

Lecture 2: Direct and indirect speech

Direct and indirect speech can be a source of confusion for English learners. Let's first define the terms, and then look at how to talk about what someone said, and how to convert speech from direct to indirect or vice-versa.

You can answer the question what did he say? In two ways:

- by repeating the words spoken (direct speech)
- By reporting the words spoken (indirect or reported speech).

DIRECT SPEECH

Direct speech repeats, or quotes, the exact words spoken. When we use direct speech in writing, we place the words spoken between quotation marks (" ") and there is no change in these words. We may be reporting something that's being said NOW (for example a telephone conversation), or telling someone later about a previous conversation.

EXAMPLES

She says, "What time will you be home?"

She said, "What time will you be home?" and I said, "I don't know! »

INDIRECT SPEECH

Reported or indirect speech is usually used to talk about the past, so we normally change the tense of the words spoken. We use reporting verbs like 'say', 'tell', 'ask', and we may use the word 'that' to introduce the reported words. Inverted commas are not used.

Eg: She said, "I saw him." (Direct speech) = She said that she had seen him. (Indirect speech)

If the reporting speech is in present tense or future tense, then no change is required to be made in the verb of reported speech. This verb could be in any tense i.e., present, past, or future. For example:

Direct Speech: He says, "I am ill."

Indirect Speech: He says that he is ill.

Direct Speech: She says, "She sang a song."

Indirect Speech: She says that she sang a song.

Direct Speech: You say, "I shall visit London."

Indirect Speech: You say that you will visit London.

If the reporting verb is in past tense, then reported verb will be changed as per the following criterion:

- Present indefinite tense is changed into past indefinite tense. For example:

Direct Speech: They said, “They take exercise every day.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they took exercise every day.

- Present continuous is changed into past continuous tense.

Direct Speech: They said, “They are taking exercise every day.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they were taking exercise every day.

- Present perfect is changed into the past perfect tense.

Direct Speech: They said, “They have taken exercise.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they had taken exercise.

- Present perfect continuous tense is changed into past perfect continuous tense.

Direct Speech: They said, “They have been taking exercise since morning.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they had been taking exercise since morning.

- Past indefinite is changed into past perfect tense.

Direct Speech: They said, “They took exercise.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they had taken exercise.

*Past continuous tense is changed into past perfect continuous tense.

Direct Speech: They said, “They were taking exercise.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they had been taking exercise.

*No changes are required to be made into past perfect and past perfect continuous tenses.

Direct Speech: They said, “They had taken exercise.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they had taken exercise.

*In Future Tense, while no changes are made except shall and will are changed into would.

Direct Speech: They said, “They will take exercise.”

Indirect Speech: They said that they would take exercise.