**Lecture 2. Reported speech[[1]](#footnote-1)** |

When we report what we or other people have said or thought, we can use direct speech (reporting the exact words), but we usually use indirect speech. This unit looks at how we report statements, questions and commands, the variety of reporting verbs and how they are used.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPEECH

**A** When reporting speech in literature, authors often use direct speech - the exact words are between inverted commas. We do not use that to introduce direct speech:

He leaned towards her and whispered, 'Be sure to lock your door tonight.' The reporting verb (said, replied, etc.) can go before the speech in inverted commas, after the speech, or in the middle of it:

Lovett said, 'Houston, we have a problem.'

'Houston, we have a problem,' Lovett said.

'Houston,' said Lovett /Lovett said, 'we have a problem.'

**B** When we put the reporting verb after direct speech, it can go before the subject, unless the subject is a pronoun:

~~'The operation has been a resounding success,' said she.~~

'The operation has been a resounding success,' she said.

'The operation has been a resounding success,' said the surgeon.

In most other forms of writing, such as letters and reports, we prefer indirect speech: She said the operation had been a resounding success.

**C** When we are speaking, it is possible, though rare, to quote words directly. We may do this if we want to focus on the exact words spoken:

But did he actually say 7 love you'?

We usually report words using indirect speech in conversations as we do not have punctuation to clearly signal what is the reported speech:

But did he actually tell you that he loved you?

We use indirect speech for statements, questions, and commands.

INDIRECT STATEMENTS

**А** There are a number of common introductory verbs used to report statements, which are often followed by that (e.g. say, tell, add, continue, answer, reply, mention, remark):

For the third time that day, the minister replied that it was out of the question.

We can omit that after an introductory verb, and often do in conversation, except after reply, continue, answer and shout:

I told them they were barred from the club from now on.

!!! There are differences in use between say and tell.

We can omit the object or use an indirect object (e.g. to us) after say, but we use a direct object (e.g. us) after tell:

~~He said us that his mobile phone had been out of action all day.~~

He said (to us) that his mobile phone had been out of action all day.

~~He~~ **~~told that~~** ~~his mobile phone had been out of action all day.~~

He **told us that** his mobile phone had been out of action all day.

When we are reporting more than one sentence, it is not necessary to repeat the reporting verb to introduce every new sentence:

Tom insisted that he hadn't been there. He had worked late, and had then gone ... We can report our thoughts using reporting verbs such as think, decide or imagine:

She never imagined that it would be so difficult to run for the Senate.

**B** When we report another person's words in indirect speech, we often have to change the pronouns used in the direct speech:

James added, I really don't understand the problem.'

James added that he really didn't understand the problem.

When another person reports James's words, then the pronoun *I* changes to **he**. Similarly, if the place or time of reporting is significantly different from that in the original speech, we often need to make changes to adverbs of place and time (e.g. now →then; here → there, today → that day; tomorrow → the next day, yesterday →the day before; last Monday → the last/previous Monday):

Alex said, 'I'll meet you here again **tomorrow** at 3.30.

Alex said **she** would meet **us there** again **the next day** at 3.30.

But if the statement is reported on the same day and in the same place, we would say:

Alex said she would meet you **here** again **tomorrow** at 3.30.

**C** When we use indirect speech after a past tense reporting verb (e.g. said, had confirmed), we usually change the tense in the sentences we are reporting.

We use a tense one step further in the past ('backshift'), so present forms become past forms (e.g. present simple → past simple, present continuous → past continuous):

'I'm leaving in ten minutes.' → She decided she **was leaving** in ten minutes.

'We've been living here for years.' → He revealed they'**d** **been living** there for years.

Past forms become past perfect forms (e.g. past simple → past perfect simple):

'It rained really heavily today.' → Sarah mentioned that it had rained really heavily that day.

!!! The past perfect simple and continuous do not change:

'They'd arrived an hour early.' →I said they'd arrived an hour early.

**D** We do not change the tense of the original words in reported speech when:

• the reporting verb is in a present tense:

He says that intelligent life in the universe does not exist

• the direct speech includes an 'unreal past':

*I* wish I were younger.' → Janice said that she wished she were younger.

~~Janice said that she wished she had been younger.~~

In some cases we can choose to change the tense or not. This often depends on the relationship of the reported event to the time of reporting it. For example, if we report 'I'm going on holiday tomorrow morning' on the day it is said, we are likely to say:

Susanna said she's going on holiday tomorrow morning.

But reported a few days later, we are more likely to say:

Susanna said she was going on holiday the next morning.

We don't usually change the tense when:

• the action in the indirect speech is still happening or going to happen:

*I* am working on the details of a tentative settlement.' → The negotiator said he is working on the details of a tentative settlement. (= He is still working on the details.)

• the reported verb expresses a fact or situation that cannot or is unlikely to change: He explained that these animals roamed the earth millions of years ago.

He told us that counselling is not the answer for everyone.

•the verb comes after a time conjunction, e.g. when, after:

Martin replied that he had started the job immediately after he left school.

Note that in all of these cases, it is also possible to change the tense:

The negotiator said he was working on details of a tentative settlement.

He explained that these animals had roamed the earth millions of years ago.

He told us that counselling was not the answer for everyone.

Martin replied that he had started the job immediately after he had left school.

!!! We make the tense change if we no longer believe the direct speech statement: 'Where's Tom this evening?'

~~'He said he’s going to join us, but I don't think he will.'~~

'He said he was going to join us, but I don't think he will.'

E We often need to make changes to modal verbs. Where possible, the present form of the modal verb changes to its past form (e.g. will → would, may → might):

'The new law will be in place soon.' → She said the new law would be in place soon.

'Publication may be delayed' → The editor said that publication might be delayed.

!!! Shall becomes would when it refers to the future, but should when it is a suggestion:

*I* shall tell them everything.' → I decided I would tell them everything.

'Shall we tell the manager?' → She suggested that they should tell the manager. We can use both must and had to in reported speech:

'You must lose twenty kilos!' → *The* doctor said that I must I had to lose twenty kilos.

In the negative we can use mustn't or wasn't/weren't to:

'You mustn't think badly of me.' → She said we mustn't/weren't to think badly of her.

Ought to, used to, could, might, would and should do not change when reported.

INDIRECT (REPORTED) QUESTIONS

А The most common verbs for reporting questions are ask and want to know:

The assistant asked what type of printer we had, but I don't know.

Laura wanted to know if anybody had reported the missing person.

We also use enquire for formal questions and wonder for 'ask ourselves':

The reception was boring and Andrzej wondered when he could leave.

B We introduce indirect closed questions with or whether:

Lester wondered if/whether there was anything better in life.

We can present alternatives in indirect questions with whether or not, but we do not use if or not, except by putting or not at the end of the question:

~~Deborah asked if or not there was a lift in the apartment block.~~

Deborah asked whether or not there was a lift in the apartment block.

Deborah asked whether/if there was a lift in the apartment block or not.

In indirect open questions we use a question word:

The nurse asked when exactly the pain had started.

!!! We report negative questions which express surprise or criticism with a 'functional' verb like complain:

'Isn't that stupid?' → ~~He asked if that wasn't stupid.~~

He complained that it was stupid.

INDIRECT COMMANDS AND REQUESTS

**A** Verbs used to report commands are tell, order, command and forbid (negative): When the vet had finished, he told them to let the animal sleep.

He forbade us to pass on any of the information to the authorities.

We use ask for reporting requests, and beg or urge with urgent requests: His secretary asked me to come back later.

**B** In indirect commands we use a reporting verb and (not) to + infinitive:

Several members of the Royal Family urged Edward VIII not to abdicate.

We can use ask for + passive infinitive if we don't mention the person to whom the

command was given:

*The cinema manager* ***asked for*** *the culprit* ***to be brought*** *to his office.*

REPORTING VERBS AND THEIR PATTERNS

**A** A large number of reporting verbs indicate the function of the original speech, e.g: 'You should stop smoking.' → He advised her to stop smoking, (advice)

'If you do that again, I'll call the police.' → He threatened to call the police. (warning)

In informal conversation we usually report speech using the introductory verbs soy and tell. In more formal speech and writing, we use a greater variety of introductory verbs:

‘*I* think you should inform the judge.'

Dad told me he thought I should inform the judge.

The lawyer advised me to inform the judge.

**B** There are several different patterns used after reporting verbs:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| verb only  *‘I’m really sorry’. → She apologised.* | agree, apologise, refuse |
| verb + (that) clause  *I* hacked into the company's accounts system.' → He admitted (that) he had hacked into the company's accounts system. | accept, acknowledge, add, admit, advise, agree, announce, answer", argue, assert, assume, believe, boast, comment, complain, concede, conclude, confess, continue\*, decide, declare, deny, doubt, exclaim, expect, explain, foresee, imagine, imply, insist, know, mention, notice, observe, point out, predict, promise, protest, recommend, remark, repeat, reply\*, report, respond, reveal, say, shout\*, state, suggest, vow, whisper (\* = that is obligatory) |
| verb + object + that clause  'Don't worry. You'll arrive on time.' → She reassured me that I would arrive on time. | advise, assure, inform, reassure, remind, tell, warn |
| verb + to infinitive  'We'll pick up the children, if you like.' → They offered to pick up the children. | agree, demand, guarantee, offer, propose, refuse, swear, threaten, volunteer, vow |
| verb (+ optional object) + to infinitive  'Please can I use the car?' → She asked to use the car.  'Please let me stay.' → She begged us to let her stay. | ask (sb), beg (sb), expect (sb), promise (sb) |
| verb + object + to + infinitive  'You shouldn't say anything.' →I advised him not to say anything. | advise, allow, challenge, command, compel, encourage, expect, forbid, force, implore, instruct, invite, order, permit, persuade, remind, request, tell, urge, warn |
| verb + object + to + infinitive + complement  'Muhammad Ali was the greatest boxer ever.' → She considers Muhammad Ali to have been the greatest boxer ever. | acknowledge, assume, believe, claim, consider, declare, expect, feel, find, presume, suppose, think, understand |
| verb + -ing form  *I* didn't do it.' → He denied doing it. | admit, apologise for, decide on, deny, mention, recommend, regret, report, suggest |
| verb + object + preposition + -ing form  'You forged the cheques, didn't you?' → They accused me of forging the cheques. | accuse sb of, blame sb for, congratulate sb on, thank sb for |

1. Материалы подготовлены на основе: Foley M., Hall D. Advanced Learners’ Grammar. Harlow, Longman, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)