Unit 44 - Reporting

1 Reporting speech

1.1 Sequence of tenses

1.1.1 In Unit 4 it was mentioned that the tense of a subordinate verb is often dependent on that of a main verb and that this state of dependence is referred to as **sequence of tenses**. One of the most important structures involving sequence of tenses is known as **reported** or **indirect speech**. This is when a person's words are reported to a third party by means of an introductory verb followed by a completive (or *que*) clause. This contrasts with **direct speech**, which involves quoting the exact words of that person to a third party :

Direct speech	Il dit «J'ai faim» - *He says "I'm hungry"*
Indirect speech	Il dit qu'il a faim – *He says (that) he is hungry*

The most common reporting verb used in indirect speech is of course *dire*, but any verb implying the reporting of speech can be used, such as *affirmer, ajouter, admettre, annoncer, constater, déclarer, expliquer, jurer, préciser, promettre, remarquer, répondre, suggérer.*

> Note that when the reporting verb comes after direct speech, the verb and subject are inverted and linked by a hyphen :
> «J'ai faim» **dit-il** - *"I'm hungry" he says*

1.1.2 In reported speech, the rules for the sequence of tenses are as follows. When the verb used in the main clause of the reporting sentence is in the present or future tense, the tense used in the original direct speech is not changed in indirect speech. For example :

Il dit «J'**ai** faim»	⇒	Il dit qu'il **a** faim
He says "I'm hungry"	⇒	*He says (that) he's hungry*
Si tu le lui demandes, il dira «J'**ai** faim»	⇒	Il dira qu'il **a** faim
If you ask him, he'll say "I'm hungry"	⇒	*He'll say (that) he's hungry*

1.1.3 However, when the verb used in the main clause of the reporting sentence is in the past tense, the tense used in the original direct speech is shifted one stage back in the past :

Tense used in main clause	*Tense used in reporting clause*
present	imperfect
perfect	pluperfect
simple future	future perfect (conditional)

For example :

Il a dit «J'**ai** peur»	⇒	Il a dit qu'il **avait** peur
He said "I'm frightened"	⇒	*He said (that) he was frightened*
Il a dit «J'**ai eu** peur »	⇒	Il a dit qu'il **avait eu** peur
He said "I was frightened"	⇒	*He said (that) he had been frightened*
Il a dit «J'**aurai** peur »	⇒	Il a dit qu'il **aurait** peur
He said "I'll be frightened"	⇒	*He said (that) he would be frightened*

These tense changes need not made if the original tenses still hold true at the time the reported speech is made. Imagine, for example, the following scenario. On the way to Paul's house you

meet Marie, who tells you *«Paul est malade»*. A few minutes later you bump into Michel, and you say *«Marie a dit que Paul est malade»*.

However, a tense change must be made in the above context if the truth of what was originally said is doubtful. For example, to return to the above scenario, on arriving at Paul's house, you find him playing tennis. You tell him *«Ça m'étonne de te voir jouer au tennis. Marie a dit que tu étais malade»*

1.1.4   There is no change in tense when the verb in the original speech or description is in the imperfect, pluperfect or conditional :

> Il a dit «J'**avais** peur parce que j'étais allé me coucher tout seul»
> *He said "I was frightened because I had gone to bed alone"*
> ⇒   Il a dit qu'il **avait** peur parce qu'il était allé se couché seul»
> ⇒   *He said that he was frightened because he had gone to bed alone*
> Il a dit «J'**aimerais** aller me coucher» ⇒   Il a dit qu'il **aimerait** aller se coucher
> *He said "I would like to go to bed"   ⇒   He said that he would like to go to bed*

1.2   Other changes

In addition to changes in tense, there are often other changes to be made.

1.2.1   Changes in person

> Il a dit «**J'**ai faim»   ⇒   Il a dit qu'**il** avait faim
> *He said "I'm hungry"*   ⇒   *He said that he was hungry*
> Il a dit «Je **t'**ai vu»   ⇒   Il a dit qu'il **m'**avait vu
> *He said "I saw you" "*   ⇒   *He said that he saw me*
> Il a dit «J'ai oublié **mon** parapluie»   ⇒   Il a dit qu'il avait oublié **son** parapluie
> *He said "I've forgotten my umbrella"* ⇒   *He said that he'd forgotten his umbrella*

1.2.2   Changes in vocabulary

As in English, these changes are related to time or place :

Direct speech	Indirect speech
aujourd'hui	ce jour-là
hier	la veille
avant-hier	l'avant-veille
ce matin / soir	ce matin-là / ce soir-là
lundi prochain	le lundi suivant
lundi dernier	le lundi précédent
demain	le lendemain
après-demain	le surlendemain
dans 5 jours	5 jours plus tard
il y a 5 jours	5 jours plus tôt
ici	là

> «Je l'ai vue **hier**»   ⇒   Elle a dit qu'elle l'avait vue **la veille**
> *"I saw her yesterday"*   ⇒   *She said that she had seen her the day before*
> «Venez nous voir **demain** »   ⇒   Elle nous a dit de venir les voir **le lendemain**
> *"Come and see us tomorrow"* ⇒   *She told us to come and see them the next day*

Note that, as with tense changes, these changes need not be made if the original expressions still hold true at the time or from the place the reported speech is made :

«Je l'ai vue **hier**»	⇒	Elle a dit qu'elle l'a vue **hier**
"I saw her yesterday"	⇒	*She said that she saw her yesterday*

1.3 The imperative

As in English, the imperative is replaced in indirect speech by an infinitive :

Elle m'a dit : «**Ouvre** la fenêtre !»	⇒	Elle m'a dit d'**ouvrir** la fenêtre
She said to me : "Open the window !"	⇒	*She told me to open the window*

It is also possible to replace the infinitive with a subjunctive, although this is less common :

Elle m'a dit que j'**ouvre** la fenêtre - *She told me to open the window*

2 Reporting descriptions

Other completive clauses involve the reporting not of speech but of facts, events, opinions, states and so on that have not necessarily been expressed verbally. These can be termed **reported descriptions,** and they too are subject to the sequence of tense rules. Sometimes these descriptions can be said to express actual or probable reality, in which case the subordinate verb is in the indicative. Here the sequence of tenses is identical to that used in reported speech :

Description	⇒	Tu **as** peur - *You're frightened*
Reported description (present)	⇒	Il **croit** que tu **as** peur
		He thinks (that) you're frightened
Reported description (future)	⇒	Si tu fais ça, il **croira** qu'tu **as** peur
		If you do that, he'll think you're frightened
Reported description (past)	⇒	Il **croyait** que tu **avais** peur
		He thought (that) you were frightened

And sometimes these descriptions are imbued with a sense of judgement, doubt, emotion and so on, in which case the subordinate verb is in the subjunctive. Here the sequence of tenses are different in that the future and imperfect are often replaced by the present subjunctive :

Description	⇒	Elle **était** là hier
		She was in yesterday
Reported description (past)	⇒	J'étais content qu'elle **soit** là hier
		I was pleased she was in yesterday
Reported description (future)	⇒	Je ne pense pas qu'elle **soit** là demain
		I don't think she will be in tomorrow

3 Reporting questions

3.1

A third type of indirect expression involves the reporting of questions. This creates a type of subordinate clause mentioned in **2**:3.3 called an **indirect interrogative clause** :

Je lui ai demandé **quand il comptait revenir**
I asked him when he intended coming back

The sequence of tense rules for indirect questions are the same as for indirect speech, as are those relating to changes in person and vocabulary. Indirect questions are formed as follows :

- The question is returned to affirmative form. This means that there is no *est-ce que* or inversion of subject and verb, and that there is no question mark :

    Est-ce que vous pouvez m'aider ?

    Pouvez-vous m'aider ? ⎫ Vous pouvez m'aider

- The reported question is linked to the introductory verb by *si* or a question word.
    Elle m'a demandé **si** je pouvais l'aider
    *She asked me **if** I could help (her)*

3.2 Choice of link word

3.2.1 For **total interrogation** (i.e. expecting answer *yes* or *no*, formed by inversion or *est-ce que*), *si* is used :

    «Pouvez-vous m'aider ?»   ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **si** je pouvais l'aider

3.2.2 For questions formed using *où*, *quand*, *comment*, *pourquoi*, *combien*, *lequel* and *quel,* the question word is retained :

    «Combien de jours restes-tu?»   ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **combien** de jours je restais
    "How many days are you staying ?" ⟹ *She asked me how many days I was staying*

3.2.3 When referring to people : for questions formed using *qui*, *qui est-ce qui* or *qui est-ce que*, *qui* is used :

    «**Qui / qui est-ce qui** a appelé ?» ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **qui** avait appelé
    "Who called ?"   ⟹ *She asked me who called*
    «**Qui / qui est-ce que** tu regardes ?» ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **qui** je regardais
    "Who are you looking at ?"   ⟹ *She asked me who I was looking at*

For questions formed using preposition + *qui*, these are retained :

    «**A qui est-ce que** tu téléphones ?» ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **à qui** je téléphonais
    "Who are you phoning ?"   ⟹ *She asked me who I was phoning*

3.2.4 When referring to things : for questions formed using *que* or *qu'est-ce qui*, *ce qui* is used :

    «**Que / qu'est-ce qui** s'est passé ?» ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **ce qui** s'est passé
    "What happened ?"   ⟹ *She asked me what happened*

For questions formed using *que* or *qu'est-ce que*, *ce que* is used :

    «**Que / qu'est-ce que** tu regardes ?» ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **ce que** je regardais
    "What are you looking at ?"   ⟹ *She asked me what I was looking at*

For questions formed using preposition + *quoi*, these are retained :

    «**De quoi** parles-tu? »   ⟹ Elle m'a demandé **de quoi** je parlais
    "What are you talking about ?"   ⟹ *She asked me what I was talking about*