SPEAKING:OPEN-BASED DISCUSSION GRAMMAR:REPORTED SPEECH

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning a foreign language because it enables learners to communicate their thoughts, express opinions, exchange information, and participate in meaningful conversations. Opinion-based discussions play an important role in developing students' speaking abilities, critical thinking, and confidence. At the same time, grammar provides the foundation for accurate and effective communication. One particularly important grammatical topic is reported speech, which allows speakers to report information, statements, questions, and requests made by other people.

This article explores the relationship between opinion-based discussions and reported speech in English language learning. It examines effective speaking strategies, common grammatical structures, practical classroom activities, and methods that help students develop both fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, it demonstrates how reported speech can be integrated into communicative speaking activities to create more interactive and meaningful language-learning experiences.

Keywords: speaking skills, opinion-based discussion, reported speech, communication, grammar, critical thinking, fluency, accuracy, language learning.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is not simply about memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules. It is primarily about using language to communicate effectively in different situations. Among the four main language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is often considered one of the most challenging skill for language learners.Speaking allows people to express their feelings, share personal experiences, explain their ideas, and communicate with others. In academic environments, students are frequently expected to participate in discussions, defend their opinions, ask questions, and respond to different viewpoints. Therefore, developing speaking skills is an essential part of university education.

One effective way to improve speaking abilities is through opinion-based discussions. These discussions encourage students to think independently, express personal beliefs, provide explanations, and respect different perspectives. Instead of giving short and memorized answers, learners are encouraged to produce meaningful statements and support their arguments with examples.For example, a teacher may ask students:

1.Is social media beneficial or harmful to society?

2.Should university education be free?

3.Is technology making people less social?

4.Can money buy happines?

5. Is learning a foreign language necessary in the modern world?

There are no single correct answers to these questions. Students must use their knowledge, personal experiences, and logical reasoning to explain their positions.

However, successful communication requires not only fluency but also grammatical accuracy. This is where reported speech becomes particularly useful. In everyday communication, people frequently talk about what others have said, asked, promised, or explained. Reported speech helps speakers communicate such information without repeating the original words.The main purpose of this article is to explore how opinion-based discussions and reported speech can be combined to improve English language proficiency among university students.

The Importance of Opinion-Based Discussions in Speaking

Opinion-based discussion is a communicative activity in which participants express their personal views about a particular subject and respond to the opinions of others.Unlike ordinary question-and-answer exercises, opinion-based discussions require students to develop arguments and explain why they agree or disagree with a particular statement.This approach provides several educational benefits.

Developing Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze information, evaluate different ideas, identify problems, and make reasonable conclusions.During discussions, students do not simply repeat information from textbooks. They consider different perspectives and make their own judgments.For instance, when discussing the statement “Artificial intelligence makes education better”, students may identify both sides.

One student might argue that artificial intelligence saves time and provides personalized learning opportunities. Another might explain that excessive dependence on technology can reduce independent thinking.As a result, students learn to analyze issues from different perspectives.

Improving Communication Skill

Opinion-based discussions teach learners how to communicate naturally and confidently.

Students practise:

1.Expressing their opinions.

2. Agreeing and disagreeing politely.

3. Asking follow-up questions.

4. Giving examples.

5. Explaining reasons.

6. Responding to opposing arguments.

These abilities are particularly important for students who intend to study or work in international environments.

Building Confidence

Many English learners understand grammar and vocabulary but hesitate when they need to speak. They may be afraid of making mistakes or receiving criticism.Discussion activities create opportunities to practise speaking in a supportive environment. When students regularly share their opinions, they gradually become more confident.Teachers should encourage communication rather than interrupting students after every grammatical mistake. Corrections can be provided after the discussion.

Expanding Vocabulary

Every discussion introduces learners to new words, expressions, and useful phrases.For example, when discussing environmental problems, students may use expressions such as: environmental protection,climate change,renewable energy,air pollution,natural resources. Using vocabulary in meaningful contexts makes it easier to remember and apply.

Useful Language for Opinion-Based Discussions

To participate successfully in discussions, students need a variety of expressions.These expressions help organize ideas, communicate opinions, and maintain a natural conversation.

Expressing Opinions

The following phrases are commonly used:

In my opinion, education should be accessible to everyone.

I believe that reading improves our knowledge.

From my point of view, technology is very useful. Personally, I think travelling is educational.As far as I am concerned, health is more important than wealth.

I would argue that students need more practical lessons.

Agreeing with Others

When students share similar opinions, they can use:

I completely agree with you.

That is absolutely true.

I share the same opinion.

You have made a good point.

I couldn’t agree more.

That is exactly what I think.

Disagreeing Politely

Disagreement is a natural part of academic discussions. However, it should be expressed respectfully.

Useful expressions include:

I see your point, but I disagree.

I understand what you mean. However…

I am afraid I have a different opinion.

I respect your opinion, but I believe…

That may be true, but we should also consider…

Giving Reasons and Examples

To make an argument convincing, students should support their opinions with explanations.

Useful expressions:

The main reason is that…

For example…

For instance…

This is because…

Another important point is…

As a result…

Therefore…

Example:“I believe that learning English is important because it creates better educational and career opportunities. For example, students who speak English can apply for international scholarships and communicate with people from different countries.This example demonstrates how an opinion can be supported by a reason and a practical example.

Grammar Focus: Reported Speech

Reported speech, also known as indirect speech, is an important grammatical structure in English. It is used when we report what another person has said without repeating their exact words.In everyday life, people frequently share information from conversations, interviews, news reports, meetings, and personal experiences. Therefore, reported speech is an essential part of effective communication.There are two main forms of reporting speech:

Direct Speech: We repeat the speaker’s exact words.Example:Sarah said, “I am tired.”

Reported Speech: We report the speaker’s message without using the exact original words.Example:Sarah said that she was tired.The quotation marks are removed, and certain grammatical changes may take place.

Changes in Tenses

When the reporting verb is in the past tense, the tense of the original statement usually moves one step back into the past. This process is called backshift.

The following table illustrates the most common changes:

Direct Speech Reported Speech

Present Simple Past Simple

Present Continuous Past Continuous

Present Perfect Past Perfect

Past Simple Past Perfect

Present Perfect Continuous Past Perfect Continuous

Past Continuous Past Perfect Continuous

Will Would

Can Could

May Might

Must Had to (when expressing obligation)

Examples:Direct: He said, “I study English.”

Reported: He said that he studied English.

Direct: She said, “I am watching television.”

Reported: She said that she was watching television.

Direct: Tom said, “I have finished my homework.”

Reported: Tom said that he had finished his homework.

Direct: They said, “We will visit London.”

Reported: They said that they would visit London.

Direct: Mary said, “I can speak German.”

Reported: Mary said that she could speak German.

It is important to remember that backshift is not always necessary. If the information is still true or the speaker is reporting a general fact, the original tense may remain unchanged.Example:Direct: The teacher said, “The Earth revolves around the Sun.”Reported: The teacher said that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

Scientific facts and general truths normally remain in the present tense.

Changes in Pronouns

Pronouns change according to the person who is reporting the statement and the context.Examples:Direct: Anna said, “I love my family.”Reported: Anna said that she loved her family.Direct: Peter said to me, “You are very helpful.”Reported: Peter told me

that I was very helpful.The pronoun changes because the point of view changes from the original speaker to the reporter.

Changes in Time and Place Expressions

When reporting speech, certain time and place expressions may also change.

Direct Speech Reported Speech

Now Then ,Today That day,Yesterday The day before,Tomorrow The next day,Last week The week before,Next week The following week,Here There,This That,These Those,Ago Before.Examples:Direct: She said, “I will call you tomorrow.”Reported: She said that she would call me the next day.Direct: He said, “I saw her yesterday.”Reported: He said that he had seen her the day before.

These changes help maintain the correct meaning and perspective of the reported statement.

Types of Reported Speech

Reported speech is not limited to ordinary statements. It can also be used to report questions, commands, requests, and suggestions.

Reported Statements

Statements are usually introduced by the reporting verbs “say” and “tell”.

Structure:

Subject + said (that) + clause.

Subject + told + object + (that) + clause.

Examples:Direct: He said, “I am busy.”

Reported: He said that he was busy.

Direct: My mother said to me, “You should study harder.”

Reported: My mother told me that I should study harder.

Remember the difference:Say something.Tell someone something.

Incorrect: He told that he was tired.

Correct: He said that he was tired.

Correct: He told me that he was tired.

Reported Questions

Reported questions are used when we communicate questions asked by another person.There are two main types.

A. Yes/No Questions

Questions that can be answered with yes or no are introduced by “if” or “whether”.

Structure:

Subject + asked + if/whether + subject + verb.

Examples:

Direct: She asked, “Are you happy?”

Reported: She asked if I was happy.

Direct: He asked, “Do you like coffee?”

Reported: He asked whether I liked coffee.

B. Wh-Questions

Questions beginning with what, where, when, why, who, or how retain their question words.Structure:

Subject + asked + question word + subject + verb.

Examples:Direct: He asked, “Where do you live?”

Reported: He asked where I lived.

Direct: She asked, “Why are you crying?”

Reported: She asked why I was crying.

An important rule is that reported questions use statement word order rather than question word order.

Incorrect: He asked where did I live.

Correct: He asked where I lived.

Reported Commands and Requests

Commands and requests are commonly reported using “tell”, “ask”, or other appropriate reporting verbs.Structure:

Subject + told/asked + object + to + infinitive.

Examples:Direct: The teacher said, “Open your books.”

Reported: The teacher told the students to open their books.

Direct: She said, “Please help me.”

Reported: She asked me to help her.

For negative commands, we use “not to”.

Direct: My father said, “Don’t be late.”

Reported: My father told me not to be late.

Reporting Suggestions and Advice

We can also report suggestions and advice by using verbs such as “suggest”, “advise”, and “recommend”.Examples:Direct: He said, “You should exercise regularly.”

Reported: He advised me to exercise regularly.

Direct: She said, “Let’s go to the cinema.”

Reported: She suggested going to the cinema.

These structures are useful in everyday conversations and academic discussions.

The Connection Between Opinion-Based Discussions and Reported Speech

Opinion-based discussions and reported speech may appear to be separate language topics. However, they can be effectively combined in communicative activities.During discussions, students express their own opinions and listen to the opinions of others. After listening, they can report what their classmates have said.

For example, imagine a classroom discussion about the question:

“Is social media more beneficial than harmful?”

Student A:

“I believe social media helps people communicate with friends and family.”

Student B:

“I think social media can negatively affect students’ concentration.”

Student C:

“In my opinion, social media is useful if people use it responsibly.”

After the discussion, another student summarizes the opinions using reported speech:

Student A said that social media helped people communicate with friends and family.

Student B argued that social media could negatively affect students’ concentration.

Student C believed that social media was useful if people used it responsibly.

This activity develops several abilities simultaneously:

Listening carefully to other speakers.

Understanding and remembering information.

Identifying the main ideas.

Applying reported speech structures.

Presenting information clearly.

Therefore, integrating speaking and grammar creates a more natural language-learning environment.

Practical Classroom Activities

Teachers can use different interactive activities to help students practise opinion-based discussions and reported speech.

Activity 1: Agree or Disagree

The teacher writes several statements on the board. Students choose whether they agree or disagree and explain their opinions.Suggested statements:

University students should work while studying.

Social media wastes people’s time.

Travelling is the best way to learn about other cultures.

Online education is better than traditional education.

Money is more important than happiness.

Students must provide at least two reasons for their opinions.

Learning outcome: Students improve their fluency, argumentation, and ability to express personal viewpoints.

Activity 2: Interview Your Partner

Students work in pairs. One student asks questions, and the other answers them.

Suggested questions:

What is your biggest dream?

What makes a person successful?

Do you prefer studying alone or in groups?

What would you change about the education system?

What is the most important quality of a good friend?

After the interview, students report their partners’ answers to the class.

Example:

“My partner said that her biggest dream was to study abroad. She explained that she wanted to experience a different culture and improve her language skills.”

Learning outcome: Students practise both question formation and reported speech.

Activity 3: News Reporter

Students imagine that they are journalists interviewing famous people, teachers, or classmates.

One student acts as an interviewer, while another answers the questions.

After the interview, the journalist presents a short news report using reported speech.Example:Interviewer: “What is your opinion about modern technology?”

Student: “I think modern technology makes our lives easier.”News report:

“The student explained that modern technology made people’s lives easier.”

Learning outcome: Students develop speaking confidence and learn how to transform direct statements into reported speech.

Activity 4: Classroom Debate

The class is divided into two groups.

Topic: “Is technology making people smarter or more dependent?”

Group A supports the statement that technology makes people smarter.

Group B argues that technology makes people more dependent.

Each group prepares arguments and presents them.

At the end, students summarize the opposing group’s main arguments using reported speech.Example:“The first group argued that technology provided quick access to information. However, the second group claimed that people were becoming too dependent on digital devices.”

Learning outcome: Students develop critical thinking, teamwork, persuasive speaking, and grammatical accuracy.

Common Mistakes in Reported Speech and How to Avoid Them

English learners often make mistakes when changing direct speech into reported speech.Understanding these mistakes helps students improve their grammatical accuracy.

Incorrect sentence Correct sentence

She said that she is tired. She said that she was tired.

He asked where did I live. He asked where I lived.

She told that she was happy. She said that she was happy.

He asked me to don’t go. He asked me not to go.

They said they will come. They said they would come.

The first sentence may also be correct if the situation is still true and the speaker chooses not to backshift.To avoid common errors, students should remember the following rules:Pay attention to the reporting verb.

The Role of Teachers in Developing Speaking and Grammar Skills

Teachers play an important role in creating an effective language-learning environment.A successful speaking lesson should provide students with opportunities to communicate rather than simply memorize grammatical rules.

First, teachers should select interesting and relevant discussion topics. Topics connected with students' daily lives, education, technology, relationships, and future careers are particularly effective.

Second, teachers should create a friendly classroom atmosphere where students are not afraid of making mistakes.

Third, grammar should be taught in context. Instead of explaining reported speech only through tables and rules, teachers should introduce it through interviews, discussions, storytelling, and real-life communication.

Finally, teachers should provide constructive feedback. They should identify common errors and explain how students can improve without discouraging their willingness to speak.An effective English lesson combines theoretical knowledge with practical communication.

Conclusion

Speaking and grammar are closely connected components of successful foreign language learning. Opinion-based discussions provide students with opportunities to express their thoughts, exchange ideas, develop critical thinking, and communicate confidently. They also encourage learners to become more independent and active participants in the learning process.Reported speech, in turn, is an essential grammatical structure that enables speakers to communicate information shared by other people. It is widely used in everyday conversations, academic discussions, interviews, news reports, and storytelling.Combining opinion-based discussions with reported speech creates

meaningful opportunities for students to practise both fluency and grammatical accuracy. Activities such as interviews, debates, classroom discussions, and news reporting allow learners to apply grammatical knowledge in realistic communication.In conclusion, the purpose of learning English should not be limited to knowing grammatical rules or memorizing vocabulary. The real goal is to use the language effectively, express ideas clearly, understand different perspectives, and communicate with confidence. By combining communicative speaking activities with practical grammar instruction, teachers can help students become more competent, independent, and successful English speakers.

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