

THE FLATMATES

Language point:
Reported speech



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BBC Learning English – The Flatmates

The Flatmates – Reported speech

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/flatmates/episode26/languagepoint.shtml>

When we want to tell someone else what we or someone else has said we can use either direct or reported (or indirect speech).

In Episode 25 Michal said to Alice "I don't know how to cook" using direct speech.

But in today's episode he said to Helen "I was just telling Alice I didn't know how to cook" using reported speech.

The reporting verb

In reported speech, the first verb is usually in the past tense, for example:

He **said** that he was trying to give up fast food.

He **told** Alice he missed his mum's cooking.

He **explained** to Helen that he wanted to eat better but he didn't know how to cook.

However, if the reporting verb is in the present tense, it isn't changed in reported speech.

Michal **says** "I want to make pudding".

He **says** he wants to make pudding.

Other verb forms in the reporting clause

In reported speech, verbs in the reporting clause usually go one tense back.

A **present form** of a verb in direct speech, changes to a **past tense form** in reported speech:

Michal **said** "I'm trying to give up fast food."

He **said** that he **was** trying to give up fast food.

Michal **said** "I **miss** my mum's cooking."

He **told** Alice he **missed** his mum's cooking.

A **present perfect form** in direct speech, changes to a **past perfect form** in reported speech:

Alice **said** "You've **broken** your New Year's resolution."

She **told** him he **had broken** his New Year's resolution.

He **said** "I've **been** homesick for ages."

He **told** her he **had been** homesick for ages.

A **past tense form** in direct speech can change to a **past perfect** or can remain in the **past tense**.

Michal **said** "I **tried** to cook Polish food but it **tasted** awful".

He **said** he **had tried** to cook Polish food but it **had tasted** awful.

or

He **said** he **tried** to cook Polish food but it **tasted** awful.

Modal verbs

Some model verbs change in reported speech:

Direct speech	Reported speech
can	could
will	would
must	had to

While others don't change:

Direct speech	Reported speech
would	would
should	should
could	could
might	might
must	must

That

You can leave out **that** in reported speech:

Michal said **that** he was trying to give up fast food.

Michal said he was trying to give up fast food.

He told Alice **that** he missed his mum's cooking.

He told Alice missed his mum's cooking

Pronouns

Pronouns can change in reported speech depending on who the reported speech is directed to. For example:

Michal said "I want to give up fast food" changes to:

"He said **he** wanted to give up fast food" when Alice is telling Helen what Michal said.

Alice (talking to Michal) said "I'll make **you** a cup of tea" changes to:

"She said **she** would make **me** a cup of tea" when Michal tells Helen what Alice said.

But pronouns don't always change. For example :

Tim said "We're going to the pub later" talking to Michal (about Michal, Alice and Helen), changes to:

"He said **we** were going to the pub later" when Michal tells Helen what Tim said.

Vocabulary:

to fly off the handle (v, informal): to be very angry

a pudding (n): a sweet or dessert

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