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Modes of Wording Direct into Indirect Speech in Intercultural Communication

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Abstract. This paper aims to determine the modes of wording indirect reporting of authentic direct utterances by Russian learners of English. We claim that since the process of transferring someone else's speech involves implication and inferences of the speaker and the hearer correspondingly, when conveying the meaning of the speaker's authentic message in the form of indirect speech the personal context of the utterance plays a vital role. The experiment to check the hypothesis that direct speech requires not only grammatical and lexical transformations but also a complex pragmatic enrichment was organized. The reporting verbs used by the participants of the experiment to convey the speaker's intention and the presentation of the speaker's identity were analyzed. The study proved that when conveying the speaker's authentic speech meaning in the form of indirect speech the listeners need to shift from the reporting speaker's perspective to the reported speaker's perspective to comply with an actual communicative meaning of the utterance. Thus, a foreign language context of communication imposes additional linguistic, extra linguistic, and pragmatic difficulties on the process of English language learners' interpreting of the utterance which is cognitively demanding and needs to be persistently developed.

Keywords: Direct speech · Reported speech · Cognitive processes · Person identification · Reporting verbs

1 Introduction

1.1 A Theoretical Underpinning of the Reported Speech Research

In teaching English as a foreign language, it is important to take into consideration the difference between the communicants belonging to different cultural backgrounds as well as the discursive factors in order to achieve adequacy in communication [1–11]. All the authors pay special attention to the pragmatic factors which are to be developed when teaching a foreign language as a means of intercultural communication and interaction.

Learners should be able to use different modes of wording the indirect reports which have to comply with the language norms and pragmatic factors of the referential communicative situation. The spotlight of this study is determining the modes of wording indirect reporting by Russian learners of English of authentic direct utterances delivered by American native speakers. Reported speech has been a topic of interest for many researchers of linguistics, sociology, philosophy and pragmatics in past years. There has been a growing interest in indirect reporting in bilingual education [12–15]. A lot of publications deal with the issue of indirect speech acts with English as a medium of communication [16–19], while other studies examine indirect reporting using a foreign language [20, 21]. Some research of indirect reports focuses on the contrasting effects of direct and indirect speech on language comprehension [22–24].

It has been established that while direct speech, as a rule, conveys the expression of another person, preserving the lexical composition, grammatical structure and stylistic features, indirect speech usually reproduces only the content of the statement, changing its structure under the influence of the author's position. Therefore, in addition to the fact that the process of transferring someone else's speech is based on the generality of the language and the rules for its use, they highlight the implicit information that the speaker puts in the message, and the listener's inferences which are based on what the listener extracts.

When conveying the meaning of the speaker's authentic speech in the form of indirect speech, the personal context of the utterance, which is encoded in lexical units and framed in the utterance, assumes great importance and is pronounced by the communicant in the actual situational context. The result of this process is a statement having an actual communicative meaning. The act of indirect speech has a number of characteristics:

- ability to influence judgments and actions of communicants;
- cooperative speech activity of two communicants – a speaker and a listener - that affects the linguistic choice reflected in the transformations of the original utterance;
- representativeness.

While direct speech, as a rule, conveys one person's utterance and communicative intent, preserving the lexical composition, grammatical structure, and stylistic features of the addressee's speech, indirect speech usually reproduces the content of the utterance, changing its structure under the influence of the personal context of the addressee. By the personal context we mean the communicant's ability to adequately perceive and interpret a foreign language utterance in accordance with the level of his/her foreign language competence and cognitive abilities. In this case, the implicit information that the addressee puts, and the inferences – the information that the addressee retrieves and transmits – become instrumental in indirect communication.

The speaker, creating an utterance, exercises control over what he/she says and how he/she shapes his thoughts. The listener interprets the speaker's message, and this interpretation may not coincide with the content implicit in the given utterance by the speaker, which will affect the content of the statement when it is communicated to a third party. The foreign language context of communication imposes additional

linguistic, extra linguistic and pragmatic difficulties on the process of interpreting the utterance. The study of the process of conveying foreign speech, in particular indirect speech-making, aims at studying a wide range of phenomena related both to their grammatical nature [25] and to the pragmatic load [26].

Based on the above-mentioned considerations, the hypothesis of this research was the assumption that the process of conversion of foreign direct speech and the implicit nucleus embedded in the utterance is a complex cognitive task, especially in the situation of intercultural communication, since it depends on the receiver's inference and his/her ability to process input information in accordance with the situational context and realities of the communicative situation. The task of this study is to determine by what language means the semantic core of the original foreign language utterance is conveyed by a foreign language learner and what reasons may lie behind failures in intercultural communication.

1.2 Cognitive and Linguistic Factors in Conversion of Direct Speech into Indirect Speech

As we know, perception and comprehension in the conditions of intercultural communication take place as a result of the functioning of the perceptual mechanism which processes the input information at a multi-level cognitive activity [5]. Due to various contextual factors, the recipient of the discourse needs additional knowledge about the specific communicative situation in which the entire complex of incoming information is encoded implicitly [27–29].

A core part of the reporting clause is a reporting verb (RV). Reporting verbs are the most important features of a reporting clause and occur in most reporting sentences [30, p. 2]. As far as English grammar is concerned, a reporting verb is used to indicate that discourse is being quoted or paraphrased. It is also called a communication verb.

We agree with Thomas and Hawes [31] and Hyland [32] who identify types of content based on the choice of verbs of communication which are used to convey the speaker's intention. There are three basic types of utterances distinguished according to discourse functions: (1) *statements*, (2) *questions (general and special)*, (3) *requests and commands*.

Thompson and Ye (1991) argue that reporting verbs permit a hearer to express his/her own judgment of what is being reported [33]. From this point of view, the speaker who conveys someone else's utterance reveals some attitude or value to what is reported, being tentative (without being absolutely certain, e.g., *imply*, *propose*, *recommend*, *suggest*). There can be also distinguished a group of verbs called the verbs of speech, which describe a speaker's intention through the way of saying: *say*, *ask*, *answer*, *suggest*. Table 1 represents the list of the most common reporting verbs (RV) assorted into groups.

Bell [34, p. 206] asserts that '*to say*' is the most frequent reporting verb. Thompson [35, p. 34] calls this verb "a neutral reporting verb" that can be used when reporting any type of language event, no matter if it is oral speech or writing.

Table 1. The list of reporting verbs used in indirect speech.

Communicative types of utterances	Most frequently used and registered variation of reporting verbs in naturally occurring reported speech
Statements	<p>say, tell</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – verbs that behave like <i>say</i> verbs that do not require an indirect object; e.g. admit, announce, comment, complain, confess, explain, indicate, mention, point out, remark, reply, report, shout, state, swear, whisper; – verbs that behave like <i>tell</i> (i.e. verbs that do require an indirect object; e.g. assure, convince, inform, notify, persuade, remind), – other reporting verbs for which no ‘say vs. tell behavior’ distinction is offered (e.g. advise, answer, demand, insist, promise, propose, recommend, require, suggest, want to know, order, request) <p>believe, reply, respond, admit, explain, emphasize</p>
Questions	ask, inquire, wonder, want to know
Requests/commands	ask, beg, order, tell

A reporting verb can show the speaker’s purpose (e.g. *admit, explain, emphasize*) or manner of speaking (e.g. *whisper, scream, mutter*) [35, p. 71–77]. A reporter can also display a neutral, positive or negative personal attitude toward the reported message, which is achieved by using reporting verbs that have positive or negative connotations.

Another canonical component of indirect speech is the person distinction. Pragmatic factors such as the communicative situation influence the processing of speech reports. In direct speech pronouns have to be evaluated with respect to the reported speaker’s perspective and in indirect speech – with respect to the reporting speaker’s perspective. Pronouns such as *I, you* and *she/he* are context-dependent. This means that listeners need to have knowledge of the speech context – in particular the distribution of speech-act roles – in order to determine their meaning. The actual speaker constitutes first-person *I* and second-person *you* refer to the primary participant of an interaction; speaker and addressee. Third-person *he* and *she* refer to a male or female person other than speaker and addressee [36]. Since both speaker and addressee are aware of their communicative roles, the referents of the first-person and second-person pronouns are automatically salient in the discourse [37]. In Kaplan’s [38] framework, for example, first- and second-person pronouns are identified as pure indexicals, directly getting their reference from the context parameters. Presentation of the identity of the reporting speaker involves the presentation of the agent by such linguistic means as names. The studies on comprehension proved that gender-marking is a very salient feature. Arnold et al. [39] results indicate that in English gender easily marked pronouns can be interpreted even at an early age. While pronouns in indirect speech have to be interpreted with respect to the actual speech context, pronouns in direct speech are anchored in the reported speech context. This means that listeners need to shift from the reporting speaker’s perspective to the reported speaker’s perspective. This perspective shift could be cognitively demanding for learners of English.

2 Methodology

2.1 Subjects

38 subjects who represented Russian learners of English were engaged in the experiment, including male and female learners aged from 18 to 26 (Table 2). The focus group included first and second year non-linguistic students from Tomsk State University, majoring in Science; and students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, majoring in Linguistics and Translation. The average level of language proficiency in non-linguistic students was intermediate while the average level of language competency in linguistic students was pre-advanced.

Table 2. Participants.

Number	Mean age	Gender (f/m)
38	20 (from 18 to 26)	28/10

2.2 Research Procedure

This paper aims to investigate the ways Russian learners of English convey speech utterances presented by American English native speakers to third parties in written form.

The study was carried out in the framework of the socio-cognitive approach proposed and developed by Kecskes [40–42] and Kecskes and Zhang [43, 44]. We assume that when conveying speech utterances of English native speakers, Russian learners of English rely on the semantic content of utterances rather than the pragmatically enhanced message. We also seek to explore if Russian learners of English are influenced by their socio-cultural background when conveying speech utterances.

The reporting material included 12 utterances of three communicative types (requests/commands statements, questions):

Request/Command

- (1) John: Don't open the window, please. It is chilly here.
- (2) Mary: Don't even think about lying to me.
- (3) John: You should meet with the professor on Friday.
- (4) Mary: They must be more careful with what music they select.

Statements

- (1) John: I think I will need your help in an important matter.
- (2) Mary: I am tired of answering your silly questions.
- (3) John: I do not want to tell you what I think about Tom.
- (4) Mary: Mary knows what Jim is hiding from us.

Questions

- (1) John: I wonder why you look so happy.
- (2) Mary: Do you know when the accident happened?
- (3) John: Where do you think Jill has put the book?
- (4) Mary: How much money can I spend on the trip?

The video was recorded so that each utterance was repeated twice with 10-s breaks between the stimuli. The subjects were instructed to watch and listen carefully to the speakers, John and Mary by names, and report in writing what they understood. The way the subjects would shape their reports was the most important issue for the analysis.

One of the interesting reporting devices to analyze is the reporting verbs which have the main function of reporting other people's utterances of 3 types: statement, question, and command/request. Another instrument of reporting speech analysis is the use of pronouns and proper names when transforming the speaker's utterance into indirect speech. We used discourse and error analyses in our study. The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. Which reporting verbs are used in the reported speech by Russian learners of English?
2. What linguistic means are used by Russian learners of English when referring to the reporting speaker?

2.3 Data Collection

The data set comprises indirect reports produced by Russian EFL learners. We assume that in reporting in a foreign language what others say in their own language the listener involves cognitive processes of perception and interpretation of the original utterance based on his or her prior linguistic and communication experience as well as socio-cultural background.

More specifically our interest concerns the reporting verbs which constitute an important factor in the speaker's intention presentation. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of reporting verbs (RV) used by the subjects in their reports. The minimum is represented by a pair 2–3 commonly used RV (*say, tell, ask*), the other groups constitute a combination of these with other RVs represented in a separate column.

Table 3. Reporting verbs used in the reports.

Number of RVs	Number of subjects Linguists/Non-linguists	RV and frequency of use (%)
2–3	4/1	say, tell, ask (65.8%)
4–5	7/1	advise, affirm, allow, beg, claim, confirm, declare, insist,
6–7	5/11	mention, prevent, prohibit, refuse, suggest, suppose, think,
8–9	1/5	threaten, utter, want, warn, wonder (34.2%)
10–11	1/1	

As Table 3 shows, this study revealed that most participants used common verbs such as *say, tell, and ask*, representing the speaker's action, as well as other reporting verbs comprising a large number including 18 various units. The use of three verbs,

say, tell, ask reaches 65.8% which complies with the rule of using reporting verbs in the indirect speech.

Another focus is on how person distinction is done in the reported speech in connection with the reporting speaker and the speaker’s gender. In Table 4 one can find the distribution of errors made by the subjects belonging to different categories.

Table 4. Distribution of errors in the speaker’s identity representation.

Speaker’s name	Number of errors	Male/female	L/NL
John	6	2/13	11/4
	5	2/2	4/0
	4	0/3	0/3
	3	1/4	2/3
	2	1/4	1/4
	1	0/1	0/1
	0	4/1	1/4
Mary	6	3/13	12/4
	5	1/2	1/2
	4	0/5	3/2
	3	2/5	2/5
	2	0/2	0/2
	1	1/0	1/0
	0	2/1	0/3

The maximum number of errors in each block of utterances (by *John* and *Mary*) is equal to 6 according to the number of utterances and the minimum number (0) corresponds to the absence of mistakes in the reports. By an error we mean substitution of the proper name of the speaker by personal pronouns *he* or *she*. We also distinguished errors made by female and male participants as well as by learners belonging to either the linguistic (L) or non-linguistic (NL) language group.

2.4 Data Interpretation and Discussion

Based on the data of Table 3, we can say that Russian learners of English as a foreign language used 21 various reporting verbs when conveying the speakers’ intention in the indirect speech. This variety testifies to the work of cognitive processes in the learners in the search for adequate language facilities for conveying the implicit nucleus of utterance.

The data of discourse analysis showed that the subjects had chosen various ways of conveying the speakers’ intention [45]. In Table 5, we provide some samples of interpretation of the original utterances belonging to three types of communicative acts:

Table 5. Samples of reported utterances.

Original utterance	Communicative type	Reported utterances
– I wonder why you look so happy	Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – He said that he looked so happy – He wondered why I was so happy – He wonders why you look so happy – He told that he wants to know why he looks so happy – John wondered why I was looking so happy – John asked me why I looked so happy
– Don't open the window, please. It is chilly here	Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – He asked me not to open the window – He asks not to open the window because it's chilly – He didn't allow me to open the window because it was chilly – John prohibited me to open the window as it was chilly – John begs me not to open the window – He claims, it's chilly in the room and prevents me from opening the window – He told me not to open the window because it's chilly
– How much money can I spend on the trip?	Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – She wanted to know how much she could spend on her trip – She wondered what amount of money she could spend on the trip – She asked me how much money the trip cost – Mary thinks how much money she can spend on her trip – Mary asks how much money she can spend on the trip

These examples indicate that the participants tried to convey the original utterances by using not only commonly used RVs, but also by preserving some lexical items in their indirect reports, e.g. *so happy*, *open the window*, *it is chilly*, *how much*, *spend on the trip*. The variety of verbs used indicates the difference in the subjects' perception of the original message and the ability to represent the implicit core of the speaker's speech.

It should be noted that in the interpretation of the same utterances by native speakers who were engaged in the experiment as experts the same commonly used RVs were found. This fact demonstrates that Russian learners of English use a wide variety of RVs in order to convey the implicit core of the referential utterance.

A closer look at the participants' errors in indirect speech focusing on the person's identity reveals that the masculine pronoun '*he*' was used instead of '*John*' in the

majority of cases and the feminine pronoun ‘*she*’ was used for the substitution of ‘*Mary*’. We analyzed participants’ production of speech reports and found out that both male and female participants in linguistic and non-linguistic subgroups made mistakes in interpretation of the speakers’ identities in comparison with native speakers (experts) who preferred labeling the speakers’ identities by their names (*John* and *Mary*). We assume that this situation can be explained by the socio-cultural background of the Russian learners. As we know, American and Russian cultures belong to different types. In American culture, individualism and personal value are typical while in Russian culture collective relationships are more valuable. This complies with the assumption of Larina that ‘the value of privacy in American culture and the lack of it in Russian explain a lot of characteristics peculiar to both politeness systems, as well as to their communicative styles’ [46, p. 3]. However, it is important to mention that none of the participants made errors in identification of a male or a female speaker.

The mistakes made by the subjects in the reports were also subjected to statistical analysis.

Table 6 shows the values of the pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})(Y_i - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})^2 \sum_{j=1}^n (Y_j - \bar{Y})^2}}, \tag{1}$$

where n is the number of observations for each variable, \bar{X} , \bar{Y} – sample mean values for the variables x and y , respectively. We should note that there is a strong direct linear relationship between errors when dealing with John and Mary – those who transferred John’s name from original utterance to reported also successfully coped with the presentation of Mary’s identity, and vice versa. Moreover, for linguists this dependence is the strongest.

Table 6. The values of the Pearson correlation coefficients of student errors in the presentation of the speaker’s identity.

	Non-Linguists		Linguists	
	Errors (John)	Errors (Mary)	Errors (John)	Errors (Mary)
Error (John)	1		1	
Error (Mary)	0.948066	1	0.87675	1

3 Conclusion

The analysis of the empirical results obtained during the study suggests that indirect speech is not only a syntactically organized form of the transmission of someone else’s speech, which requires certain transformations when conveying an utterance from direct speech to indirect speech, but also a complex pragmatic expression showing how

the reporter interpreted the original message, i.e. of the speaker, rendering its content (statement, question, request/command) as well as the speaker's assertion in a particular context. The experiment confirmed our hypothesis that the implicit core of the direct utterance is represented in two crucial elements: reporting verbs used to convey the speaker's intention and the language means applied to represent the speaker's identity. At the same time, the original authentic utterance undergoes specific transformations in connection with the socio-cultural background, language norms and cognitive mechanism functioning in representatives of various cultures involved in intercultural communication. When teaching English as a foreign language to Russian learners it is important to take into consideration the difference between the communicants belonging to different cultural backgrounds in order to achieve adequacy in indirect reporting. The learners should be able to use different modes of wording the indirect reports which have to comply with the language norms and pragmatic factors of the referential communicative situation.

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