

**TEMA 9:** *Discurso Directo, Discurso Indirecto.****Autora: M<sup>a</sup> Ángeles Martín Gavilanes*****Contents:**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

There are two main ways of reporting people's words, thoughts, beliefs, etc.: direct and indirect speech. Direct speech consists of giving the exact words (more or less) that were said, or that we imagine were thought. If the medium used is a written text, inverted commas are used to quote direct speech.

Direct: *"I want to go home"*.

On the other hand, we can make a speaker's words or thoughts part of our own sentence, using conjunctions (e.g. that), and changing pronouns, tenses and other words as necessary. This kind of structure is called indirect or reported speech:

Indirect: *He said/says that he wanted/wants to go home.*

These two structures cannot normally be mixed, but the following is normal and acceptable: *She said to me "I have got no money" and asked me for help.*

## 2. BASIC RULES FOR INDIRECT SPEECH

Words that are spoken or thought in one place by some person may be reported in another place, at a different time, and by another person. Because of this, there are often grammatical differences between direct and indirect speech. Indirect speech is characterized by a series of formal features which distinguish it from direct speech. They have the effect of shifting all deictic elements away from direct reference to the speech situation, as can be seen by comparing the following versions:

*"I want you to drink this juice".* > *She said she wanted him to drink that/the juice.*

*"Can you leave it here?"* > *She asked if I could leave it there.*

*"Do it yourselves!"* > *He told them to do it themselves.*

*"Must you go tomorrow?"* > *He asked whether I had to go the next/following day.*

The shifts involved are as follows:

**2.1. Pronouns:** A change of speaker may mean a change of pronoun. First person pronouns, which refer to the speaker, are shifted to third. The second person pronoun, which refers to the listener, is shifted to first or third, according to the identity of the listener.

**2.2. "Here and now" words:** Demonstratives and deictic adverbs which refer to the here and now (*this, these, here, now*) are replaced by more remote forms (*that, those, there, then*).

Note that *next* and *last* are also "here and now" words.

*"I'll be back next week."* > *She said that she'd be back the next/following week.*

*"I got my licence last Tuesday".* > *He said he'd got his licence the Tuesday before.*

**2.3. Dropping *that*:** We use the conjunction *that* to join a reported clause to the rest of the sentence, when it is a statement. The conjunction is often dropped, especially after common reporting verbs such as *say* and *think*, in informal speech:

*She said (that) she'd had enough; I think (that) you're probably right.*

*That* cannot be dropped after certain verbs (e.g. *reply*, *shout*) and it is not usually dropped after nouns: *I replied that I did not intend to stand for election; She shouted that she was busy; He disagreed with Copernicus's view that the earth went round the sun.*

#### 2.4. Tense back-shift.

A change of time may mean a change of tense: the person reporting uses tenses that relate to the time when he/she is making the report, not to the time when the original words were used. Verb tenses are back-shifted, that is, present forms are replaced by past forms.

*"I'm learning French".* > *She said she was learning French.*

*"I've forgotten about it".* > *He said he had forgotten about it.*

*"I won't be long".* > *She said she wouldn't be long.*

*"Can you wait?"* > *He asked if I could wait.*

Tense back-shift is not obligatory if the situation is still valid.

*"Ed is a bore".* > *She said that Ed was/is a bore.*

The changes can be illustrated best if we postulate an exact correspondence for the reporting clauses of direct and indirect speech:

Direct speech	Backshifted in indirect speech
Present	Past
Past	Past or Past Perfect
Present Perfect/Past Perfect	Past Perfect

However, there are exceptions to these correspondences. Sometimes past verbs can be used to talk about the present or the future:

*Your mother said that I could play here today.*

A: *"I wondered how you were."*

B: *"You can see how I am".*

*I knew you were American.*

*Sorry, I didn't realize this was your seat.*

Additionally, after present, future and present perfect reporting verbs, tenses are usually the same as in the original (because there is no important change of time):

*He says he doesn't want to play any more; I'll tell her your idea is great;  
The government has announced that taxes will be raised.*

The issue of tense change will be dealt with in further detail below.

**2.5. Mood:** Mood type is also affected. For example, an interrogative in direct speech is replaced by a declarative in reported speech. Imperatives have less clear correspondences, as will be seen in section 7 below.

### 3. VERBS USED TO QUOTE DIRECT SPEECH

Verbs used to introduce direct speech include:

- a) Say, and less frequently, *tell*.
- b) Verbs introducing statements: *announce, observe, point out, remark, report*.
- c) Verbs introducing questions: *ask, demand, inquire, query*.
- d) Other verbs of communication which contain some reference to the circumstances of the speech act: *affirm, answer, argue, beg, boast, declare, interrupt, object, protest, repeat, urge, warn*, etc.
- e) Verbs of uttering which have other, connotative meanings: *bark, bleat, blurt, chirp, complain, croak, cry, drawl, exclaim, grumble, hiss, holler, mumble, murmur, mutter, scream, shout, shriek, snap, snarl, snort, stammer, stutter, twitter, whine, whisper, yell*.

To this last group can be added many other verbs which are not, strictly speaking, verbs of uttering but rather behavioural verbs which express some emotive state which accompanies the act of

speaking. Such verbs can be classified according to the emotive state they reflect:

Laughter: *chuckle, laugh, smile, grin, giggle, smirk, simper, twinkle.*

Weeping: *sob, wail.*

Excitement, concern: *breathe, pant.*

Incredulity: *gasp*

Pain, anger: *bellow, choke, flash.*

These groups of verbs are used, with varying degrees of frequency, by some authors of popular narrative as more stimulating substitutes for basic verbs of saying. The following examples are taken from Gordon Parker's *Lightning in May*:

*"I'll take the cases", he whispered.*

*"Don't be a fool", Tilmouth snarled.*

*"What's happened? What's wrong?" he pleaded.*

*"Come on, lads", Tommy yelled.*

*"Mr. Cox", John snapped, matter-of-factly.*

*"I said come in, Mrs. Friar!" John barked at her.*

#### 4. REPORTING IN THE PRESENT TENSE

When the reporting verb is in the present tense (*says, mentions*), the tense of the verb in the reported clause does not change.

Example: Michael is reading Simon's letter on Monday and reporting what he reads to a friend.

*"I'm having a great time in New York".* > *Simon says he's having a great time in New York.*

*"My girlfriend likes it here, too".* > *He mentions that his girlfriend likes it there, too.*

*"We'll be home next Tuesday".* > *He says they'll be home tomorrow.*

The present tense is also used for reports attributed to famous works or authors which have present validity, as in: *The Bible says there's no end to the writing of books; Chaucer somewhere writes that love is blind.*

Backshift is optional when the time-reference of the original utterance is valid at the time of the reported utterance. Thus the shift is obligatory in:

Direct: *"I am a citizen, not of Athens, but of the world".* (Socrates)

Indirect: *Socrates said that he was a citizen, not of Athens, but of the world.*

However it is optional in:

Direct: *"Nothing can harm a good man". (Socrates)*

Indirect: *Socrates said that nothing could/can harm a good man.*

Since the statement by Socrates in the first example deals with what is now past, it has to be reported by application of the backshift rule. The second statement, on the other hand, is a **universal rule** which, if it was true for Socrates' lifetime, should also be true today; the backshift rule is therefore optional. Other examples where present forms are retained in indirect speech are:

*Their teacher has told them that the earth moves around the sun.  
I heard her say yesterday that she is studying Business Administration.  
A Yale professor has said that the Brooklyn Bridge is the most majestic embodiment of the American experience of the road.*

## 5. REPORTING IN THE PAST TENSE

If the reporting verb is in the past tense, then the verb in the reported clause usually changes from the present to the past tense. If the verb in direct speech is in the past tense, it either changes to the past perfect tense (e.g. *played* → *had played*) or it stays the same. *Will, could, should, might, and ought to* stay the same.

Example: Martin is reporting Barbara's words to Stephen.

*"We need Stephen".* > *Barbara said they needed you.*

*"I'm starting a pop group".* > *She told me she was starting a pop group.*

*"I haven't found anyone who can play the guitar".* > *She said she hadn't found anyone who could play the guitar.*

*"I'll be at the club".* > *She told me she'd be at the club.*

*"The group is going to meet there".* > *She said that the group was going to meet there.*

*"I must talk to Stephen".* > *She said she had to talk to you.*

*“He played in a group once”. > She mentioned that you had played/that you played in a group once.*

*“It would be great if he could play in our group”. > She said it would be great if you could play in their group.*

After a reporting verb in the past, there is usually a tense change. But as pointed out above, sometimes the verb in direct speech stays in the same tense if the words are still true when someone reports them. However, even if the words are still true, we can always change the tense into the past after a past tense reporting verb.

Example: Paul is reporting Sarah’s words.

*“Horses are my favourite animals”. > Sarah said horses were/are her favourite animals.*

*“I can ride”. > She told me she could/can ride.*

### 5.1. Modal verbs after past reporting verbs

The modals *would, should, could, might, ought to*, and *must*, are usually unchanged after past reporting verbs in indirect speech. This is also true of modal *need* and *had better*.

*“It would be nice if I could see you again”. > He said it would be nice if he could see me again.*

*“It must be pretty late. I really must go.” > She said it must be pretty late and she really had to go.*

First person *shall* and conditional *should* may be reported as *would* in indirect speech (because of the change of person).

*“We shall/should be delighted to come”. > They said they would be delighted to come.*

Note the different ways of reporting questions beginning *Shall I...?*, depending on whether the speaker is asking for information or making an offer:

*“Shall I be needed tomorrow?” > He wants to know if he will be needed tomorrow.*

*“Shall I carry your bag?” > He wants to know if he should/can carry your bag.*

## 5.2. Conditionals

After past reporting verbs, conditional sentences referring to “unreal” situations are often reported with past conditionals.

*“If I had any money I’d buy you a drink.” > She said if she had had any money she would have bought me a drink. OR She said if she had any money she would buy...)*

## 6. REPORTING STATEMENTS.

Say and *tell* are reporting verbs which typically report statements. We also use *mention, explain, answer, agree, think, believe*, (for thoughts), etc. *Say* does not have an indirect object when used as a reporting verb. *Tell* must have an indirect object.

*“There’s a game this evening.” > Peter says (that) there’s a game this evening.*

*“It begins at eight o’clock”. > Jane told me (that) it begins at eight o’clock.*

The reporting verb (e.g. *says, told*) usually comes before the reported clause (e.g. *there’s a game this evening*), but the reported clause may come first. When the reporting verb comes first, we can use *that* or leave it out. Leaving it out is more informal. When the reporting verb comes after the reported clause, we cannot use *that*.

*There’s a game this evening, Peter says; It begins at eight o’clock, Jane told me.*

The general rule for reporting statements is that when the reporting verb (e.g. “*she **said** (that)*”, “*they **told** me (that)*”, “*we **thought** (that)*”, “*he **informed** me that*”, “*I **wondered** whether*”, “*he **wanted** to know (if)*” is in the past, we usually convert the verb form in the direct speech sentence into one which is more 'past' in reported speech. Hence:

Present simple > past simple.

Present progressive > past progressive.

Past simple > past perfect.

Present perfect > past perfect.

Present perfect progressive > past perfect progressive.

can/may/shall/will > could/might/should/would.



Examples:

*I love you. > He told me he loved me.*

*I'm going out now. > She informed me she was going out.*

*I've been having a brilliant time in Cyprus. > She phoned to tell me that she had been having a brilliant time in Cyprus.*

*I'll be wearing my red dress to the party. > You said you would be wearing your red dress to the party, but you're not!*

*I'm sure we have met before. > He was sure we had met before.*

*I can't really fly, daddy. > My son admitted that he couldn't really fly.*

*I may be back late tonight. > He let me know that he might be back late this evening.*

If we are reporting a fact or something that is still true, the direct speech form can often be retained.

*She told me she was a teacher. OR She told me she is a teacher.* (If it is clear from context that she is still teaching).

Sometimes, whether you use one or the other depends upon how you see it. Take the two statements: “*She told me she loved me*” and “*She said she loves me*”.

In the first, it might be the case that what she said was not true, whilst in the second, it clearly is the case that you believe what she says.

The past perfect does not change in reported speech as there is no verb form further back in time:

*“I had never smoked before I went to Jane’s party.” > She maintained that she had never smoked before she went to Jane’s party.*

If the reporting verb is in the present tense, the verb form in the reported statement remains the same. Consider the following examples which are all about a murder investigation:

*“I have no idea where Jim Smith is.” > He says he has no idea where Jim Smith is.*

*“I haven’t seen him since last Easter.” > He claims he hasn’t seen him since last Easter.*

*“I didn’t kill him! I am innocent!” > He insists he’s innocent.*

## 7. REPORTING QUESTIONS

Ask is a reporting verb which reports questions. We also use *wonder*, *enquire*, *want to know*, etc.

*“What time is the game?”* > Andrew asked me what time the game was.

In reported questions we also need to move the verb form “one tense back”. Question marks are not used.

In reported questions, the subject normally comes before the verb, that is, there is no inversion of subject and verb, and no auxiliary *do/does/did*. Consider the following:

*“What’s the matter?”* > I wanted to know what the matter was

*“How do you feel today?”* > The doctor asked me how I felt.

*“Where are you going so late at night?”* > I asked her where she was going so late at night.

*“Who’s that girl in the red dress?”* > I wondered who that/the girl in the red dress was.

*“How did you make that salad?”* > I couldn’t work out how she had made that salad.

*“Which Easter Egg would you like?”* > He asked his grandson which Easter Egg he wanted.

*“Which Easter Egg did you buy?”* > His wife wanted to know which Egg he had bought.

Auxiliary *do* is not used except in indirect negative question, as a negative auxiliary.

*“Why don’t you work harder?”* > She asked why he didn’t work harder.

Note that sometimes negative questions often express emotions such as surprise or enthusiasm which are usually reported in special ways (see 7 below).

*“Don’t the children like ice-cream?”* > She was surprised that the children didn’t like ice-cream.

*“Isn’t she lovely?”* > I remarked how lovely she was.

### 7.1. Reporting yes/no questions

We can generally use both *whether* and *if* to report yes/no questions.

*The driver asked if/whether I wanted the town centre.  
I don't know if/whether I can help you.*

After some verbs, *whether* is preferred to *if*: *We discussed whether we should close the shop.*

In a formal style, *whether* is usually preferred in a two-part question with *or*: *Let me know whether you can come or not; The Directors have not decided whether they will recommend a dividend or reinvest the profits.*

If an indirect question is fronted, *whether* is used: *Whether I'll have time I'm not sure at the moment.*

Other examples: Mrs. Todd is reporting a telephone conversation to her husband.

*"Is your husband in?" > He asked (me) if you were in.*

*"Has he gone to London?" > He wanted to know whether you'd gone to London.*

## 7.2. Reporting wh-questions

In wh-questions we use question words (e.g. *which, when, what, who, how*) both in direct speech and in reported speech. Verb tenses in reported questions change in the same way as in reported statements. The word order in a reported question is the same as in a direct statement (i.e. there is no inversion). Examples:

*"Which train did he take?" > He asked (me) which train you'd taken.*

*"When does he usually get home?" > He asked (me) when you usually got home.*

## 8. REPORTING ACTIONS: PROMISES, ORDERS, REQUESTS, ADVICE.

In the reported representation of an utterance, the speaker or writer may keep close to the original wording, except for the necessary temporal, spatial, and pronominal shifts:

*"It's raining". > Peter said that it was raining.*

More often, however, reported speech involves paraphrase or summary of the original utterance. This is particularly apparent in reported

directives, i.e. offers, suggestions, and commands, as opposed to reported statements and questions. Let us consider this in more detail:

Speech relating to actions (e.g. promises, agreements, orders, offers, requests, advice and suggestions) is often reported with **infinitives, or object + infinitive**.

*He promised to write; She agreed to wait for me; I told Andrew to be careful; The lady downstairs has asked us to be quiet after nine o'clock; Ann has offered to baby-sit tonight; I advise you to think again before you decide; The policeman told me not to park there.*

The structure **question word + infinitive** is common: *He asked her how to make a white sauce, Don't tell me what to do.*

We report orders with **tell + object + infinitive**.

*"Take the pills before meals." > The doctor told me to take the pills before meals.*

*"You mustn't smoke." > He told me not to smoke.*

We report requests with **ask + object + infinitive**.

*"Would you mind not leaving your car here?" > He asked me not to leave the car there.*

The reporting verb can be in the passive: *I was told to take the pills before meals; You were asked not to leave the car there.*

We can also report orders with a form of *must* or *be to*: *The doctor said I must take/I had to take/I was to take the pills before meals; He said I mustn't smoke/I was not to smoke.*

We report a request to have/eat/drink something with *ask for*: *"Can I have some water please?" > A motorist asked (me) for some water.*

We can also report requests which are in question form (e.g. *Can I...?*) in the same way as other yes/no questions.

*He asked me if he could have some water.*

The following are examples of the most common types of reported directives:

- Suggestions: *“Let’s go out”.*  
*Tony suggested going out.*
- Advice: *“You’d better phone the police”.*  
*Mrs. Dell advised me to phone the police.*
- Warnings: *“Don’t be late”.*  
*I warned you not to be late.*
- Threats: *“If you don’t go, I’ll call the police”.*  
*I threatened to call the police.*
- Insisting: *“We simply must take a taxi”.*  
*Mr. and Mrs. Beal insisted on taking a taxi.*
- Refusals: *“I’m not going to wait any longer”*  
*Mrs. Janner refused to wait any longer.*
- Promises: *“I’ll send you a postcard.”*  
*He promised to send us a postcard.*
- Offers: *“Can I get you a taxi?”*  
*Eric offered to get the visitors a taxi.*
- Invitations: *“Would you like to have lunch with us?”*  
*The Updikes invited us to lunch.*

### 8.1. Reporting suggestions

*Suggest* is not followed by **object + infinitive**. Instead, *that*-clauses and *-ing* structures are commonly used.

*Her uncle suggested that she (should) get a job in a bank.*  
*Her uncle suggested getting a job in a bank.*

In *that*-clauses after *suggest*, various verb forms are possible:

- Ordinary present and past tenses can be used in BrE.

*Her uncle suggests that she gets a job in a bank.*  
*He suggested that she got a job in a bank.*

- In a formal style, subjunctives are possible, especially in AmE.

*He suggests that she get a job in a bank.*  
*He suggested that she get a job in a bank.*

- In BrE, *should* + infinitive is common.

*He suggests that she should get a job in a bank.*  
*He suggested that she should get a job in a bank.*

- In direct suggestions (“*I suggest...*”), *should* is not generally used.  
*I suggest (that) you get new tyres for your car.*
- We can use a direct object after *suggest*.  
“*What shall we give the children?*” “*I suggest hamburgers*”.
- *Suggest* is not normally followed by an indirect object without a preposition: *Can you suggest a restaurant to us?*

## 9. CONCLUSION

As regards linguistic competence, the Curricula of Official Language Schools (Basic and Intermediate Levels) set out the following distribution of contents: At Basic Level 2, students are introduced to reported speech with *say*, *tell* and *ask* in the present tense (*Liz says: “I love hamburgers”; Liz says she loves hamburgers*). At Intermediate Level 1, students look at tense changes and other types of modifications in reported speech. Intermediate Level 2 students review and consolidate the forms dealt with in previous levels. They look at changes in tenses and other elements of the reported clause, such as modal verbs (*He asked me if I could help him*). Verbs and constructions that summarise and paraphrase the reported information (*I advised him to arrive on time; She told me about what had happened.*) are also dealt with. More advanced points related to reported speech are dealt with at the Advanced Level, currently 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Year Level.

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