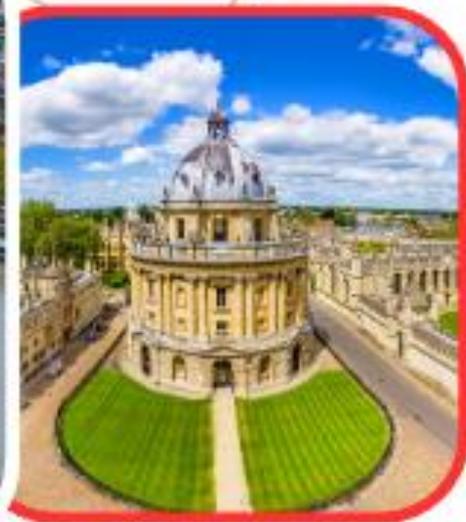




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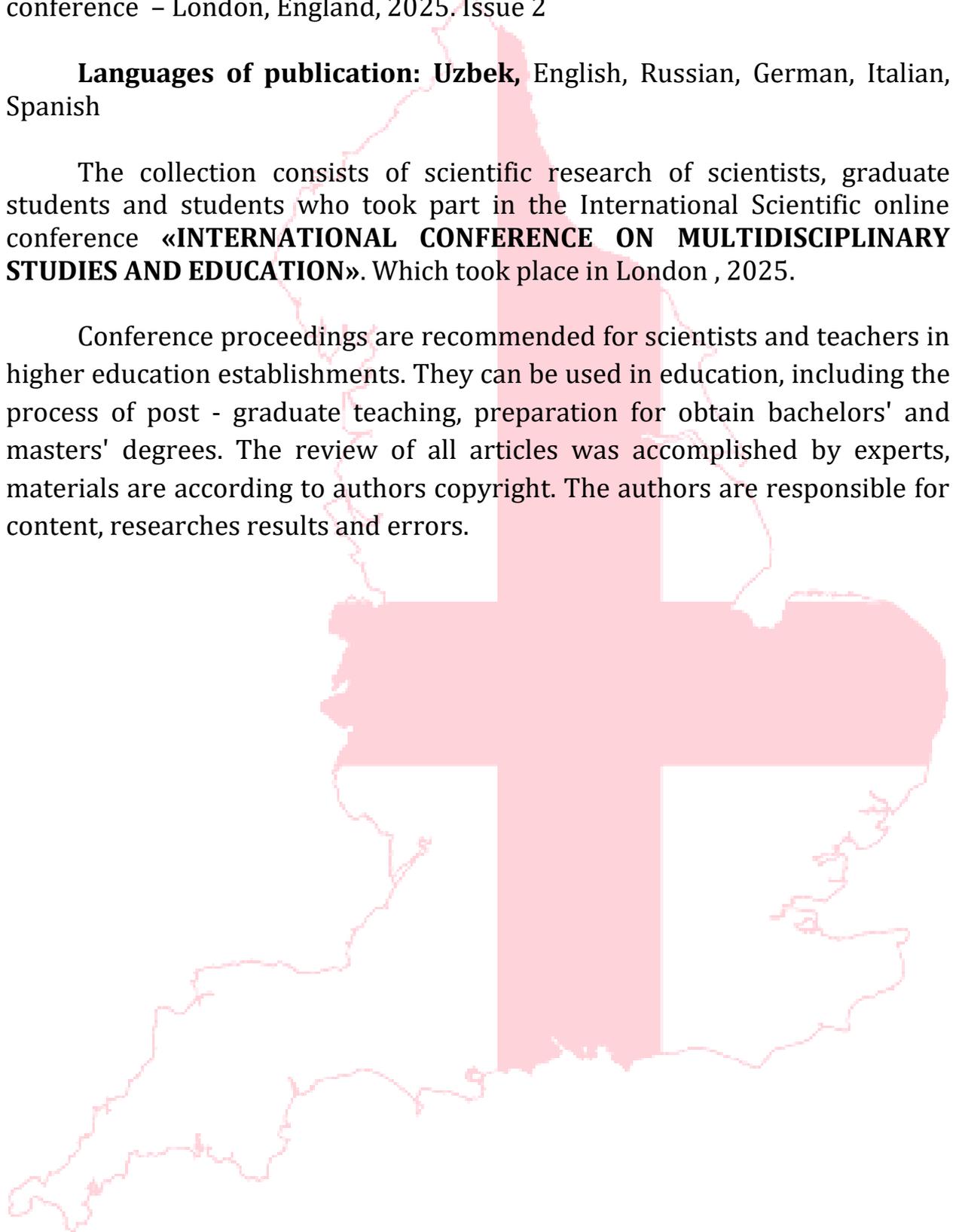


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Talking About What Others Said: An Introduction to Reported Speech

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Reported speech, also referred to as indirect speech, is a grammatical mechanism used to convey the content of someone else's statement without quoting them directly. In English, this structure usually requires shifting verb tenses, adjusting pronouns, and modifying time expressions to reflect the change in the reporting context (Yule, 2010). Reported speech is a critical component of discourse competence, as it enables speakers to narrate past events and reproduce others' utterances accurately and appropriately.

This paper explores the core features of reported speech in English and contrasts them with equivalent structures in Uzbek and Russian. While English requires tense backshifting in most cases (e.g., "He said he was tired"), Uzbek and Russian do not consistently follow such temporal shifts, instead relying on context or maintaining the present tense form (Comrie, 1981; Mustafoqizi, 2022). These cross-linguistic differences can cause confusion for EFL learners and lead to direct translation errors. By analyzing these contrasts, the essay highlights how linguistic transfer influences learner accuracy and suggests ways to address common difficulties in the classroom.

Rationale for Topic Selection in the Teaching and Learning Context

This topic was selected due to its significant role in both written and spoken English communication. Reported speech is an essential grammatical phenomenon that enables individuals to convey what others have said without directly quoting their words. This is especially relevant in academic contexts where it is necessary to summarize, paraphrase, or cite others' ideas without introducing plagiarism. Understanding reported speech is crucial for first-year students who aim to improve their writing and speaking skills.

The choice of reported speech as the focus of this study is grounded in its fundamental role in both the teaching of English as a foreign language and in learners' academic development. As a first-year language student and a current teaching practitioner, I have consistently observed that many Uzbek-speaking students struggle with correctly transforming direct speech into reported speech, often due to a lack of clear understanding about tense shifts and pronoun changes. These difficulties are particularly evident in speaking activities and written assignments where students attempt to retell conversations or cite information from reading materials.

This issue is not only grammatical but also deeply connected to academic integrity and discourse skills. In my teaching practice, especially during writing lessons, I have noticed that students tend to overuse direct





quotations or avoid integrating others' ideas altogether, likely due to their discomfort with transforming speech into indirect forms. This aligns with the findings of Ghanbari and Bani (2016), who emphasize that the mastery of reported speech allows learners to restate information with greater fluency, reducing overreliance on verbatim quotes and supporting more coherent academic writing.

Moreover, the Uzbek language does not employ the same obligatory back shifting of tenses found in English. In Uzbek, indirect speech often preserves the original verb form, relying instead on context or discourse markers (Mustafiqizi, 2022). This structural contrast can cause learners to transfer their L1 logic into English, resulting in errors such as, "He said he is tired" instead of the grammatically appropriate "He said he was tired".

Table 1. Key Features of Reported Speech (Mustafiqizi, 2022)

Aspect	Description	Example
Definition	Reported speech is used to express what someone else has said without quoting their exact words.	Direct Speech: "I am learning English," he said.
Tense Changes	In reported speech, the tense often shifts back (present becomes past, etc.) to maintain logical sequence.	Direct Speech: "I will help you tomorrow."
Pronoun Changes	Pronouns change according to the perspective of the speaker.	Direct Speech: "I am going to the market," he said.
Reporting Verbs	Verbs like 'said,' 'told,' 'asked,' and 'suggested' are used to introduce reported speech.	She said, "I need help." → She said she needed help.
Time Expressions	Time expressions are adjusted when converting from direct to reported speech.	Direct Speech: "I saw her yesterday."

Learning about reported speech also improves comprehension and interpretation skills, as it requires students to fully understand the content before converting it into indirect speech. This aligns with the pedagogical goal of enhancing critical thinking and writing proficiency. Richards (2013) supports the idea that learning reported speech deepens one's understanding of English syntax and helps in achieving a more natural, coherent style in writing.





Thus, reported speech was chosen as a topic due to its importance in both academic and everyday communication. Mastery of this grammatical structure will enable students to express ideas from external sources effectively and accurately, which is vital for academic success and professional development.

Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Accurately Reporting What Others Said

Acquiring reported speech presents several notable difficulties for EFL/ESL learners, particularly for speakers of Uzbek and Russian. These challenges stem from differences in syntactic structures, limited exposure, and overgeneralization of grammatical rules. Based on classroom observation first-year university students, one of the most frequent problems lies in applying tense back shifting rules accurately. For example, many learners tend to say "She said she is tired" instead of the grammatically correct "She said she was tired." This issue is often rooted in the discrepancy between the learner's L1 and the rules of English reported speech, especially since Uzbek lacks a parallel back shifting system (Xudoyberganova, 2017).

Another recurrent difficulty involves selecting appropriate reporting verbs. Learners tend to overuse the verb "say" regardless of context, failing to distinguish between verbs like "ask," "suggest," or "claim," which require different grammatical constructions (e.g., using infinitives, gerunds, or subjunctive moods). This limits the depth and precision of learners' expression and shows a gap in lexical diversity. Research by Rimmer (2006) confirms that overgeneralization and limited verb awareness are key stumbling blocks for learners attempting to master indirect speech structures.

Moreover, learners often struggle with adjusting pronouns and time expressions correctly, particularly in longer texts. In my classroom experience, students often produced inaccurate conversions such as "He said I would come tomorrow" instead of "He said he would come the next day." These errors point to a need for more focused instruction on the pragmatic function of time shifts, which is not always emphasized in standard textbooks (Murphy, 2019).

From a psycholinguistic perspective, learners may find reported speech cognitively demanding due to the simultaneous mental tracking of speaker intent, listener perspective, and temporal shifts. This cognitive load is intensified when speaking spontaneously or under time pressure. According to Sagarra and Herschensohn (2011), L2 learners often rely more heavily on lexical cues than grammatical forms when processing meaning, which may explain why learners neglect subtle grammatical shifts in reported structures.

Practical exercises

The effective use of reported speech is a critical skill for students learning English, particularly when it comes to conveying information, summarizing conversations, or relaying others' ideas without directly quoting





their words. In this section, practical exercises are introduced to help learners gain hands-on experience with reported speech and develop their understanding of its application in both spoken and written contexts. These exercises are designed to address common challenges that students face when acquiring reported speech, such as tense shifts, pronoun changes, and the transformation of direct speech into indirect speech.

Exercise 1: Reporting Conversations in Context

Objective: To practice transforming direct speech into reported speech, focusing on tense shifts, pronoun changes, and reporting verbs.

Activity:

1. The teacher presents a short conversation between two people, using direct speech (e.g., “I can't believe it's already 10 PM,” she said. “I still have so much work to do,” he replied.).

2. Students work in pairs or small groups to rewrite the conversation in reported speech. They must adjust tenses, pronouns, and time expressions accordingly.

3. After completing the task, students compare their answers with the class, discussing differences in their transformations.

Justification:

This activity addresses one of the key challenges learners face when acquiring reported speech: managing tense shifts and pronoun adjustments. It emphasizes the practical application of the rule in a context where learners can see how direct speech is transformed in natural conversations. According to Azimi (2020), providing learners with a meaningful context helps them engage with grammar rules in a more dynamic way, increasing retention and understanding.

Exercise 2: Time Expression Transformation Drill

Objective: To practice adjusting time expressions when changing direct speech into reported speech.

Activity:

1. The teacher provides a list of direct speech sentences that include specific time expressions (e.g., “I will call you tomorrow.” “She left yesterday.”).

2. Students are tasked with converting these sentences into reported speech, ensuring they modify the time expressions correctly (e.g., “She said she would call me the next day.” “He said she had left the day before.”).

3. The class then discusses the reasoning behind each transformation, focusing on how the time expressions change to align with the perspective of the speaker.

Justification:

This exercise targets a common problem for learners: correctly adjusting time expressions when reporting speech. As noted by Ghanbari and Bani (2016), understanding the role of time in reported speech is essential for





effective communication. This task helps learners recognize the subtle shifts in time reference that occur when reporting past actions or events. By working with a variety of examples, students gain a more nuanced understanding of how time expressions function within reported speech, enhancing both their grammatical accuracy and their ability to convey meaning in different contexts.

Conclusion

The topic of reported speech is crucial for both written and spoken communication in English, particularly for EFL/ESL learners. Mastering this grammatical phenomenon allows L2 learners to effectively convey what others have said, ensuring clarity and accuracy in both casual conversations and formal academic contexts. The ability to use reported speech correctly enhances EFL/ESL learners' fluency, helps them avoid plagiarism, and adds to the credibility of their writing.

Throughout this article, it was explored the fundamental rules of reported speech, highlighting the key elements such as tense changes, pronoun shifts, and the use of reporting verbs. It was also considered common challenges L2 learners face, such as difficulties in adjusting time expressions, managing tense shifts, and over-relying on direct translations from their native languages.

The exercises presented, such as the conversation transformation and time expression drills, are designed to provide L2 learners with practical opportunities to engage with reported speech. These activities promote active learning, encourage critical thinking, and offer ample chances for students to practice and internalize the structure in meaningful contexts. By considering the unique challenges of EFL/ESL learners and applying evidence-based teaching methods, educators can significantly improve Uzbek students' mastery of reported speech and help them communicate more effectively in English.

Reported speech is not only a grammatical tool but also a bridge that connects the speaker to the broader world of discourse, allowing them to relay information in a coherent and contextually appropriate way.

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