UNIT 30. DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPEECH.

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1. Introduction

Direct and indirect speech constitute fundamental mechanisms in language to convey reported information. Their mastery is essential for learners of English as a foreign language, as these structures appear frequently in spoken and written discourse across a wide range of communicative functions. Through these structures, speakers can narrate past conversations, summarize opinions, transfer knowledge and position themselves relative to the source of an utterance. In communicative terms, reporting what others have said is a core skill that integrates grammar, semantics, pragmatics and discourse competence.

The theoretical foundations of this topic can be traced to descriptive and functional grammars such as *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al., 1985), and *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* Huddleston and Pullum, 2002), which provide detailed taxonomies of syntactic transformations and restrictions involved in reporting. In addition, functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994) and pragmatics, especially speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), offer valuable insights into how reported speech functions within discourse and how different reporting verbs affect meaning and tone. Pedagogical perspectives such as those of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman in *The Grammar Book* (1999), and Thornbury's *How to Teach Grammar* (2006), inform classroom practice and error correction. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) includes descriptors related to reporting events, opinions and conversations, making this topic relevant across levels.

2. Definition and Grammatical Distinction

Direct speech refers to the verbatim repetition of a speaker's original utterance, framed by quotation marks in writing and typically introduced by a reporting verb: *She said, "I love books."* In contrast, indirect speech paraphrases the content of the utterance and involves grammatical adjustments: *She said that she loved books.* These transformations affect tense, pronouns, time and place adverbials, and syntactic structure.

One of the key grammatical mechanisms involved in indirect speech is the back shifting of verb tenses. When the reporting verb is in a past tense, the verb in the reported clause usually shifts one tense back: present simple to past simple, present perfect to past

perfect, past simple to past perfect, and so on. For example, *"I have seen the movie"* becomes *He said he had seen the movie.* However, tense back shifting is not always obligatory. If the reporting verb is in the present or if the original statement remains universally true, the tense often remains unchanged: *She says that the Earth orbits the Sun.*

Another difference lies in the syntax of questions and commands. *Yes-no* questions in indirect speech require *if* or *whether* as a complementiser (e.g. *"Are you tired?"* → *She asked if I was tired*), while *wh*-questions retain the interrogative word but shift to statement word order (e.g. *"Where do you live?"* → *He asked where I lived*). For imperatives, reporting typically involves an infinitive clause (e.g. *"Close the window"* → *He told me to close the window).*

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3. Structural Features of Direct and Indirect Speech
From a structural standpoint, transforming direct into indirect speech involves consistent shifts at several linguistic levels:
- Pronouns change to reflect the new speaker's perspective. For example, *"I like your jacket"* turns into *She said she liked my jacket*.
- Time expressions often shift. From *today* to *that day*; *tomorrow* to *the next day*, *yesterday* to *the day before*; and *now* to *then*.
- Place expressions also change. From *here* to *there*; *this* to *that*; and *these* to *those*.
- Modals such as *will, can* and *may* generally become *would, could* and *might*, though *should, ought to* and *must* may remain unchanged depending on meaning.

In reporting speech acts, the choice of reporting verb plays a critical role. While *say* and *tell* are most common, a wide variety of verbs can be used to express intention, certainty, politeness or emotional nuance (e.g. *claim, admit, confess, warn, advise, remind, deny*). These verbs determine the type of complement clause they take, namely finite, infinitival or gerundial, and often carry pragmatic implications.

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4. Semantic and Pragmatic Considerations
From a semantic and pragmatic perspective, the act of reporting is not merely grammatical but involves crucial interpretive decisions. The speaker may choose to report verbatim, in direct speech, to emphasise authenticity, dramatic effect or speaker intention. Alternatively, indirect speech allows for paraphrase, summarisation and mitigation.

Reported speech introduces distancing, meaning that the speaker becomes a mediator rather than an original source. This is especially relevant in formal contexts such as journalism, research or academic writing. The reporting verb may subtly influence how the original utterance is interpreted: compare *She admitted that she was wrong* with *She said that she was wrong.* The former suggests guilt; the latter is neutral.

Reported speech also reflects interpersonal relationships, speaker stance and level of formality. For example, *He ordered me to leave* conveys authority and tension, while *He*

asked me to leave suggests politeness. Understanding such nuances is critical for developing pragmatic competence.

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5. Crosslinguistic Influences and Learner Difficulties
For Spanish-speaking learners, some aspects of indirect speech are relatively intuitive due to structural similarities between English and Spanish. However, significant challenges arise:

- Tense back shifting can cause confusion, especially when learners attempt to apply it rigidly in contexts where it is not necessary.
- Pronoun adjustment often leads to errors, particularly in nested or multi-clause statements (e.g. *She told him that I said I would help*).
- Learners may overuse or misuse reporting verbs, relying solely on *say* or *tell*, ignoring more precise verbs that add communicative richness.
- The transformation of questions and imperatives is particularly problematic, as it requires reordering elements and shifting mood.

Negative transfer from L1 and the cognitive load of managing multiple simultaneous transformations contribute to fossilisation of errors. Targeted instruction, scaffolded practice and metalinguistic awareness are therefore essential.

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6. Pedagogical Implications in the EFL Classroom
Given its complexity, reported speech should be introduced progressively and revisited at multiple stages of instruction. At A2-B1 levels, learners can begin with simple statements and familiar reporting verbs (e.g. *say, tell*) and gradually incorporate questions, imperatives and advanced structures (e.g. *He asked me where I had been*).

Besides, contextualisation is key. Instead of decontextualised sentence drills, students should engage in authentic tasks: conducting and reporting interviews, summarising dialogues, writing news reports or retelling stories. Such tasks link form to meaning and help consolidate transformation rules through use.

Contrastive analysis and visual aids (e.g. before/after charts, timelines) can facilitate comprehension. Dictogloss tasks, role-plays and peer interviews also promote oral fluency in using indirect speech. Activities such as *"reported speech detective"*, where learners identify changes in a transcript, enhance awareness and analytical skills.

Moreover, the CEFR descriptors encourage integrating this structure into activities that build discourse competence. For instance, B1 learners should be able to *"report the main points of short messages and announcements"* and *"convey what someone else has said in simple terms"*. These descriptors can guide the design of performance-based assessment tasks involving reported speech.

Finally, formative assessment strategies, such as self-correction exercises, peer review of written transformations or oral summaries, help learners monitor their own progress.

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7. Conclusion

Direct and indirect speech represent essential tools in the learner's linguistic repertoire. They allow for the accurate and nuanced reporting of information, reflecting both syntactic mastery and pragmatic awareness. Their teaching requires attention to structural rules, but also to the communicative functions they serve in discourse.

From a curricular standpoint, reported speech supports the development of communicative competence as outlined by the CEFR, particularly in the areas of spoken interaction, written production and mediation. Its inclusion in Secondary Education responds to the legal framework established by the Organic Law 3/2020, known as LOMLOE, and the Order ECD/1172/2022, comprising the Aragonese Curriculum for Secondary Education, which promote an action-oriented, inclusive and competency-based approach to language teaching.

Through well-designed instruction, authentic input and meaningful practice, learners can internalise the transformations involved in reported speech and use them confidently in both academic and real-life contexts.