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SENTENCES WITH INDIRECT REPORTED QUESTIONS IN STORY RETELLING IN ENGLISH

The article presents the results of a study that examined how Serbian undergraduate students of English reported questions in English in a story retelling task. Story retelling is a part of the first-year course *Contemporary English Language 1* at the Department of English at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš. It is used as a method of practising listening comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and basic writing skills. Namely, the role of the EFL instructor is to read an English story of between 245 and 280 words to students twice, and students are required to memorise and retell the story in written form in accordance with grammatical rules and in a way that preserves textual cohesion and coherence. Students are explicitly instructed to use indirect reported speech in their stories since they are required to retell the stories from memory and referring to the notes they are allowed to take while the instructor is reading the story. The story includes three questions: a polite *yes-no* question, a rhetorical *wh*-question and an information-seeking *wh*-question. The corpus includes sentences with indirect questions from sixty-six retold stories and the analysis of the results demonstrates that the students reported the polite *yes-no* question and the information-seeking *wh*-question more successfully than the rhetorical *wh*-question.

Keywords: question, indirect reported question, story retelling, EFL

1. Introduction

Güldemann and von Roncador (2002: viii) refer to reported discourse as 'speaking about speaking' or 'text within text'. The authors explain that, since texts have their particular deictic and interactional settings as well as different communicative

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perspectives, texts have to be modified when we integrate them in the domain of reported discourse. In addition, speakers/writers who use reported speech, or 'reporters', can reproduce original text and manipulate reported text in accordance with their own specific purposes. In relation to this, the basic traditional distinction between direct and indirect speech is based on the relation between original and reported text.

As far as structural linguistics is concerned, Clift and Holt (2006: 3) state that 'a major focus has been the distinction between so-called direct reported speech (DRS) and so-called indirect reported speech (IRS)'. Huddleston (2002a: 1023) mentions that some authors omit the word 'reported' and use the terms 'direct speech' and 'indirect speech', whereas some other authors use the term 'reported speech' to denote the indirect type of reported speech. As explained by Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 1021), direct and indirect speech are two primary modes of reporting. Direct speech is the speech that gives the exact words that someone utters in speech or writing, and, on the other hand, indirect speech 'conveys in the words of a subsequent reporter what has been said or written by the original speaker or writer'.

Moreover, Clift and Holt (2006: 4) note that, in linguistic literature, another type of reported speech is mentioned, 'free indirect' or 'quasi-direct' speech, a mixture of direct and indirect reported speech. In their discussion of direct and indirect speech, Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 1021, 1032–1033) also refer to two secondary modes of reported speech, free indirect and free direct speech. In these types of reported speech, there is no reporting clause. Similarly, Huddleston (2002a: 1029) explains that the reporting frame can be implicit, and, when this is the case, we have free direct or indirect speech. This case is usually identified in certain types of written or oral narrative.

In English, reporting discourse has traditionally been viewed with regard to the division between direct and indirect styles (SAKITA 2002: 173). In the EFL context, the bipartite classification between direct and indirect reported speech can be a good starting point for practicing reporting the speaker's original words. Specifically, EFL students can start from reporting someone else's statements, orders, and questions as utterances out of context (see, for example, MURPHY 2019: 94–101; SWAN and WALTER 2011: 281–292; VINCE 2008: 62–69). After they master the strategies of reporting single utterances, they can practise reporting texts. This article describes how Serbian first-year students of English reported questions in a story retelling task. Story retelling is a part of two first-year courses, *Contemporary English Language 1* and *Contemporary English 2*, at the Department of English at the Faculty of Philosophy, Niš. The aim of practising story retelling is to practise using grammar and vocabulary in context and to develop listening comprehension and basic writing skills. The research is based on sixty-six students' retold stories from the 2024 January examination.

2. Theoretical background

As already mentioned, reported speech can be viewed through the division between direct and indirect speech². Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 1022) explain that, in direct speech, the reporting clause can come before, in-between or after the direct speech, which is marked with quotation marks. Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 1024) also refer to

² In this paper, we use the terms *direct speech* and *direct reported speech* as well as *indirect speech* and *indirect reported speech*.

the partial quotations as the most integrated direct speech, or cases where direct speech is a part of a clause and the reporting clause is implicit. Similarly, Huddleston (2002a: 1029) notes that implicit reporting frames can be identified in free indirect or direct speech. These are the frames that can be recovered from the previous text. Normally, implicit reporting frames are restricted to specific types of written or oral narrative.

2.1. Direct and indirect reported speech

The main difference between direct speech and indirect speech is in the use of deictic expressions, such as personal pronouns, demonstratives, tenses and adverbs of time. These are interpreted with regard to the circumstances of the utterance-act, i.e. the participants, place and time. In direct speech, deictic expressions are related to the original utterance, and in indirect speech, deictic expressions are related to the act of reporting (HUDDLESTON 2002a: 1023). The choice of the tense in the reported clause depends on the time reference of the reporting verb (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1026–1028). Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 1026) explain that, when the time reference of the reported utterance does not coincide with the time when the utterance is reported, the verb forms in indirect reported speech are changed. The authors refer to this change as *backshift in indirect speech* and the relationship between the verb forms in the reporting and reported clauses is known as the *sequence of tenses* (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1026).

Huddleston (2002a: 1023) uses four terms: the *original speaker*, *reporter*, *reporting frame* and *reported speech*. The term *original speaker* denotes the person who produced or thought the text which is reported, and the term *reporter* is used for the person who reports. The term *reporting frame* is used for the reporting clause, and the term *reported speech* refers to the reported clause. Also, Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 1020) explain that we can report other people's words in several ways. The most explicit ways of reporting other people's words are introduced by a reporting clause which refers to the following: the speaker and the act of speaking or writing (*X said; X wrote*), and perhaps to the addressee as well (*X told him*), to the manner of speaking (*X said silently*), or to the circumstances of the speech act (*X replied; X agreed; X said while writing an email*) (BIBER, JOHANSSON et al. 2021: 198; QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1020–1021). As far as the circumstances of the speech act are concerned, the examples show that they can be conveyed by means of an appropriate speech act verb and by means of an additional non-finite or finite clause. Biber, Johansson et al. (2021: 198) note that reporting verbs can be verbs of saying or verbs which denote the form or function of the speech act.

2.2. Questions

The terms *interrogative* and *question* are closely connected, but they are defined with respect to two different classifications. The term *interrogative* is defined with reference to the four-member classification of sentence types into declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives and exclamatives. Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 803) define *interrogatives* as sentences that can formally be marked in two ways: 1) as *yes-no* interrogatives, with the operator positioned in front of the subject, and 2) as *wh*-interrogatives, with the *wh*-element in the initial position. In relation to this definition, three major types of questions

can be distinguished (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 806): 1) *yes-no* questions, 2) *wh*-questions and 3) *alternative questions*. The first group includes questions that expect the affirmative or negative response. This type can be subdivided into the following eight types: positive *yes-no* questions; negative *yes-no* questions; tag questions; tag questions where both the statement and question are positive; tag questions with imperatives and exclamatives; invariant tag questions; declarative questions and *yes-no* questions with modal auxiliaries (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 806–816). The second group includes questions followed by a reply from a set of possible replies. It includes four subtypes: positive *wh*-questions, negative *wh*-questions, questions with the pushdown *wh*-element and questions with more than one *wh*-element (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 806, 819–823). The third group, *alternative questions*, comprises questions which are followed by the reply which is one of the options given in the question. This group has two subtypes, the first resembling a *yes-no* question, and the second a *wh*-question (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 806, 823–824). Lastly, two minor types are mentioned: exclamatory and rhetorical questions (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 806, 825–826).

The term *question* is defined with reference to the four-member classification of discourse functions into statements, questions, directives and exclamations (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 803–804)³. We primarily use questions to ask for information (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 804). However, the relation between, on the one hand, the syntactic type, i.e. interrogatives, and, on the other hand, the discourse function, i.e. questions, is not straightforward. This means that asking questions by means of the morphosyntactic markings of interrogativity is not the only way to ask questions – we can also use declaratives to ask questions. Moreover, although a central function of questions is to ask for information, other actions can be performed by means of questions (STIVERS 2002: 5). We can use an interrogative as an exclamation, or we can ask a rhetorical question, an interrogative which is not a request for information (STIVERS 2022: 5; QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 804). Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 825) define a rhetorical question as an interrogative that has the force of a strong assertion, and a question that does not generally expect a reply. Rhetorical questions can perform different functions: 1) a positive rhetorical *yes-no* question is a strong negative assertion; 2) a negative rhetorical *yes-no* question is a strong positive assertion; 3) a positive *wh*-question can be a statement in which the *wh*-element corresponds to a negative element; 4) rhetorical questions can be replies to previous questions (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 825–826). Celle's (2018) analysis of rhetorical questions demonstrates that unresolvable questions and rhetorical questions can express mirativity.

2.3. Interrogatives and reported questions

According to Huddleston (2002b: 972), the most important structural difference between subordinate and main clause interrogatives is that there is no subject-auxiliary inversion in subordinate interrogatives. Taking into account this difference, the two-

³ Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 804) refer to the four semantic types of discourse functions as discourse functions on the most general level. However, we can identify more specific pragmatic categories which show how sentences are used in utterances. Similarly, König and Siemund (2007: 277, 316) relate sentence types to different types of speech acts (see also AUSTIN 1962 and SEARLE 1976).

member classification into *wh*-interrogatives and *yes-no* interrogatives (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 303) can be used to make another major classification into subordinate *wh*-clauses and subordinate *yes-no* interrogative clauses in direct and indirect reported speech. As regards subordinate *wh*-interrogatives, they occur in the functions that are available to the nominal *that*-clause, and they can also function as prepositional complement (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1050). The indirect *wh*-question is the ‘type of subordinate *wh*-interrogative clause that most closely resembles *wh*-questions’ (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1051). As for subordinate interrogative clauses, they are introduced by the subordinator *whether* or *if*. Together with subordinate alternative interrogative clauses, these clauses occur in the functions that are available to subordinate *wh*-interrogative clauses, and they can also include infinitive clauses (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1053).

2.4. Indirect reported questions in EFL

In EFL teaching and learning, two best-practice pedagogical guidelines can be identified in addressing the topic of indirect reported questions: 1) before learning the strategies for reporting questions, students should firstly adopt the strategies for reporting statements, and 2) students should firstly adopt the strategies for reporting sentences outside of texts.

The first guideline can be useful because the topic of indirect reported questions can be viewed as more complex than the topic of reporting statements. Therefore, the skill of using indirect reported questions is built on the skill of using indirect reported statements. Murphy (2019: 94–101), Swan and Walter (2011: 281–292) and Vince (2008: 62–69) propose these guidelines for instructors when teaching indirect speech: firstly, explain the rules regarding indirect statements in reported speech and then do the same for indirect questions. As for the topic of indirect questions, Murphy (2019: 98–99) firstly explains the formation of *yes-no* and *wh*-questions, and then explains the word order in questions which are integrated into a longer sentence as well as the changes in word order in indirect reported questions. Swan and Walter (2011: 287–288) also touch upon the issue of speech act verbs by explaining the use of infinitives with the reporting verbs *promise*, *agree*, *tell*, *offer*, *advise*, and *ask*. Vince (2008: 66) notes that some reporting verbs can be used to avoid repeating the speaker’s original words.

The second guideline can be useful because reporting sentences outside of texts can help students concentrate on the relation between the reporting verb and the reported clause, the appropriate use of deixis, personal pronouns, demonstratives and sequence of tenses. After learning how to relate the reporting verb with the reported clause, students can observe complex and compound sentences as well as sentences in texts. This means that, at that stage, students can understand both the formal and functional aspects of indirect questions and the relation between reported questions, discourse functions as well as speech acts that show how utterances are used in reported texts.

Since in reported speech it is possible to summarize the original words in more than one way (VINCE 2008: 66), it means that, as noticed by Bin and Xiaoli (2021: 12), indirect speech often conveys ‘the reader’s understanding of the original discourse event’, for better or for worse. As far as EFL is concerned, this means that it is highly important to appropriately unite the English foreign language grammar of reported

speech with the awareness of the English foreign language pragmatics of reported speech. In relation to this, Charkova and Halliday (2011: 2) write that some studies on the issue of pragmatic and grammatical acquisitions support the hypothesis that second language environments develop the awareness of pragmatic appropriateness, and, on the other hand, foreign language environments develop the awareness of grammatical accuracy. Also, they conducted their own research on the influence of second and foreign language environments on the use of the tense backshifting in English indirect reported speech. The authors found out that, in the second language environment, advanced second language learners who have an appropriate level of metalinguistic competence can integrate native speakers' pragmatic norms. On the other hand, foreign language learners rely on the sequence of tenses in both immediate and delayed reported speech (CHARKOVA and HALLIDAY 2011: 24). This research suggests that a higher level of immersion in the target language affects the way grammar and pragmatics are integrated.

3. Empirical study

The empirical part of this paper investigates how 66 native speakers of Serbian, first-year students at the Department of English of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, reported questions in a story retelling task. As already mentioned, the analysis is based on sixty-six students' retold stories from the 2024 January examination. The EFL instructor read an English story of 245 words to the students twice, and the students were required to retell the story in written form in accordance with grammatical rules and in a way that maintains cohesion and coherence. In the following sections, we first define the objective of the study and then, in the subsequent sections, we describe story retelling, the corpus, methodology, and, finally, we present and analyse the research results.

3.1. The objective

The study aims at investigating the ways in which three questions that appear in a story read to students are reported in student-produced retold stories. Considering that these students are on the intermediate to upper-intermediate level of proficiency, the majority of them are expected to accomplish the task successfully, yet, certain types of errors are expected. The results offer insight into the areas of reported speech-related grammar that require follow-up instruction and remedial exercises.

3.2. Story retelling

Story retelling is a consolidation activity done several times in the Use of English 1 and Use of English 2 courses, which are part of two larger courses, Contemporary English Language 1 (CEL1) and Contemporary English Language 2 (CEL2), taught to first-year students at the Department of English of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš. Apart from Use of English 1 and Use of English 2, CEL1 and CEL2 also encompass a Grammar and a Lecture course. As far as the written portions of the final CEL1 and CEL2 exams are concerned, story retelling is one of five tests. It serves as preparation for other types of writing, more precisely, for paragraph writing in the third semester of studies and for essay writing from the fourth semester onwards.

A story retelling activity has two components: listening comprehension and retelling the story. The listening comprehension component is straightforward – the

teacher/examiner reads the story twice and the students try to remember the major events in the story. While listening, they are allowed to take notes to a reasonable extent, bearing in mind that they are not taking a dictation. Then, they are given thirty minutes to retell the story in their own words, using a variety of vocabulary items and grammatical structures.

Stories for in-class story retelling practice during the CEL1/CEL2 course as well as stories for story retelling as part of the final exam are chosen specifically with the aim of revising, expanding and, finally, testing not only the vocabulary but also the grammar covered in all courses comprising CEL1/CEL2. The specific demands of successful story retelling in CEL1/CEL2 include story comprehension, accurately addressing the temporal relationships of the events from the original story using reported speech, achieving cohesion, coherence, and, finally, reaching the expected level of vocabulary and grammar both in terms of variety and accuracy⁴.

3.3. Corpus analysis

In the original story⁵ the students were asked to retell, there are three questions, therefore, the corpus consists of three subcorpora. Although the projected number of student-produced sentences with indirect reported questions was 66 per subcorpus, one corpus consists of 40 sentences (see subsection 3.3.3.3) as 26 students failed to produce a reported sentence for the second question in the story. In percentage terms, this is 13.13% of the corpus, or 39.39% of the subcorpus Q2. It was expected that Q2 could be the most difficult and confusing question for reporting since Q2 could be interpreted both as a rhetorical question and as an information-seeking question. In the next section, each question is given in italics and specified in more detail.

3.3.1. Questions from the original story

The three direct questions from the original story, whose reported versions comprise the corpus in this study, are described in detail in the sections below.

3.3.1.1. Question 1 (Q1)

The first question consists of an interrogative, independent clause, and a dependent *that*-clause introduced by the subordinating conjunction *so*.

“The genie said, ‘... You’ll only get one wish!’ The man thought about it for a while and said, ‘I’ve always wanted to go to Hawaii but I’m scared to fly and I get very seasick. *Could you build me a bridge to Hawaii so that I can drive over there to visit?*’”

As the focus of our study is the construction of indirect questions in student-retold stories, we limited our investigation only to the first, independent clause in the question, because it has interrogative syntax and its form in indirect speech has all the hallmarks that we wanted to investigate in the corpus: word order change, pronoun change, and tense backshift, while the dependent clause in indirect speech does not require any word order changes. Therefore, our Question1 (Q1) in the corpus is the *yes-no* question *Could you build me a bridge to Hawaii?*

⁴ For more details on story retelling, see Mihajlović, Dix Stojanović et al. (2011: 9–22).

⁵ The story, entitled *The Genie*, is a version of a joke that can be found on many Internet sites (for example, *Unijokes* and *Smart Jokes*). The story was adapted to fit the CEL1 course objectives.

Also, we consider Q1 a polite request for three reasons: 1) the context in which it appears suggests that, 2) the use of the auxiliary *could* implies that it is a polite directive or request (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 233; HUDDLESTON 2002c: 200; HUDDLESTON 2002b: 940; CARTER and McCARTHY 2006: 640, 646, 697) and 3) because ‘one way to make a directive softer or more polite is to use an interrogative structure’ (CARTER and McCARTHY 2006: 687).

3.3.1.2. Question 2 (Q2)

The second question (Q2) in the story has only one subject-verb relationship: *How would the supports ever reach the bottom of the Pacific?* It belongs to this part of the story:

“The genie laughed and said, ‘That’s impossible! Think of the logistics of that! *How would the supports ever reach the bottom of the Pacific?* Think of how much concrete and steel I would need! You’ll have to think of another wish.’”

Question 2 can be treated as a rhetorical question for three reasons: the context, the use of the modal verb *would*, and of the adverb *ever*, which all point to a question that does not require an answer because the speaker knows the answer and believes that the addressee knows the answer, too (CELLE 2018: 23)⁶.

With regard to the context where Q2 is used, it is safe to say that there is no presupposition in Q2. A presupposition is a statement which can be matched with many *wh*-questions or, more precisely, it is ‘a statement which, in place of the *wh*-element, contains an indefinite expression such as somebody’ (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 820). Huddleston (2002b: 900) refers to the lack of presupposition in some *wh*-questions as ‘presupposition cancellation: the question is used without the presupposition that characteristically accompanies a question.’ One of the illustrative examples he uses is the question ‘Who cares?’, which ‘is a conventional way of indirectly asserting “Nobody cares”’ (HUDDLESTON 2002b: 900) instead of ‘Somebody cares’, which would be a presupposition. The context suggests that in Q2 the genie was probably entertained and surprised by the absurdity of the man’s wish. By naming the unreasonable length of the supports required, he asserted that it would be impossible for the supports to reach the bottom of the ocean. Thus Q2 is the genie’s compelling argument against the man’s unfulfillable request.

The genie wondered at the impossibility of the supports reaching the bottom of the ocean using the modal auxiliary *would* in his direct question as a grammatical marker of hypothetical meaning (LEECH 2004: 122–123, QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 234). Thus, he indicated that his utterance referred to an unreal future event, where the condition (if I tried to build such a bridge) was implied (LEECH 2004: 124; QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 234).

Furthermore, the genie used *ever* as an intensifier (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 451) or emotive modifier (HUDDLESTON 2002b: 916) to reinforce his stand against building a bridge. One of Huddleston’s (2002b: 901) examples that is analogous to Q2 is ‘When will you ever learn not to trust them?’ In this question, there is no presupposition on the part of the speaker that the addressee will learn not to trust them but quite the

⁶ It might even be labelled as a surprise-induced rhetorical question (CELLE 2018).

opposite: the speaker believes that the addressee will never learn to trust them. Similarly, Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985: 601) remark that, in rhetorical questions, the adverb *ever* often replaces *never* as a minimizer.

3.3.1.3. Question 3 (Q3)

Question 3 is a *wh*- information-seeking question, which concludes the story:
 “The genie paused for a while and asked, ‘*How many lanes do you want on that bridge?*’”

3.3.2. Methodology

The corpus analysis was done as follows: firstly, the students’ stories were marked, and their sentences with indirect questions were colour-coded. Secondly, the student-produced sentences with indirect questions were classified into three categories: Student-produced sentence with indirect question 1 (SQ1), Student-produced sentence with indirect question 2 (SQ2), and Student-produced sentence with indirect question 3 (SQ3). Then, SQ1-3 were further classified into three subcategories: acceptable, unacceptable and omitted sentences. Finally, the acceptable and unacceptable categories were analysed in terms of the types of correct grammatical solutions employed as well as the types of errors committed. In the corpus analysis, a number of student-produced sentences is given to exemplify different acceptable and unacceptable ways of reporting the original questions. The parts of the sentences that are not included in the analysis are omitted and marked with ellipsis points.

As the focus of reported speech in general is the message or content of someone’s utterance, which is usually not expressed verbatim, in addition to the sentences that follow Q1-Q3 word for word to the maximum degree allowed by the grammar rules, we welcomed those that conveyed the meaning of the original question using more creative, elegant ways. More specifically, when it comes to reporting questions Q1 and Q2, a more advanced, sophisticated approach would be to take into consideration their semantics/pragmatics and report them not by following the reported speech-related rules for information-seeking questions verbatim but to convey the meaning of the original questions through appropriately chosen devices such as particular reporting verbs/phrases or, in the case of Q2, even retaining the question in its original form, as free direct speech (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1032–3). Bearing in mind that, in their previous schooling, first-year students practised indirect reported speech mostly in individual sentences and rarely in larger contexts, we focused not only on the most elegant solutions in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, but also on other acceptable, albeit more verbose or lacking in important detail, less precise and less sophisticated, ways of reporting Q1 and Q2 – applying the rules governing reporting information-seeking questions. Regarding reporting these two questions, it should be noted that, despite the fact that there is a time-reference change, when Q1 and Q2 are reported, the modal auxiliaries *could* (in Q1) and *would* (in Q2) are not backshifted (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1031). Finally, since Q3 is the only typical, information-seeking *wh*-question, a textbook, or more or less word-for-word, reporting was expected.

To sum up, we deemed acceptable the student-produced sentences with indirect questions that demonstrated a high/reasonable degree of comprehension of the (direct)

question in the original story and that fulfilled the following grammatical criteria: the appropriate word order in the reported question and the use of appropriate deictic features (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1025–1026). In our corpus, the latter include only the tenses of the reporting verb and the verb in the original (direct) question, and the correct personal pronouns. We also accepted sentences with minor shortcomings such as the omission of some details and minor cohesion errors, which still convey the meaning of the original question to a sufficient degree. We did not consider errors in any part of speech that is not (directly) governed by the grammatical rules related to indirect speech (spelling, punctuation, articles, prepositions, and some word choice (not directly governed by the above-mentioned grammar rules)).

The errors students made in each sentence with an indirect question were classified into four major categories regulated by the grammar rules that govern reported speech: verb forms, word order, personal pronouns, and other types of errors. Generally speaking, verb form errors are primarily due to the lack of the sequence of tenses (temporal deixis) but also other incorrect grammar, word order errors are caused by keeping the subject-auxiliary inversion in a reported question, and pronoun errors are committed when person deixis is disregarded. Other types of errors include lack of coherence, lack of comprehension, awkward expressions or the omission of important information/details.

3.3.3. Results

3.3.3.1. The entire corpus

As mentioned, the corpus in its entirety consists of expected 198 student-produced sentences with indirect questions, i.e. 66 sentences per each subcorpus. However, 26 students failed to report Q2. Out of all student-produced sentences, 123 are acceptable and 49 are unacceptable (Table 1).

Table 1. *Numbers and percentages of acceptable and unacceptable sentences in the corpus*

	acceptable	unacceptable	omitted	total
number of sentences	123	49	26	198
percentage	62.12	24.75	13.13	100

The data obtained in this study show that 26 students (13.13%) failed to report Q2. In comparison to the expected corpus, the majority (62.12%) of the SQs were acceptable, and 24.75% were unacceptable. In the acceptable portion of the corpus, the SQs ranged from those in which the original question is reported verbatim, to those in which precedence is (correctly) given to the meaning of the original question, i.e. its semantics/pragmatics, rather than its syntax. As expected, throughout the corpus, there are no errors in person deixis. However, there are many instances of verb form errors, mostly due to the lack of backshift or overgeneralization, i.e. using backshift where it does not apply, e.g. with *would* and *could* (QUIRK, GREENBAUM et al. 1985: 1031). Furthermore, contrary to expectation, many SQs contained word order errors.

In the following sections, each of the three student-produced sentences with indirect questions is analysed, as described in detail in section 3.3.2.

3.3.3.2. Student-produced sentences with indirect question 1 (SQ1)

The first question students reported (Q1) is the *yes-no* question *Could you build me a bridge to Hawaii?* Table 2 shows that students produced 61 acceptable sentences with indirect questions and five that did not meet the criteria outlined in section 3.3.2.

Table 2. Numbers and percentages of acceptable and unacceptable SQ1s

	acceptable	unacceptable	omitted	total
number of SQ1s	60	6	0	66
percentage	90.91	9.09	0	100

The acceptable sentences are analysed in terms of the sentence patterns the students used, whereas the unacceptable ones are classified into categories according to the error(s) they contain.

3.3.3.2.1. Acceptable sentences

As expected, students used a variety of ways to report Q1, but primarily more or less verbatim ones. Thirty students reported this question as a polite one, using either the verb *ask* in the reporting clause and (*could*) *build/make* in the reported clause (1) and (2), or a one-clause sentence (3).

- (1) The man/He *asked* the genie *to build/make* (him) a bridge to Hawaii.
- (2) The man/He *asked if* the genie *could build* (him) a bridge to Hawaii.
- (3) The man/He *asked* the genie *for* a bridge to Hawaii.

Five students used a more emphatic reporting verb such as *tell* and *order* (4).

- (4) The man/He *told/ordered* the genie/him to build a bridge to Hawaii.

In the remaining twenty-five SQ1s, other ways of (fully or partly) conveying the meaning of the original question are used. The most frequently occurring patterns are with *wish*, as either the reporting verb (5) or the head noun in the subject noun phrase (6) and (7), and the verbs *want* (8), *say* (9), *specify* (10) and *declare* (11):

- (5) He *wished for* (*the genie to build*) a bridge to Hawaii/the islands.
- (6) *His wish was for the genie to build/make* (him) a bridge to Hawaii.
- (7) *His wish was a bridge* to Hawaii.
- (8) He *wanted* (*to be able to drive and visit Hawaii through [sic]*) a bridge.
- (9) He *said he wanted/wished* a bridge (*to drive over*) to Hawaii.
- (10) The man also *specified that it had to be* a bridge.
- (11) The man *thought for a while before declaring that the genie build* him a bridge to Hawaii.

3.3.3.2.2. Unacceptable sentences

The classification of errors used in this analysis is explained in section 3.3.2.

Table 3 presents the total number of errors made in SQ1s as well as the number of errors per category.

Table 3. Numbers and percentages of errors per category in the SQ1 subcorpus

	verb forms			word order	personal pronouns	other types of errors	total
	reporting verb	the verb in the reported question	total verbs forms				
number of errors	3	3	6	0	0	0	6
percentage	50	50	100	0	0	0	100

Six SQ1s contain errors, with a single verb form error in each SQ1. It is important to note that declarative word order (subject-(auxiliary)-main verb) in the reported clause is avoided in all six SQ1s because other ways of reporting the original question are utilized (*to wish for, to demand/request/propose*).

(12) He *had wished/d wish* for a bridge (over the Pacific Ocean).

(13) He demanded/requested the genie *to build* a bridge to Hawaii.

(14) The man proposed the genie *makes* a bridge for him to drive over there.

Wrong tenses of the verb are used in (12). Incorrect sentences (13) and (14) contain a mistake in the form of the verb in the dependent clause because the choice of *demand/propose* as the reporting verb requires the use of either the subjunctive or the modal verb *should* before the verb in the reported question.

There are no errors in word order and the use of personal pronouns. Also, none of the incorrect sentences contain errors which we labelled as 'other types of errors', which include lack of coherence, lack of comprehension, awkward expressions or the omission of important information/details.

3.3.3.3. Student-produced sentences with indirect question 2 (SQ2)

The *wh*-question *How would the supports ever reach the bottom of the Pacific?* is the second question (Q2) students reported in their retold stories. Twenty-five students provided acceptable sentences, fifteen student sentences are considered unacceptable, and twenty-six students omitted this sentence in their retold stories (Table 4).

Table 4. Numbers and percentages of acceptable and unacceptable SQ2s

	acceptable	unacceptable	omitted	total
number of sentences	25	15	26	66
percentage	37.88	22.73	39.39	100

3.3.3.3.1. Acceptable sentences

The majority of the students who reported Q2 in sentences deemed acceptable,

i.e. 17 of them, used a reporting clause with the verb *say* followed by a variety of *that*-clauses with a modalized verb phrase (15) and (16) or the verb *tell*, in active or passive voice, followed by either the direct object *the man/him* and a *that*-clause (17) and (18) or a *to*-infinitive (19) and (20).

(15) He *said that the supports couldn't go down to/ there was no way that the supports could ever reach* the bottom of the Pacific ocean [sic].

(16) The genie *said that it was impossible to do that, because he would need very long supports to reach* the bottom of the Pacific.

(17) He *told the man that the beams had to reach* the bottom of the ocean.

(18) He was then *told by the genie that ... the supports couldn't reach the bottom* of the Pacific.

(19) The genie *told him to change the wish because the supports [sic] to the bottom of the Pacific would be to [sic] long*.

(20) The genie ... *told him to imagine just how difficult it would be for the supports of the bridge to reach* the bottom of the Pacific.

Three students used a reporting verb other than *say* or *tell* followed either by a *that*-clause or a direct object + *to*-infinitive. The verbs *claimed* and *mentioned* followed by a *that*-clause were used as reporting verbs by two students and one student, respectively (21) and (22):

(21) The genie *claimed that the supports of the bridge couldn't possibly reach / that was impossible due to how much concrete and steel he would need to build the supports that would touch* the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

(22) The genie also *mentioned that supports would have to be built to the bottom* of the Pacific ocean [sic].

One student used the verb *urge* followed by the direct object and *to*-infinitive (23), whereas three students reported Q2 without a reporting clause, illustrated in (24) and (25).

(23) He *urged the man to consider how much material would be needed to make the supports* for that bridge.

(24) *The supports could never reach* the bottom of the Pacific.

(25) *The supports wouldn't reach the bottom* of the Pacific.

Finally, only one student used a direct reported question, thus fully preserving the original, rhetorical, meaning of the question:

(26) *How would the supports reach the bottom of the Pacific?*

On the whole, the analysis shows that Q2 can be regarded as a thought-provoking question in terms of its grammar and pragmatics.

3.3.3.3.2. Unacceptable sentences

Fifteen SQ2s are deemed unacceptable due to one or more errors. The number of errors students made across the categories analysed is given in Table 5.

Table 5. Numbers and percentages of errors per category in the SQ2 subcorpus

	verb forms			word order	personal pronouns	other types of errors	total
	reporting verb	the verb in the reported question	total verbs forms				
number of errors	2	4	6	5	0	6	17
percentage	11.76	23.53	35.29	29.41	0	35.29	100

Firstly, there are four SQ2s containing a total of six verb form errors: two in the reporting clause (27) and (28) and four (27-30) in the reported clause.

(27) Genie [sic] *had refused* that wish because ... the supports *wouldn't have been able* to reach the bottom of the Pacific.

(28) The genie *toled* him ... there *is* no way that the supports would reach the bottom of the ocean.

(29) The genie ... said ... there *is* no way the supports could reach the bottom of Pacific [sic].

(30) He said that there *is* no supports that could reach the bottom of the ocean.

As can be seen from the examples, both verb forms in sentences (27) and (28) are incorrect. As for (27), it is clear from the context of this particular retold story that the genie's refusal of the wish follows the previous events chronologically and, therefore, the reporting verb should be in the past simple and not in the past perfect tense. In the verb form in the reported clause, the backshift is incorrect because modal verbs such as *would*, *could*, *might* are not backshifted in reported speech. It may be concluded that the student committed an overgeneralization error as he/she used backshift where this rule does not apply. In (28), there is a spelling error in the past simple tense of the reporting verb (*toled* instead of *told*), which we deem a verb form error and not a spelling one since the verb in question is one of the most frequently used irregular verbs in English and students at this level of proficiency are expected to know its forms. In addition to that error, (28) also contains an incorrect verb form in the reported clause; namely, the tense of the verb *to be* is not backshifted, which is an error committed in (29) and (30) as well. However, along with the lack of backshift, there is one more reason why the verb in the reported clause in (30) is incorrect; namely, it lacks subject-verb agreement.

Secondly, five cases of the wrong word order are found in SQ2s. Subject-auxiliary inversion is erroneously retained in all five SQ2s:

(31) The genie/He asked how *would/could the supports reach/get* to the bottom (of the Pacific/ocean).

Thirdly, other types of errors committed in the remaining six SQ2s include lack of coherence or comprehension or awkward language (32-36) and omission of important information/details (37):

- (32) The genie immediately responded that ... *the logistics of supports at the bottom of the Pacific ... would be very hard to come by.*
- (33) Genie [sic] said that ... *the reach couldn't be supported in any way.*
- (34) The genie said ... *he couldn't get enough concrete and steel for the bridge, as well as the pillars not being able to reach the bottom of the Pacific.*
- (35) The genie asked him if he knew how long *were the supports needed to be to reach the bottom of the Pacific.*
- (36) The genie refused as he *would need a lot of concrete in addition to supports of the bridge would never reached the bottom.*
- (37) The genie explained *that is a hard thing to do.*

Besides the lack of coherence in the reported clause, sentence (36) has a basic error in the verb phrase containing a modal verb (*would never reached*). We classified this error as belonging to the 'other error types' category rather than the verb forms one because this incorrect verb form is only a part of a more substantial coherence and awkward language error.

3.3.3.4. Student-produced sentences with indirect question 3 (SQ3)

The third direct question in the original story (Q3) is an ordinary *wh*-question: *How many lanes do you want on that bridge?* As with SQ1 and SQ2, in the case of SQ3, the number of acceptable student-produced sentences is higher than the number of unacceptable sentences. Moreover, no students omitted this sentence from their stories (Table 6).

Table 6. Numbers and percentages of acceptable and unacceptable SQ3s

	acceptable	unacceptable	omitted	total
number of sentences	38	28	0	66
percentage	57.58	42.42	0	100

3.3.3.4.1. Acceptable sentences

The sentence pattern with *ask* in the reporting clause, as the only verb in most cases, usually followed by the direct object (*the man/him*), is the most common in the SQ3 part of the corpus, considering the fact that 32 students used it (38). The reported clause begins with the *wh*-phrase *how many lanes* and, in the majority of cases, the verb phrase in the reported clause is *wanted*, whereas *would like/wished for/wished to have* appear only four times.

- (38) The genie *asked/replied by asking/responded by asking* (the man/him) *how many lanes he wanted/would like/wished for/wished to have* (on the/that/his bridge).

Two SQ3s have the past simple of the verbs *tell* and *ask* in the reporting clause, followed by the direct object (*the man*) and a *to*-infinitive before the reported clause (39) and (40).

- (39) ... the genie *told the man to decide how many lanes he would like* on that

bridge to Hawaii.

(40) Genie [sic] ... *asked the man to give him more details about the bridge.*

Each of the following sentence patterns was used only once.

(41) The genie ... *realized that the* [sic] *building a bridge was a better idea* in the end.

(42) The genie *thought it over himself before agreeing to make a bridge* to Hawaii

(43) The genie... *changed the decision... asking him for the amount* [sic] *of lanes* on the bridge.

(44) Genie [sic] *asked him how long he wanted the bridge to be ...* .

Although sentence (44) does not perfectly capture the meaning of the original question, it was accepted because the student did understand the essential meaning of Q3 and used the correct grammar to report it.

3.3.3.4.2. Unacceptable sentences

There are 28 SQ3s that are considered unacceptable, nine of which contain more than one error. The number of errors per category is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Numbers and percentages of errors per category in the SQ3 subcorpus

	verb forms			word order	personal pronouns	other types of errors	total
	reporting verb	the verb in the reported question	total verbs forms				
number of errors	0	11	11	24	0	2	37
percentage	0	29.73	29.73	64.86	0	5.41	100

The form of the reporting verb is correct in all unacceptable sentences. As for the reported verb form, the lack of backshift as the only error appears in two SQ3s:

(45) The genie ... asked the man how many lanes he *needs* for that bridge.

(46) ... the genie asked the man for the number of lanes he *wants* on the bridge.

The wrong word order as the only error is found in 15 SQ3s (47-50). The examples are presented in descending order of occurrences.

(47) Then the genie ... asked (the man) how many lanes *did he want*.

(48) The genie responded by asking how many lines [sic]/lanes *would he want* on the bridge.

(49) The genie ... asked the man how many lanes *had he wanted* on that bridge

(50) The genie ... asked how many lanes *should the bridge have*.

There are two more sentences with one error each which belongs to the category of 'other types of errors':

(51) The genie then told him to tell him [sic] how many *bridges* he wanted.

(52) The genie ... asked him *about the bridge*.

Sentence (51) shows lack of comprehension of the original question, whereas (52) is unacceptable due to its lack of detail.

Nine students produced sentences with two types of errors in the reported clause: an error in the form of the reported verb and a word order error:

(53) The genie ... asked the man how many lanes *does he/the man want* on/for the bridge.

(54) The only thing the genie asked him was how many legs [sic] *does he want* for the bridge.

(55) The genie replied to the man asking him how many lanes *dose he want* for the bridge...

(56) Genie [sic] ... asked him how many lanes *did he wanted* on the bridge.

The reported verb form error in seven of those SQ3s is the lack of backshift (53-54), whereas (55) and (56) have additional errors: a wrong spelling of the auxiliary and an incorrect form of the past tense, respectively.

4. Conclusion

Overall, as presented in Table 1, there are 49 (24.75%) unacceptable, 123 (62.12%) acceptable and 26 (13.13%) omitted sentences. The results indicate that, judging by the number of unacceptable and acceptable SQs, the students were most successful in reporting the *yes-no* question (Q1) and the information-seeking *wh*-question (Q3), whereas they found reporting the rhetorical *wh*-question (Q2) the most challenging. When it comes to SQ1, it is interesting to note that all students who used a textbook link between the reporting and the reported clauses (*if/whether*) used the word *if* rather than *whether*. Predictably, some students failed to provide an SQ2, possibly due to their incomprehension of Q2, the possibility to interpret Q2 both as a rhetorical and an information-seeking question, or because of their incoprehension of that part of the story. In reporting the only information-seeking question (Q3), the students displayed a lack of skill/knowledge about the word order required in the reported question. The errors committed in the corpus may be explained by one or a combination of factors: insufficient familiarity with the grammatical rules governing reported speech, overgeneralisation, L1 interference, lack of experience with reporting speech in a larger context, or lack of listening comprehension skills.

The number of acceptable sentences shows that approximately two thirds of the students succeeded in constructing grammatically and pragmatically acceptable sentences with indirect questions in their retold stories. These sentences report the original words in different ways, which agrees with Bin and Xiaoli's (2021: 12) statement that 'indirect speech often fully expresses the reader's understanding of the original discourse event'. More specifically, students produced not only sentences constructed in accordance with the strategies for reporting sentences in isolation but they also used various speech act verbs and sentence patterns imposed by the context. Finally, the research results suggest that practising story retelling can be a useful method not only for assessing EFL listening comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and basic writing skills but also for improving and learning more about the interconnectedness between EFL grammar, semantics, and prag-

matics. Also, with regard to the fact that this analysis was based on a corpus that included three questions from 66 retold stories, further research could be based on a larger corpus, which would provide additional insight into students' reported speech skills.

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ЗАВИСНОУПИТНЕ РЕЧЕНИЦЕ У НЕУПРАВНОМ ГОВОРУ У ПРЕПРИЧАВАЊУ ПРИЧЕ НА ЕНГЛЕСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ

Резиме

Рад представља резултате емпиријског истраживања начина на које су студенти прве године енглеског као страног језика и изворни говорници српског језика структури-сали зависноупитне реченице у неуправном говору у препричавању приче на енглеском језику. Препричавање приче је део предмета *Савремени енглески језик 1* на Департману за англистику на Филозофском факултету Универзитета у Нишу. Препричавање приче се користи као метода за развијање вештина разумевања говора, као и вежбање граматике, употребе речи и писања. Наиме, улога предавача је да студентима два пута прочита причу на енглеском језику која има између 245 и 280 речи, а студенти су у обавези да запамте и препричају причу у писаној форми у складу са граматичким правилима и на начин на који се постиже текстуална кохезија и кохерентност. Студентима је експлицитно речено

да треба да користе неуправни говор у својим причама зато што препричавају причу по сећању као и на основу белешки које пишу док предавач чита причу. Оригинална прича има три питања: учтиву општу упитну реченицу, реторичку посебну упитну реченицу и посебну упитну реченицу. Корпус обухвата зависноупитне реченице у 66 препричаних прича и анализа показује да су студенти били успешнији у структурисању зависноупитних реченица на основу учтиве опште упитне реченице и посебне упитне реченице у односу на структурисање зависноупитне реченице на основу реторичке посебне упитне реченице.

Кључне речи: упитна реченица, зависноупитна реченица у неуправном говору, препричавање приче, енглески као страни језик