reporting forms interact with narrative framing to organize voice, viewpoint and attributed authority. The discussion considers retrospective self-positioning, proverbial legitimacy, dictatorial speech and the distribution of knowledge in the tale. It argues that neither direct quotation nor indirect reformulation has a fixed ideological effect: interpretation requires attention to attribution, evaluation and narrative context. The article proposes grammar activities combining formal analysis, rewriting and evidence-based interpretation. The corpus is purposive, the readings are exploratory, and the pedagogical proposals have not been tested in a classroom study.

Keywords: Enunciation, Reported speech, Gender and identity, Francophone African literature, Discursive strategies.

1 INTRODUCTION

Francophone African fiction makes the representation of speech central to the construction of narrative authority. Letters, dialogue, proverbs and retold conversations place several voices within the same textual space, while giving those voices unequal opportunities to speak, interpret and be believed. Reported speech therefore raises a linguistic and a political question: how does a narrator represent another speaker's words, and how does that representation redistribute authority? The selected works connect this question to women's self-positioning, the mediation of oral expression, political domination and the transmission of narrative knowledge.

A grammatical account based on the conversion of direct speech (DS) into indirect speech (IS) explains some changes in person, tense and deixis. It does not, by itself, explain why a narrator quotes one utterance, summarizes another or allows a character's perspective to enter the narration without an explicit reporting clause. Enunciative approaches, particularly those of Authier-Revuz (1995), Ducrot (1984), Rosier (1999) and De Mattia (2000), make it possible to distinguish the form of speech representation from the distribution of viewpoints and responsibility. This distinction is essential because direct quotation does not guarantee neutrality, and indirect reporting does not necessarily imply rejection of the reported position.

Table 1: Reporting and represented instances in the mediation of reported speech

Reporting instance S0	Mediation	Represented instance S1
Current frame and evaluation	Selection and reformulation	Attributed utterance or viewpoint

Source: created by the authors with the help of AI

This article asks how different forms of reported speech organize the relationship between narrative mediation and the authority attributed to represented voices. It pursues three objectives: to clarify the linguistic criteria used to distinguish reporting forms; to compare their possible functions in four selected works; and to derive classroom activities linking grammatical analysis to interpretation. The guiding proposition is that discursive effects emerge from the interaction between reporting form, narrative framing and the represented social relationship, rather than from grammatical form alone.

The corpus brings together Mariama Bâ's Une si longue lettre, Ahmadou Kourouma's Les Soleils des indépendances, Sony Labou Tansi's La Vie et demie and Amadou Hampâté Bâ's Petit Bodiel. Their different narrative configurations support a focused comparison between epistolary retrospection, the literary mediation of oral expression, political satire and the written tale. The selection is purposive rather than representative of Francophone African literature as a whole. The contribution is an exploratory comparative interpretation and a pedagogical framework; it is not a quantitative account of the frequency of reported-speech forms.

The discussion first establishes the theoretical distinctions and methodological boundaries of the study. It then examines how the selected narrative configurations may authorize, distance or reframe represented speech, before setting out implications for contextualized grammar teaching. Throughout, author, narrator and character are treated as distinct analytical levels.

The problem also concerns the status of evidence in literary discourse analysis. A grammatical label can describe how speech is represented without explaining what readers are invited to make of it. Conversely, an interpretation of resistance or domination may remain insufficiently grounded if it does not identify the linguistic operations that make the reading possible. Connecting these levels requires a deliberately intermediate scale of analysis: the reported utterance must be examined together with its reporting clause, its narrative surroundings and the relations between the participants. This scale avoids treating isolated quotation marks as proof of a political position.

The comparison consequently approaches authority as a relationship constructed in discourse. Authority may concern the right to speak, the credibility attached to a proposition, the power to demand action or the capacity to determine the meaning of an event after it has occurred. These capacities need not belong to the same participant. A ruler can command obedience without controlling the reader's judgement; a narrator can interpret an encounter without having controlled it at the time. Distinguishing these dimensions makes the comparison more precise and allows gendered, political and pedagogical questions to be considered without reducing them to a single opposition between powerful and powerless speakers.

2 DEFINITIONS, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Definitions and theoretical framework

2.1.1 Enunciation, S0 and S1: asserter status and polyphony

Following the Culiolian principles developed by Monique De Mattia (2000), every utterance anchored in a situation of enunciation (Sit0 = S0, T0, L0) results from complex operations of reference and situational anchoring. In reported speech, two situations coexist: the original situation (Sit1 = S1, T1, L1) and the encompassing situation in which the reporting speaker takes the floor (Sit0).

Table 2: Components of the reporting and represented enunciative situations

Situation	Analytical components
Sit0	Reporting instance S0, time T0 and place L0
Sit1	Represented speaker S1, time T1 and place L1

Source: created by the authors with the help of AI

The distinction drawn by Oswald Ducrot (1984) and refined by De Mattia (2000) between the speaker (the physical or grammatical bearer of speech) and the enunciator (the source of a point of view) is crucial. In indirect speech, S1 does not speak directly in Sit0 and is therefore not the direct asserter of the utterance. Nevertheless, S1 remains responsible for the propositional content that S0 attributes to them through an indirect assertion. This distinction can be summarized as follows.

In the account developed by De Mattia (2000), indirect reporting separates the reporting act performed in the current situation from the earlier assertion attributed to the represented speaker. Attribution of content therefore does not give the reported speaker direct control over the current discourse.

This distinction prevents attributed responsibility from being confused with endorsement. A narrator may represent a character as the source of a proposition while retaining control over its wording, placement and evaluation. In literary analysis, S0 should therefore designate the relevant reporting instance, not automatically the empirical author. Patriarchal or authoritarian speech may be exposed to criticism through its narrative framing, but that criticism must be established from contextual cues rather than inferred solely from its attribution to another voice.

Responsibility must also be separated into several operations. The reporting instance takes responsibility for presenting an utterance as attributable to someone; the represented speaker is constructed as responsible for the attributed position; and the narrative may invite the reader to assess that position from another perspective. These responsibilities can diverge. A report may accurately identify a source while expressing doubt about the proposition, or reproduce a speaker's confidence while exposing the inadequacy of that confidence through subsequent narration. Polyphony concerns this organization of positions, rather than simply the number of speaking characters.

Temporal and spatial anchoring provide an operational way of examining these relations. Expressions such as today, here and tomorrow receive their reference from an enunciative situation. When they occur in reported discourse, the analyst must determine whether their centre is the reporting situation, the represented situation or an intentionally unstable combination. Tense alone is insufficient because narrative tense may locate events while evaluative vocabulary continues to suggest a character's orientation. The relevant question is how several cues converge, and which competing explanation best accounts for their combination.

2.1.2 Shown heterogeneity, textual islands and autonymic connotation

Jacqueline Authier-Revuz (1982, 1995) formalizes the markers of "the non-coincidence of discourse with itself". Within the typology of shown heterogeneity, a textual island (or autonymic modalization through borrowing) occurs when words enclosed in quotation marks are inserted into the syntactic structure of non-direct discourse.

Both textual islands and quotation marks fulfil a key function.

Read as a framework for analysis, Cataldo's (2022) discussion of textual islands draws attention to the coexistence of syntactic integration and the visible presentation of borrowed wording. Such fragments invite analysis of both the represented voice and the reporting instance's treatment of it.

The concept of the textual island provides a useful hypothesis for reading fictional prose. A quoted fragment embedded within indirect reporting may preserve a socially marked expression while allowing the narrator to reframe its meaning. Quotation marks alone, however, cannot establish irony or an oral origin: they may also mark a title, a metalinguistic use or a conventional label. Interpretation requires attention to syntactic integration, the identifiable source of the expression and the surrounding evaluation.

A further distinction concerns the scale of what is borrowed. A complete quoted utterance can stage a relatively autonomous speaking turn, whereas a short borrowed expression may function inside the narrator's own assertion. The latter arrangement can make one word or label conspicuous without transferring control over the surrounding proposition. Analysis should therefore record the scope of quotation: whether the borrowed wording names an

institution, repeats a judgement, preserves an expression attributed to a character or comments on language itself. The ideological effect depends partly on this scope.

Punctuation must be read alongside attribution. Where a source is explicit, the expression can be connected to a represented act of speaking. Where it is diffuse, the wording may evoke circulating discourse without reconstructing a specific utterance. The second configuration calls for greater caution because the analyst may otherwise supply a collective source that the text has not established. A description of an expression as traditional, patriarchal or official should accordingly be supported by its textual framing, rather than inferred from its unfamiliarity to the reader.

2.1.3 Challenging derivational theory: enunciative translation

Enunciative approaches challenge the view, familiar from grammatical transformation exercises, that indirect speech can be adequately explained as a mechanical derivation of direct speech through rules governing tense and person concordance.

The focus is instead on reformulation and interpretation:

De Mattia's (2000) enunciative approach treats indirect reporting as interpretative reformulation. The reporting instance reconstructs an attributed utterance within a new communicative situation, which affects reference, wording and the presentation of commitment.

Viewing indirect speech as "translation" thus restores the reporting speaker's (S0) role as an analyst. In Ahmadou Kourouma's prose, the translation of Malinké expressions into colloquial French does not seek literal equivalence within the boundaries of French grammar. Instead, it recreates a hybrid form that reorganizes enunciative commitment.

Table 3: Grammatical conversion and enunciative reformulation in reported speech

Approach	Analytical focus
Grammatical conversion	Changes in syntax, person, tense and deixis
Enunciative reformulation	Interpretation, framing and attributed commitment

Source: created by the authors with the help of AI

2.1.4 Enunciative strategies: effacement, dramatization and fictionalization

The work of Laure Cataldo (2022) and Patrick Charaudeau (2011) highlights the range of discursive strategies associated with speech reporting.

The first concerns the illusion of objectivity and enunciative effacement:

Cataldo (2022) provides a basis for examining apparent withdrawal by the reporting instance. Giving prominence to a quoted source does not eliminate the effects of selection and framing; apparent neutrality must therefore be analysed rather than assumed.

Apparent effacement offers a useful question for the selected corpus: how does a narrator give prominence to a storyteller, a proverb or a political speaker while organizing meaning through the selection and framing of represented speech?

2.2 Methodological framework

The study adopts an exploratory qualitative and hermeneutic approach to four purposively selected literary works. The comparison is organized around contrasting narrative configurations: epistolary retrospection in Une si longue lettre, the mediation of Malinké expression in Les Soleils des indépendances, the staging of political authority in La Vie et demie and the written reworking of oral storytelling in Petit Bodiel. These configurations provide analytical contrasts; they do not establish the prevalence of a feature across an author's writing or across African literary traditions.

The interpretative framework distinguishes three levels. The first concerns formal cues: reporting clauses, syntactic dependency, punctuation, personal reference, temporal anchoring and evaluative vocabulary. The second concerns narrative mediation: who reports, whose viewpoint is represented, who receives the report and how it is framed. The third concerns possible social and pedagogical implications. A claim about domination, resistance or learning must remain distinct from the formal observation on which it rests. The present manuscript does not supply an exhaustive

inventory, systematic coding or edition-specific passage references; its readings should therefore be understood as interpretative propositions rather than verified distributional findings.

2.2.1 Analytical units and comparison procedure

For the purposes of this framework, the useful analytical unit is a contextualized reporting sequence. It includes the represented speech or viewpoint, the clause or narrative device introducing it, and enough adjacent narration to identify its consequences. A sequence can be short, but its boundaries should be justified by the interpretative problem under examination. An isolated sentence may establish syntactic dependency; it will rarely establish the full social effect of that dependency. Longer sequences become necessary when a narrative later revises the credibility of an earlier assertion.

A reproducible extension of this study would proceed in stages. The analyst would first record the work, edition and location of each sequence, then identify formal cues independently of a proposed social interpretation. The next stage would describe the reporting situation and the participants' access to knowledge. Only after these observations would the analyst formulate an account of authority, distancing or alignment. Finally, each account would be tested against a plausible alternative reading. These stages constitute a proposed procedure for further close reading; they should not be understood as a coding process already completed for the present manuscript.

Comparability depends on asking the same questions across different narrative configurations without requiring identical answers. Who is represented as speaking? Who controls the report? What is preserved of the utterance, and what is summarized? What does the addressee know? Which linguistic cues support an evaluative position? Such questions allow a letter, a politically charged exchange and a tale to enter the same discussion while retaining their formal differences. The aim is analytical comparison, rather than a ranking of works by their presumed degree of polyphony.

2.2.2 Interpretative validity and limits of transfer

Interpretative validity rests on the fit between a claim and the evidence needed to support it. A claim about a grammatical construction requires explicit formal cues. A claim about irony requires a contextual discrepancy or another defensible indication of distance. A claim about a social norm requires evidence that an utterance is framed as extending beyond an individual preference. Keeping these requirements separate prevents an accumulation of theoretical vocabulary from substituting for demonstration. It also makes disagreement productive: readers can dispute a particular inference without rejecting the entire framework.

The purposive corpus imposes limits on generalization. The four works do not stand for four homogeneous national, cultural or gendered positions. Nor does the inclusion of different narrative configurations establish a historical evolution from one form of speech representation to another. The comparison is useful because it makes selected relations visible and generates questions for subsequent research. Its conclusions concern possible mechanisms of mediation, not measured regularities across Francophone African fiction. Classroom transfer is similarly conditional on learners' proficiency, the selected passages and the teacher's ability to separate observation from interpretation.

3 TYPOLOGY AND STRATEGIES OF REPORTED SPEECH

Table 4: Forms of reported speech, linguistic cues and interpretative questions

Form	Possible cues	Interpretative question
Direct speech	Quotation and reporting frame	How is the voice presented and evaluated?
Indirect speech	Syntactic dependency and adjusted reference	How does the reporting instance reformulate?
Free indirect speech	Narrative anchoring with character-oriented evaluation	Whose perspective is expressed?
Textual island	Borrowed wording within an integrated construction	Why is this wording displayed?
Narrativized speech	Speech summarized as an event	What is retained or omitted?

Source: created by the authors with the help of AI

3.1 Mariama Bâ and Ahmadou Kourouma: patriarchal norms and epistolary subversion

In Une si longue lettre, Ramatoulaye's position as letter writer gives retrospective reporting a particular significance. The events recounted and the act of writing belong to different temporal situations. Representing earlier speech within the letter consequently places that speech within a later act of interpretation addressed to Aïssatou. The analytical issue is not simply whether another person's words appear in direct or indirect form, but how the writing subject selects and evaluates them. This temporal and interpersonal framing makes reported speech relevant to the construction of a woman's interpretative authority.

Indirect reporting can integrate a social prescription into the letter writer's syntax, making it available for explanation, qualification or challenge. Narrativized speech can instead present an encounter as an act of pressure, persuasion or refusal without reproducing its wording. Neither form is intrinsically emancipatory: summarization may also reduce another person's opportunity to be heard. A stronger reading must therefore relate the reporting form to the narrator's evaluation, the addressee and the consequences of the reported exchange.

The epistolary configuration also complicates the opposition between individual and collective voice. A remembered utterance may carry a family's expectations or a gendered norm, but an individual character should not automatically be treated as the spokesperson for an entire community. The interpretative task is to establish how the narrative constructs that representative status. This approach grounds the discussion of gender in acts of attribution and evaluation rather than treating women's narration as uniformly resistant.

The letter's addressee is especially important because reported speech is reconstructed for someone. Addressing Aïssatou provides a communicative horizon within which remembered conversations acquire present relevance. The writing subject does more than conserve a record: she organizes what the recipient needs to understand and what can be left implicit. Shared knowledge may reduce the need for explanation, while retrospective evaluation can connect separate encounters into an account of a life. The analytical value of the epistolary frame lies in this relation between remembered interaction and current address.

This distinction also prevents retrospective authority from being mistaken for unrestricted freedom. The narrator can select and interpret earlier speech, but the circumstances described may continue to constrain her. An account of resistance should therefore distinguish discursive agency from changes in the represented social situation. Naming a prescription, evaluating it and refusing its legitimacy are different acts, each requiring its own evidence. The framework makes these distinctions available without assuming that every reported conversation reaches the same emancipatory outcome.

In Les Soleils des indépendances, the mediation of proverbial expression raises a related question under a different narrative configuration. A proverb may present a judgement as inherited knowledge, transferring authority from an individual speaker to an apparently collective source. Its insertion into a narrative also subjects that authority to the circumstances in which it is invoked. Analysis should distinguish the occurrence of a proverbial formulation, its attribution to a speaker or viewpoint, and the narrative treatment of the judgement it expresses.

The relationship between Malinké expression and literary French should consequently be examined as a problem of mediation rather than as transparent access to an original oral utterance. Rhythm, lexical choices and unusual combinations may create an effect of translated orality, yet that effect remains a written construction. Linguistic hybridity and reported speech overlap when the text stages an identifiable voice or viewpoint; they are not equivalent categories.

Free indirect speech requires particular caution. Expressive vocabulary, exclamation or culturally marked phrasing may suggest a character's perspective, but these features alone do not prove a shift into free indirect discourse. The reading becomes stronger when grammatical anchoring and evaluative orientation point towards different enunciative centres. Compared with Ramatoulaye's explicit retrospective reporting, this possibility draws attention to less clearly delimited boundaries between narration and represented perspective.

Proverbial authority can be examined through a similar separation of levels. The analyst should distinguish the general form of a maxim from the particular act of applying it. A formulation may appear to state a timeless rule, while its local use advances one participant's interest. What matters is therefore not only what the proverb says, but who benefits from presenting the present situation as an instance of that rule. Narrative context may confirm the application, complicate it or reveal the speaker's limited understanding. Collective legitimacy is thus a discursive resource whose effectiveness remains open to examination.

The comparison with the letter brings out a shared operation of recontextualization. In epistolary retrospection, earlier words are placed inside a later account addressed to a particular reader. In proverbial discourse, a formulation

associated with broader knowledge is applied to a situated event. Both arrangements move discourse between contexts, but they authorize interpretation differently. One foregrounds a writing subject's reconstruction of experience; the other can invoke a judgement whose source appears more widely distributed. The distinction is useful precisely because neither arrangement determines whether the reported position will ultimately be endorsed.

3.2 Sony Labou Tansi: mocking tyrannical discourse and aphoristic satire

In La Vie et demie, the staging of dictatorial speech invites analysis of the gap between a claim to authority and the narrative conditions under which it is heard. An inflated title or repeated slogan may construct authority within the represented political world while also becoming available for satirical interpretation. The designation "Providential Guide", for example, makes the language of exceptional legitimacy visible. Its critical force cannot be established from the title alone; it depends on how the narrative places such claims alongside the actions and situations they are used to justify.

Direct speech can make a command appear immediate and forceful, but immediacy does not entail narrative approval. Reporting clauses, the sequence of exchanges and subsequent events may undermine the speaker's self-presentation. Conversely, an unqualified quotation may leave interpretation open. A close reading should therefore identify the utterance's claimed authority, the formal means through which it is staged and the contextual cues that support a satirical reading.

Enunciative effacement is useful here only if it does not erase the distinction between the author and the narrator. An apparently unobtrusive reporting instance still organizes access to speech. Selection, repetition and juxtaposition can expose the contradiction between a ruler's assertions and the narrative world. The resulting interpretation concerns the organization of discourse, not an automatic equation between exaggerated language and political resistance.

The authority of a command should also be separated from the truth of a statement. A political speaker may attempt to make an utterance effective through institutional position, threat or ritual repetition. In such cases, the immediate issue is whether others comply, remain silent or attempt a reply. Narrative criticism can emerge from the relation between that practical effect and the ruler's description of events. The reported words may succeed within the fictional interaction while failing as an account that the reader is invited to accept.

Attention to response is therefore essential. An apparent dialogue can remain asymmetrical when one participant determines the permissible topics, interrupts others or treats a question as disobedience. The narrator's allocation of turns, descriptions of silence and presentation of consequences can make this asymmetry legible. Silence should nevertheless remain an interpretative problem: it can suggest constraint, calculation, refusal or the simple absence of a represented answer. Assigning it a fixed meaning would repeat the same error as assuming that direct speech automatically provides freedom.

Satire can accordingly be approached as a relation between discursive scales. A speaker's exalted self-presentation is evaluated against the ordinary, bodily or violent consequences narrated around it. The analytical task is to show how the relation is organized, rather than to identify an exaggerated expression and declare it satirical. This reading directs attention to placement and recurrence: where a title appears, what action it accompanies and whether later uses alter its force. In the absence of a documented passage inventory, these remain precise questions for close reading rather than claims about measured patterns.

Table 5: Analytical questions for examining represented authority and narrative framing

Analytical level	Question
Represented authority	What legitimacy does the speaker claim?
Narrative framing	Which contextual cues support a critical reading?

Source: created by the authors with the help of AI

3.3 Amadou Hampâté Bâ: transposed orality and narrative polyphony in *Petit Bodiel*

Petit Bodiel offers a different configuration in which the representation of speech contributes to the movement of the tale. Exchanges between characters can stage persuasion, misunderstanding or strategic concealment, while the narrator controls what the reader knows about those exchanges. The comparison with the novels is therefore especially useful for examining the relationship between speaking effectively within the story and possessing authority over its interpretation.

The pedagogical interest of this configuration lies in the need to distinguish a character's assertion, the interlocutor's understanding and the narrator's framing. A claim may persuade a character without being validated by the narrative. Students can examine who knows what at each stage, whose words are represented and how the reporting frame guides judgement. These are proposed uses of the tale, not evidence of measured cognitive gains.

Orality should likewise be treated as a textual effect supported by identifiable cues rather than assumed from the work's association with oral tradition. Dialogue, repeated reporting patterns, address to an audience and temporal shifts are possible objects of close reading. Claims about their recurrence or the use of a particular tense require a documented set of passages. This distinction preserves the analytical value of oral mediation without turning a plausible reading into an unsupported frequency claim.

The distribution of knowledge offers a practical bridge between narratology and enunciative analysis. The reporting instance may make an intention available to the reader while withholding it from an interlocutor. A persuasive utterance then has at least two possible effects: it can appear convincing to a character and questionable to the reader. Reported speech contributes to that divergence by determining whether readers encounter only the assertion, the speaker's intentions or the narrator's evaluation as well. Persuasion and credibility therefore need to be examined from each participant's position.

The written tale also requires care in the treatment of its audience. A textual address to listeners can construct the presence of an audience, but it does not establish the circumstances of an actual oral performance. Similarly, repetition may support rhythm, recollection or narrative organization without functioning as a direct record of a storyteller's delivery. The relevant object is the literary representation of communicative relations. This approach recognizes oral mediation while preserving the difference between an oral event and a written work that produces effects associated with telling.

Across the four works, the common analytical problem is the allocation of interpretative authority. Epistolary reporting makes retrospective self-positioning explicit; proverbial expression may invoke collective legitimacy; dictatorial speech stages claims to political control; and the tale invites attention to the uneven distribution of knowledge. These are contrasting possibilities, not fixed properties of genres. A convincing comparison must relate each proposed function to the formal and contextual evidence of an identified passage.

3.4 Comparative discussion of voice and authority

The four configurations suggest a distinction between possessing a voice and controlling its circulation. A character may receive an extensive speaking turn while the narrator determines its placement and interpretation. Another may be represented only through summary, yet that summary can preserve an argument that becomes decisive for the narrative. Visibility, length and autonomy are consequently separate dimensions. Assessing authority requires attention to how a voice is introduced, how it is answered and whether the surrounding discourse confirms its entitlement to define events.

A second distinction concerns the sources of legitimacy. Personal testimony may claim authority through remembered experience; proverbial discourse may invoke inherited knowledge; political speech may rely on office and coercion; and the tale may distribute credibility through unequal knowledge. These are analytical possibilities associated with the present comparison, not exclusive properties of the selected works. A single sequence can combine several sources, as when a personal account repeats a proverb or a command claims to express collective wisdom. The framework is strongest when it identifies such combinations rather than imposing a single label.

A third issue is the reader's position. Narrative mediation does not merely connect an earlier utterance to a new reporting situation; it also provides readers with a basis for accepting, doubting or suspending judgement. The availability of that basis varies. An explicit evaluation can direct interpretation, whereas competing cues may require a provisional reading. Such uncertainty is analytically meaningful. It demonstrates why the identification of a reporting form cannot replace an account of the narrative information available at a particular moment.

These distinctions support the article's central proposition while limiting its scope. Formal choices enable particular arrangements of distance, presence and responsibility, but their effects emerge in context. Direct quotation may expose domination, preserve testimony or leave a claim unresolved. Indirect reformulation may subordinate a voice or make it available for careful evaluation. The comparative contribution is therefore a set of relations to investigate, rather than a dictionary assigning stable political meanings to grammatical constructions.

4 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CRITICAL GRAMMAR PEDAGOGY

Analysis of this corpus provides valuable material for renewing the teaching of narrative grammar and reported speech in Francophone higher education.

Table 6: Teaching reported speech through identification, rewriting and interpretation

Teaching focus	Activity
Identification	Locate voices, reporting cues and reference frames
Rewriting	Compare changes in form, evaluation and commitment
Interpretation	Justify a reading with textual evidence

Source: created by the authors with the help of AI

4.1 Moving beyond mechanical grammar towards text grammar

Contextualized teaching can retain grammatical transformation exercises while extending their purpose. Students first identify the reporting instance, represented speaker, addressee and temporal frame in a short passage from a specified edition. They then compare the original with two rewritings, changing the reporting verb or the reporting form while retaining the propositional content as far as possible. The discussion asks what changes in certainty, evaluation, distance and access to the represented voice. This makes grammatical accuracy and interpretative consequences complementary learning objectives.

4.2 Developing grammatical awareness and cognition

A further activity asks students to justify competing interpretations of an ambiguous passage. They must cite linguistic cues, explain whose viewpoint those cues suggest and identify evidence that weakens their preferred reading. Assessment can distinguish accurate identification of forms, coherent handling of deixis and tense, and the quality of the interpretative justification. The proposed framework may support attention to voice and perspective, but its effectiveness would need to be evaluated through classroom observation and comparison of student work before and after instruction.

4.3 A classroom sequence from identification to interpretation

A practical sequence can begin with two short passages selected by the teacher from the editions available to the class. Each passage should provide sufficient surrounding narration to identify speaker, addressee and temporal frame. The teacher first asks learners to describe visible features without assigning an ideological meaning: quotation boundaries, reporting verbs, subordinators, pronouns and temporal expressions. Disagreement at this stage can reveal whether learners are using grammatical evidence or relying mainly on expectations about the character. Keeping the initial task descriptive establishes a common basis for subsequent interpretation.

The second stage introduces controlled rewriting. Learners transform one report into another form and annotate every change that affects reference, tense, evaluation or attribution. They then explain what the rewriting cannot preserve. A transformation may retain the apparent propositional content while changing the rhythm of an exchange or the visibility of the reported speaker. This limitation is central to the exercise: grammatical conversion is treated as an interpretative decision with consequences, rather than as a guarantee of equivalent meaning. The teacher can require learners to justify both the revised text and their account of its effects.

The third stage compares interpretations in small groups. One group may argue that a report distances the narrator from a represented judgement; another may argue that the same form leaves endorsement unresolved. Each group must identify the evidence that would strengthen or weaken its position. The final individual task asks for a short analytical paragraph connecting form, narrative framing and a carefully qualified interpretation. The sequence is adaptable to the four works, but its duration and difficulty should depend on the learners' command of French and their familiarity with literary analysis.

4.4 Assessment and conditions for evaluating the proposals

Assessment should distinguish grammatical accuracy from interpretative plausibility. A learner can identify a reporting form correctly while overstating its ideological effect, or offer an interesting reading while mishandling temporal reference. Feedback should make the difference explicit. Suitable criteria include the identification of the relevant enunciative situations, accurate explanation of formal cues, coherence of a rewriting and the use of contextual evidence.

A qualified conclusion supported by the passage should receive greater credit than a confident interpretation based on a grammatical label alone.

Evaluating the sequence would require evidence beyond students' satisfaction. A future classroom study could compare analytical paragraphs written before and after instruction using parallel passages of similar difficulty. It should document teaching conditions, task instructions and the criteria used to judge improvement. Where possible, a second assessor could review a sample of anonymized work to identify disagreements in scoring. These suggestions outline a possible research design; the present article reports no classroom trial and supplies no basis for claiming a measured effect on achievement.

The multilingual context of Francophone higher education offers additional possibilities, provided linguistic difference is handled carefully. Learners may compare how languages familiar to them represent another speaker's words, but no student should be treated as the spokesperson for an entire linguistic community. Comparisons should focus on explicit examples and their contexts of use. Such work can help reveal assumptions about tense, deixis and quotation while maintaining the distinction between linguistic structure, literary construction and judgements about the social value of a language.

5 CONCLUSION

This exploratory comparison argues that reported speech is best understood through the relationship between linguistic form, narrative framing and attributed authority. Quoting, reformulating and summarizing another voice organize the reader's access to that voice while positioning the reporting instance towards it. The selected works make this relationship available for examining gendered prescriptions, the mediation of oral expression, political legitimacy and the interpretation of persuasive speech. Their comparison supports a contextual approach in which no reporting form carries a predetermined ideological effect.

The pedagogical implication is to connect the description of person, tense, syntax and deixis with questions of attribution, evaluation and responsibility. Transformation exercises remain useful when students also explain how a rewriting changes the relationship between voices. Literary texts can thus provide material for grammatical reasoning and supported interpretation within the same activity. This is a proposed teaching orientation; the article does not demonstrate its effectiveness in practice.

The scope of the conclusions is limited by the purposive selection of four works and the absence of an edition-specific inventory of analysed passages. The manuscript cannot establish how frequently particular forms occur, whether they distinguish the authors statistically or whether classroom use improves learning. Further research should document the passages and editions used, apply explicit coding criteria, examine alternative readings and test the proposed activities with learners. Within these boundaries, the study offers a framework for investigating how the representation of another's speech becomes an act of interpretation.

The main theoretical implication is that reported speech should be examined as an arrangement of responsibilities. The reporting instance controls access to another voice without necessarily endorsing it; the represented speaker can claim authority without securing credibility; and the reader's judgement depends on contextual information that may exceed what characters know. This account makes it possible to connect linguistic analysis with questions of gender, collective legitimacy and political domination while retaining the evidential requirements specific to each claim.

The pedagogical contribution follows from that same distinction. Students can learn to explain how a report is constructed, test what changes when it is rewritten and defend an interpretation with identifiable cues. Developing this practice requires neither abandoning formal grammar nor assigning predetermined values to literary voices. It requires sustained attention to the relation between wording and context. Further research can strengthen the present contribution by assembling edition-specific sequences, documenting alternative analyses and examining whether classroom tasks improve the precision of learners' grammatical and interpretative reasoning.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript

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