Surendra Bahadur Mahatara Chhetry

surendra1chhetry@gmail.com

Madhyabindu Multiple Campus, Kawasoti

Abstract

Reported speech is a crucial grammatical concept, yet Nepali-speaking learners often struggle with its intricacies due to significant differences between the two languages, such as the absence of verb conjugation for tense in Nepali. A qualitative study was conducted to investigate the challenges faced by Grade XI learners in Nepal in acquiring reported speech in English, using observations of classroom interactions, interviews with teachers and students' test for data collection methods. Fifty students (25 boys and 25 girls) studying in Grade XI were randomly selected for data collection. This study identified key challenges including errors in tense changes (backshift), dificulties in transforming direct questions into indirect questions, and problems with pronoun shifts. These challenges are exacerbated by factors such as limited real-world exposure, diverse learner backgrounds, and interference from the Nepali language. Based on these findings, the study recommends practical strategies to enhance the teaching and learning of reported speech, such as curriculum modifications, textbook revisions, and targeted teacher training programs that focus on addressing the specific grammatical issues identified.

Keywords: *reported speech, challenges, shift, transformation, back-shifting*

Introduction

Nepali is an Indo-Aryan language that traces its roots to Sanskrit. Historically, Nepali was referred to as Khas Kura and served as the language of the Khasa kingdom during the 13th and 14th centuries in Nepal. The use of Nepali in written form dates back to the 12th century AD, with its script, Devanagari, having evolved from the Brahmi script in the 11th century AD. Linguistically, Nepali maintains a strong connection with Sanskrit, sharing a significant part of technical vocabulary and utilizing nearly identical scripts, differing only in minor details (Pokharel, 1997). In contrast, English is a West Germanic language that was originated from Anglo-Frisian dialects brought to Britain by Anglo-Saxon migrants in the mid-5th to 7th centuries AD. Initially localized to England, English expanded globally alongside the British Empire and is now recognized as the most widely spoken language worldwide. Mastery over English grammar is essential for learners, as it supports their ability to communicate effectively in speaking, reading, and writing. Grammar not only corrects sentences but also provides a systematic framework for constructing meaningful and correct sentences. Ur (1996) noted, "Grammar determines how words are put together to form sentences, which directly impacts their meaning."

The proficiency in grammar enables learners to achieve clear and effective communication, which is fundamental to academic success and interaction in day-to-day life. One of the

major aspects of English grammar is reported speech, which allows individuals to convey the theme of statements, thoughts, experiences or beliefs without quoting them directly. Reported speech is particularly significant as it facilitates indirect communication, a highly applicable skill in real-life scenarios such as news reporting, conversations, and academic writing (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Reported speech includes two primary forms: direct speech, in which the exact words of a speaker are quoted directly, and in indirect speech the content is paraphrased with out changing the original meaning. When converting direct speech to indirect speech in English, students should apply grammatical changes, adjusting tense, pronouns, and adverbs of time and place, to align with the temporal and contextual requirements of the report (Llewelyn & Menezes, 2001).

In the context of Nepalese learners, acquiring competence in reported speech poses distinct challenges due to the grammatical disparities between Nepali and English. For instance, while Nepali grammar does not necessitate tense shifts or pronoun changes when reporting speech, English mandates these transformations to ensure coherence and accuracy. This discrepancy often leads to errors and difficulties for Nepali students in mastering reported speech, as they must internalize rules that are absent in their native language structure.

As previously highlighted, the process of transforming direct speech into indirect speech in English requires significance understanding and memorization of specific grammatical rules. This complexity marks the need for focused pedagogical strategies to address the difficulties faced by Nepalese students in learning reported speech. No such research to recommend the challenges and strategies in learning reported speech has been carried out yet. This study aims to explore the challenges encountered by Nepalese learners and explore effective strategies to enhance their proficiency in using reported speech in English, drawing insights from relevant linguistic theories and educational frameworks (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999)

Statement of the Problem

As outlined in the background of the study, learning reported speech presents significant challenges for Grade XI students studying in different schools in Kawasoti Municipality. These challenges arise from the structural and grammatical differences between Nepali and English, particularly in areas such as tense shifts, pronoun adjustments, and syntactic transformations. There were number of studies on teaching tenses, grammar and other grammatical items. However, there were not any studies conducted on what exactly troubles on teaching reported speech in Nepalese context. This study would find out issues and challenges which often result in errors and hinder effective mastery of reported speech.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study were expected to have both theoretical and practical implications: The study aimed to help students overcome the difficulties they face in learning reported speech by identifying specific challenges and suggesting practical strategies to address the students. This will enhance their overall competency in English grammar and improve their communication skills.

Similarly, the study provided insights into

students' comprehension levels and identifies common difficulties and their underlying causes. Teachers can use this information to evaluate and revise their teaching methods, and furthermore the study would serve as a foundational reference for researchers interested in exploring language acquisition challenges, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts in Nepal. It highlights the necessity of addressing linguistic differences and pedagogical strategies to support grammar learning.

By addressing these aspects, the study contributes to the broader discourse on English language education in Nepal, offering practical recommendations for students and educators while paving the way for further research in this area (Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Creswell,

Objectives and Research Questions

The primary objectives of this study were:

To analyze the specific learning difficulties encountered by Nepalese students in learning reported speech

To identify the root causes of these difficulties in mastering reported speech.

To propose pedagogical strategies and implications for enhancing students' understanding and usage of reported speech This article was intended to seek the answers of the following research questions:

1. What specific difficulties do Grade XI students face in learning reported questions?

2. What are the underlying causes of these difficulties in mastering reported speech?

3. What strategies can effectively facilitate students' learning of reported speech?

Understanding and addressing these problems is critical to improving the teaching and learning of reported speech in the Nepalese educational context.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused specifically on analyzing the difficulties faced by Grade XI students in learning reported speech at different schools in Kawasoti Municipality. While reported speech encompasses various aspects, the research narrowed its scope to examine students' challenges with reported statements, questions, and commands in English grammar. Given the limitations of time and resources, the study did not extend to other linguistic features or grammar components beyond reported speech. Furthermore, the study's findings might primarily reflect the specific context of the target group and might not have been entirely generalizable to other populations.

Method of the Study

The study employed a qualitative research method, which aimed to systematically describe the nature of the situation as it existed during the study period. This approach was suitable for identifying and exploring students' difficulties with reported speech. Qualitative research incorporates various tools such as observations, surveys, self-reports, and tests to collect and analyze data comprehensively. Kumar (2014) states: the qualitative approach follows an open, flexible, and unstructured approach to enquiry; aims to explore diversity than to qualitify; emphasizes the description and narration of feelings, perceptions and experiences rather than their measurements, and communicates findings in descriptive and narrative. By using this method, the study

investigated both the nature and causes of the students' challenges with reported speech and proposed evidence-based recommendations for addressing these issues. The researcher randomly selected fifty students (25 boys and 25 girls) studying in Grade XI at different schools in Kawasoti Municipality. The students were assigned with a set of questions related to reported speech both from English and Nepali languages. Some unstructured questionnaires for interview were set to collect data for the study. The subject teachers were randomly interviewed focusing on the specific issues and problems in dealing with reported speech. However, their responses were not presented and analyzed in the data form.

Literature Review

Grammar acts as the fundamental structure that underpins a language's system of organization and meaning. It sets the guidelines and patterns for assembling linguistic components—words, phrases, and sentences—into clear and meaningful communication. Thornbury (1999) further elaborates that grammar is "a system of rules or patterns that describe the formation of language sentences. These viewpoints highlight the major role of grammar in comprehending and crafting meaningful expressions in any language. Grammar instruction is important in second language acquisition, as it helps learners understand and produce syntactically correct sentences. According to Crystal (2003), grammar is "a device of some sort for producing the sentences of the language under analysis." Similarly, Nunan (1999) defines grammar as "a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences. According to Nunan

(1999), 'a strong grasp of grammar enables learners to effectively manage the significance of meaning within sentences.' For English language learners, understanding grammar is not only about sentence construction but also about developing communicative competence, which is essential for both written and oral interaction (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Reported Speech

Reported speech is a grammatical structure used to convey the essence of someone's spoken or written words without quoting them accurate. Swan (2005) explains, "Reported speech involves quoting somebody's words or thoughts without using the exact words and integrating them into the speaker's own sentence structure". This transformation often requires changes in verb, tense, subjects, objects, adverbials, and other necessary grammatical elements to reflect the context of the report.

Azar (2002) defines reported speech as "the use of a noun clause to report what someone has said," highlighting its structural complexity and reliance on grammatical adjustments. Thompson and Martinet (1986) further note, "In reported speech, we give the exact meaning of a remark or a speech without necessarily using the speaker's exact words." These definitions underscore that reported speech is not merely a linguistic form but also a cognitive process that involves interpreting and restructuring information to suit a new context.

The use of reported speech is prevalent in everyday communication, academic discourse, and professional interactions. It serves as a tool for transforming information while maintaining clarity and coherence. However, for learners of English as a second language (ESL), learning reported speech can be challenging due to

the grammatical transformations it requires. Nepali learners, for instance, often struggle with these transformations because their native language does not necessitate similar changes in tense or pronouns during indirect reporting. This linguistic discrepancy often leads to errors and difficulties in acquiring reported speech proficiency (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

Theoretical Framework
The study of reported speech is grounded in various linguistic theories, including transformation-generative grammar and functional grammar. Chomsky's transformation-generative grammar theory (1965) provides a framework for understanding how syntactic transformations, such as those required in reported speech, occur in language processing. This theory highlights the systematic rules that govern sentence transformation, which is particularly relevant in analyzing how direct speech is converted into indirect speech.

Halliday's functional grammar theory (1994) emphasizes the communicative purposes of grammatical structures, including reported speech. According to Halliday, language is a resource for meaning-making, and grammar serves as a tool to achieve specific communicative goals. Reported speech aligns with this theory as it enables speakers to convey information, summarize discussions, and share perspectives effectively.

Selinker (1972) posited that second language learners develop an interlanguage—a transitional linguistic system influenced by their native language and the target language. In the context of Nepali learners, interlanguage theory helps explain the grammatical errors

and difficulties encountered when transitioning between Nepali and English reported speech structures.

Empirical Review
Many studies have documented the difficulties ESL learners encounter when learning reported speech. Empirical studies have highlighted the challenges Nepali learners face in learning reported speech in English, focusing on the linguistic differences and contextual limitations unique to the Nepalese context. Research has consistently shown that Nepali learners struggle with reported speech due to grammatical complexities, particularly tense back shifting, pronoun changes, and word order. Akbari (2016) emphasized the importance of explicit grammar instruction combined with inductive learning. Akbari's study found that learners performed better in reported speech exercises when teachers explicitly explained grammatical rules and followed up with activities requiring students to discover and apply these rules in practice. Nguyen (2018) examined Vietnamese students' errors in using reported speech and identified that students often struggled with tense back shifting and distinguishing between direct and indirect reporting styles. Nguyen suggested that these challenges were primarily due to the structural differences between English and Vietnamese, as well as limited practice in communicative contexts.

Similarly, Adhikari (2019) noted that learners often fail to distinguish between direct and indirect reporting styles, a difficulty compounded by limited opportunities for real-life application of reported speech. Dhakal (2020) identified that the absence of tense back shifting rules and the static nature of pronouns

in Nepali contribute significantly to these challenges.

The structural differences between Nepali and English are a primary cause of these challenges. For instance, Nepali does not require tense shifts or significant changes in word order when reporting speech, unlike English. Furthermore, Sharma (2002) highlighted that traditional grammar-focused teaching methods, which emphasize rote memorization over contextual understanding, hinder learners' ability to internalize reported speech structures effectively.

Reported Speech in English and Nepali

English and Nepali possess distinct linguistic systems, encompassing unique vocabularies, grammatical rules, and structures. While both languages incorporate reported speech as a grammatical construct, little research has been conducted to systematically compare the similarities and differences between them. Bhatarai and Adhikari (2008), 'translating Nepali grammar into English was a strenuous task, the first experience of its type, which involved a lot of time, study, interpretations and multiple visits…there were innumerable word level gaps and sentence level skewing which naturally needed much contemplation and circumlocution as well' Understanding these distinctions has significant implications for teaching reported speech in English to Nepali-speaking learners.

Grammatical Structures in Reported Speech

In English, reported speech involves relaying the words or ideas of another speaker without quoting them verbatim. This structure typically includes two components: the reporting clause and the reported clause. The reporting clause contains a verb (e.g., said, told, replied) and often sets the tense and perspective of the report, while the reported clause conveys the content of the original speech (Leech & Svartvik, 2013). For example:

- Direct speech: She said, "I am going to the market."

- Reported speech: She said that she was going to the market.

When shifting from direct to reported speech in English, several grammatical changes are required, including adjustments to verb tense, pronouns, time expressions, and word order (Thomson & Martinet, 1986).

In contrast, Nepali reported speech exhibits unique characteristics. Reported clauses in Nepali can appear before, after, or even interspersed with the reporting verb. This flexibility reflects the syntax of the Nepali language, where the placement of elements within a sentence can vary significantly. Moreover, direct speech is more commonly used in natural conversations in Nepali, with indirect speech primarily gaining prominence due to the influence of mass media and formal writing (Adhikary, 2019).

Pedagogical Implications

Teaching reported speech in English to Nepali-speaking learners presents several challenges. Nepali does not typically require tense back-shifting or pronoun changes when transitioning from direct to reported speech, unlike English. This fundamental difference often leads to errors in tense and pronoun usage among Nepali learners of English. For example, a Nepali speaker may incorrectly construct the sentence: She said that I am going to the market instead of the correct English equivalent: She said that she was going to the market.

Additionally, English reported speech

emphasizes maintaining the logical flow of time and perspective through grammatical adjustments, a concept that may be less intuitive for Nepali learners. Teachers must address these discrepancies through explicit instruction and practice.

The Role of Context in Teaching Reported Speech

The instructional goal is not merely to familiarize students with the rules of reported speech but to enable them to apply these rules fluently and communicatively in real-life scenarios. However, research and classroom experience reveal that many English teachers struggle to effectively teach reported speech, and learners often fail to use it fluently and accurately in practical situations (Adhikari, 2019).

By contrasting the grammatical requirements of English and Nepali, educators can help learners navigate the complexities of reported speech. For example, providing comparative examples and engaging learners in tasks such as converting direct speech into reported speech in both languages can build their understanding of the underlying rules and conventions.

Reported speech is an essential grammatical feature in English, and its mastery is critical for effective communication. While Nepali shares some functional similarities, its syntactic and grammatical differences create challenges for learners transitioning to English reported speech. A deeper understanding of these differences and the incorporation of contrastive analysis into teaching strategies can enhance learners' proficiency and communicative competence.

Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher employed a qualitative approach to data analysis, allowing for a detailed exploration of patterns, themes, and relationships within the data. This approach aligns with qualitative research methodologies, emphasizing the understanding of participants' experiences and contextual factors influencing the research problem. Through this method, the collected data were systematically organized, coded, and interpreted to draw conclusions and propose solutions to the identified research questions. The collected data were tabulated on the basis of different errors the students committed. Then, the data were analyzed categorizing them into types of changes, similarities and differences, and errors in sentences. To address the research objectives, it is essential to process, analyze, and interpret the data to derive meaningful insights and conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By utilizing descriptive method the researcher ensured a comprehensive examination of the data, facilitating the development of findings that directly address the research objectives. This process contributes to generating insights that are not only grounded in empirical evidence but also contextually relevant to the educational and linguistic challenges under investigation.

Reported Speech in English and Nepali: Detailed Analysis

Both English and Nepali incorporate reported speech as an essential grammatical feature, yet they differ significantly in structure, syntax,

and pragmatic usage. This section presents a comparative analysis of reported speech in the two languages, highlighting similarities, differences, and challenges faced by learners, particularly Nepali-speaking students learning English.

Examples:

Placement of Reporting Verbs

In Nepali, the reporting verb can appear in various positions within the sentence, which can lead to subtle changes in pragmatic meaning:

a. *Post-reporting Verb*

1 (a). Johnā le ke bhanyo bhane u anupasthit thiyo. (John said that he was absent.)

b. *Pre-reporting Verb*

1 (b). Johnā le u anupasthit thiyo bhanyo. (John said that he was absent.)

c. *Clause Internally*

1 (c). Johnā le anupasthit thiyo bhanyo. (John said that he was absent.)

These variations in Nepali contrast sharply with English, where the reported clause consistently follows the reporting verb. In (1a-c) the basic free translation is almost the same though it is possible to interpret these three sentences as having different pragmatic implications because the change in word order triggers a change in meaning in Nepali.

Use of Conjunctions

In Nepali, conjunctions such as ke bhane, kaso bhane, bhani, and bhanera are used to connect the reported clause to the reporting verb. For example:

2."Timi ma anupasthit chhau bhanyau."

(You said you were absent.)

This differs from English, where conjunctions like that are more commonly used and are sometimes omitted in informal contexts.

In Nepali, normally the inverted commas are removed and the reported speech clause is combined with the matrix clause with conjunctions like

Ke bhane, kaso bhane, bhani, and bhanera, as in example (3)

(3) "timile ma anupasthit chhu vanyau."

"timile k bahnyo bahne timi anupasthit thiyau."

(What you said you were absent.)

In Nepali, as in English the reporting verb 'bhannu' is normally changed into 'batayau', 'bhanyau', 'mannu', 'sodhnu', 'daraunu', 'araunu', 'kura garnu', 'prashna garnu', etc. according to the 'sense' of the reported speech. In both English and Nepali, the personal pronouns of the reported speech have to be changed. Normally, the second person is changed according to the object of the reporting verb whereas the first person is changed according to the subject of the reporting verb. The third person personal pronouns are not changed at all. As in English, Nepali proximal demonstratives, and deictic adverbs are changed into distal forms.

Back shifting

In English, back-shifting of verb tenses is a mandatory rule when transitioning from direct to reported speech, unless the statement remains true in the present. In contrast, Nepali does not strictly require back-shifting, allowing for more flexibility in tense.

(4) Proximal distal yo, yi, yini, yiniharu

Tyo, ti, tini, tiniharu, u, uni, uniharu

Yasto, yati, yaha, yata

Testo, teti, tyaha, tyata

Tyasari, tyasto, ustai, tyastai
 In Nepali, the time adverbials may be changed as in English. However, it is not as obligatory as in English. In Nepali, though they are changed, there is a lack of specific words as in English Munale malai bhanin Suman ko bhoili janmadin ho.

Munale malai aaj Sumanako janma din bhayako batain.

During the research the researcher observed several similarities and differences between these two languages in terms of major grammatical changes in reported speech. Table1 presents the similarities and differences between English and Nepali reported speech.

Table 1:

Similarities and differences between English and Nepali reported speech.

S.N.	Grammatical Element	English	Nepali
1.	Reporting Verbs	✓	✓
2.	Verb Tenses	✓ (Regular)	✓ (Flexible)
3	Pronouns and Possessive Forms	✓	✓
4.	Demonstratives and Deictic Adverbs	✓	✓
5.	Time Adverbials	✓ (Regular)	✓ (Flexible)

This table 1 outlines the key grammatical elements that differ or exhibit similarities in reported speech between English and Nepali. It focuses that both languages utilize reporting verbs (e.g., say, tell, ask, report) to introduce reported speech. While English generally follows specific rules for verb tense shifts in reported speech, Nepali demonstrates greater flexibility in verb tense usage. Both English and Nepali languages require adjustments to pronouns and possessive forms to reflect the shift in perspective from direct to reported speech. The use of demonstratives (this, that, these, those) and deictic adverbs (here, there, now, then) also undergoes changes in reported speech in both languages. Similar to verb tenses, English typically follows specific rules for shifting time adverbials (e.g., today, yesterday, tomorrow) in reported speech, while Nepali exhibits greater flexibility in their usage.

Analysis of the major issues and problems
 In this section, the researcher analyzed problems in the reported speech in English from the test papers of the learners of Grades XI of the different streams at different schools. After the interval of the teaching of the forms and functions of the reported speech to the students interactively with the major language skills, a test consisting of questionnaires from reported speech was administered to 50 students (25 girls and 25 boys) on the reported speech. This analysis is primarily based on the classification of errors about the very basic grammatical changes to be made in shifting from direct speech to indirect speech in standard English and trying to explain the errors as far as possible. The general perspective of the analysis is functional and pedagogical. Tentatively, the errors committed by the students are related to the following aspects of the general rules of the reported speech.

1. Reporting verbs in English: The reporting verb 'said' or 'said to' is obligatorily changed into the forms such as told, requested, asked, prayed, wished, exclaimed according to the structural patterns of the sentences.

Table 2:

Errors in Sentences

sentence types	reporting verb (direct speech)	reporting verb (indirect speech)
Declarative	said/said to	said/told
Imperative	said/said to	requested/commanded/ordered/ proposed/ suggested/ forbade/
Interrogative	said/said to	Asked
Exclamatory	said/said to	exclaimed with joy/ sorrow/ surprise
Optative	said/said to	wished/prayed

There are also erroneous sentences with the reporting verb in the indirect speech.

One of them is given in (5).

(5) a. Johan said, "I am calling a taxi to Muna now."

*Johan told that he was calling a taxi to Muna at that time.

      2. Verb tenses

In English verb tenses require to be obligatorily changed since, in reported speech, we usually talk about a time in the past (because obviously, the person who spoke originally spoke in the past). A popular rule referred to as a back-shift of tense is usually required unless the situation has not changed. The pattern of the tense change is given in (8).

Table 3:

Tense Change in indirect speech

Direct speech	Indirect speech
Present simple	Past simple
Present continuous	Past continuous
Present perfect simple	Past perfect simple
Present perfect continuous	Past perfect continuous
Past simple	Past perfect simple
Past continuous	Past perfect continuous
Past perfect	Past perfect
Past perfect continuous	Past perfect continuous

Some of the students have produced the following erroneous sentences as in (6)

6 (a). Johan said to Muna, "I love you but you do not love me."

 * John told to Muna that he loves her but she does not love me.

6 (b). Johan said to Muna, "I wrote a letter yesterday."

* Johan told Muna that he wrote a letter the day before.

6(c). Muna said, "I had completed my course before I returned to Pokhara."

  * Muna told that she <u>have</u> completed her course before I return to Pokhara.

6(d). Anjana said to Johan, "We had been learning together for many years."

* Anjan told to me that they have been studying together for many years.

6(e). Muna said to Rina, "What are you doing now?"

 * Muna told Rina that what you are doing now.

6(f). Rohan said to Sunita, "I phoned you yesterday."

* Rohan told Sunita, that he was phoned you the previous day.

6(g). Rohan said, "Does Sunita finish her work?"

* Rohan asked If Sunita finish her job.

In examples (6a-g), though there are also other

types of errors, the main errors are related to backshift.

3. Pronouns and possessive determiners

In reported speech pronouns and possessive determiners may necessitate being changed when the speaker or listener changes. One has to be very careful with personal pronouns. They require to be changed according to the situation. As we said earlier as in the case of Nepali the first-person pronoun of the indirect speech is changed according to the subject of the reporting verb whereas the second person is changed according to the object of the reporting verb. The third person does not change. The students have produced erroneous sentences in this respect as well.

7(a). Sohan said, "Where are your parents?"
* Sohan asked where were your parents.
7(b). Sunita said, "Will you write the story?"
*Sunita wished that you would write the story.
7(c). Ravi said, "Please, help me!"
*Ravi asked me to help me

4. Questions

It is a quite common rule that while reporting questions the word order requires to be changed to that of a statement, namely subject-verb, and the auxiliary verb do is dropped. Moreover, the yes/ no questions start with if, or whether and wh-word questions, such as why, when, and where, however, do not.

8(a). Sunita said, "When does this school open?"
*Sunita asked when did that school open.
8(b). Rohan said, "Does Sunita finish her work?"
* Rohan asked If Sunita finish her job.
8(c) Sohan said, "Where are your parents?"
* Sohan asked where were your parents.
9(a). Amit said, "How did you go across the river?"
* Amit asked how do I go across the river.
9(b). Johan said, "Are you going to help in the exam?"
*Gita asked me am I going to help with the exam.

The erroneous formations in (9a-e) are related to shifting questions from direct speech to indirect speech in English. We can also show the real phenomenon of the errors made by the learners statistically table 4 presents the total number of test items in different structural patterns of sentences in English.

Table 4:

Statistical Review of Errors

Grammatical elements/ Sentence types	Reporting verbs	Verb Tenses	Pronouns and possessive determiners	Demonstratives and deictic adverbs	'Deviated structures'
Declarative	23	86	5	6	5
Imperative	16	5	4	8	2
Interrogative	12	46	8	8	54
Exclamatory/ Optative	9	24	3	6	26
Total	60	161	20	28	87

Table 4 provides a valuable overview of the types of errors encountered by learners in reported speech across different grammatical elements and sentence types. The table categorizes errors across five key areas: Reporting verbs, Verb Tenses,

Pronouns and possessive determiners, Demonstratives and deictic adverbs, and a category encompassing other grammatical errors labeled "Deviated structures."

Furthermore, the table analyzes these errors within four sentence types: Declarative, Imperative, Interrogative, and Exclamatory/Optative. This breakdown allows for a nuanced understanding of the specific challenges learners face in each sentence type.

The data reveals that Verb Tense errors are the most prevalent across all sentence types, highlighting a significant area of difficulty for learners. Notably, "Deviated structures" within Interrogative sentences exhibited the highest frequency, suggesting that learners struggle significantly with the correct transformation of direct questions into reported speech. Additionally, Exclamatory/Optative sentences also presented a considerable number of errors.

Results, Discussion and Findings
Results
Reasons for the errors

Nepali learners have considerable trouble in shifting direct speech to indirect speech in English and learning to use it communicatively due to a number of reasons. These reasons can be broadly categorized into general and specific reasons.

General reasons

One of the main reasons for difficulties in the reported speech is the grammatical elements to be taken into account in the reported speech. These errors particularly pose difficulty because there are students from a variety of different backgrounds, with different personal and professional interests, and different motivations for learning English. Moreover, they normally do not use the reported speech outside the classroom. Undoubtedly, they require a clear and effective context to present reported speech in a variety of situations, rather than in a single context.

Specific reasons

The specific reasons are grounded on the dissimilarities between Nepali and English reported speech. The basic assumptions in contrastive analysis are that the similarities are equated with ease and dissimilarities are equated with difficulties in learning. However, Agnihotri (1988) assumes that the errors in the second language are learning strategies depending on the learners and his/her socio-psychological background rather than instances of mother tongue interference. In this respect, we may make some predictions with respect to difficulties in shifting direct speech to the indirect speech.

i. As Nepali lacks strict back shift in the formation of the reported speech, most of the serious mistakes are related to the change of the tense in the reported speech in English.

ii. There are mistakes in the reporting of questions in English. The reason is that in Nepali while reporting questions the word order does not need to be changed to that of a statement, namely subject-verb. However, in English while reporting questions, the word order requires to be changed to that of a statement, namely subject-verb, and the auxiliary verb do is dropped.

iii. Students often perceive grammar as a difficult subject, which negatively affects their motivation to learn. This mindset is

a significant barrier to their understanding of complex grammatical structures like reported speech.

iv. Students were often confused by the rules governing tense and pronoun shifts when transforming direct speech into indirect speech. This confusion exacerbates the errors they make in applying the rules of reported speech (Agnihotri, 1988).

Discussion and Findings

The findings of this analysis reveal significant challenges faced by Nepali learners in acquiring reported speech in English. These challenges are deeply intertwined with the interplay of linguistic factors, pedagogical approaches, and socio-cultural contexts.

Linguistic factors, such as the contrasting grammatical structures between Nepali and English, pose a significant hurdle (Dhakal, 2020). Nepali, unlike English, does not necessitate tense back shifting or significant word order changes when reporting speech, leading to persistent errors in tense usage, pronoun selection, and question formation. Furthermore, the absence of explicit grammatical marking for reported speech in Nepali further complicates the learning process for learners.

Pedagogical approaches also play a crucial role. Traditional grammar-focused instruction, which often emphasizes rote memorization and limited communicative practice, can hinder the development of communicative competence in reported speech (Sharma, 2002). Learners require ample opportunities to engage with authentic language use, practice in real-world contexts, and receive meaningful feedback on their language production.

Socio-cultural factors also contribute to the challenges. The limited exposure to authentic uses of reported speech in everyday life can restrict learners' ability to internalize and apply the grammatical rules effectively (Sharma, 2002).

From a transformational-generative grammar perspective (Chomsky, 1965), the difficulties encountered by Nepali learners can be attributed to the complexities involved in applying the underlying rules of sentence transformation. The mismatch between the underlying rules of Nepali and English grammar can lead to errors in applying these transformations. Furthermore, Halliday's (1994) functional grammar perspective highlights the importance of understanding the communicative functions of reported speech. By focusing on the communicative purposes of reported speech, instruction can be more effectively tailored to meet the learners' needs and enhance their ability to use reported speech meaningfully.

Learners often encounter reported speech exclusively in classroom settings, which limits their ability to use it communicatively. The lack of varied and meaningful contexts restricts the internalization of this grammatical structure (Sharma, 2002).

The learners' diverse linguistic, educational, and socio-cultural backgrounds result in varied understandings of grammatical concepts, including reported speech. This diversity makes it more challenging to teach reported speech effectively (Adhikary, 2019).

English requires strict back shifting of tenses when transforming direct to indirect speech, a feature absent in Nepali. As a result, learners frequently make errors related to tense changes. For example:

Direct Speech: "I am going to school."

1. Incorrect Indirect Speech: He said he is going to school.

2. Correct Indirect Speech: He said he was going to school.

Nepali learners face difficulties in reporting questions due to differences in syntactic rules. While Nepali maintains the same word order when reporting questions, English requires that the structure follow that of a statement. For instance:

Direct Speech: "What are you doing?"

Incorrect Indirect Speech: He asked what are you doing.

Correct Indirect Speech: He asked what I was doing.

Errors in reported speech are often due to the structural and syntactic interference from Nepali. For example, learners may omit the auxiliary verb or misuse conjunctions like that, if, or whether (Sharma, 2002).

Current English textbooks for Nepali learners fail to provide sufficient exercises for practicing the complexities of reported speech, particularly tense shifts and question transformations. By identifying the specific areas where learners struggle, educators can tailor their instruction to address these challenges effectively. This may involve focusing on specific grammatical rules, providing targeted practice exercises, and incorporating error analysis into the learning process.

To sum up, the findings of this analysis underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by Nepali learners in acquiring reported speech. By addressing these challenges through a combination of communicative approaches, explicit instruction, and the use of authentic materials, educators can effectively support learners in developing their proficiency in reported speech and enhance their overall communicative competence in English.

Recommendations

The learners, teachers, syllabus designers, textbook writers and supplementary material producers are role players in the teaching and learning process. The main role of these agents is to assist the teachers and the learners. Effective teaching and learning is impossible without the proper co-ordination between the role players and the knowledge of the linguistic background of the learners. Based on the findings, several pedagogical implications can be drawn. Emphasizing communicative activities, incorporating task-based learning, providing explicit instruction, utilizing authentic materials, and integrating technology-enhanced learning tools can effectively support learners in developing their proficiency in reported speech (Nguyen, 2018).

(1) While designing the syllabus of English for the Nepali learners significant distinct characteristics of English reported speech should be taken into consideration.

(2) While writing the textbooks of English

the reported speech should be presented in such a way that the learners can easily master the process of back shift and the process of changing the questions in to reported speech in English.

(3) Keeping in view, the dissimilarities between English and Nepali reported speech and the errors made by the learners in the formation of the reported speech in English we are required to describe and explain the structures of the reported in detail and appropriate exercises should be provided for the practice of the structures.

(4) In the context of Nepal where English is mostly taught in the mother tongue we should slightly modify the way of the presentation and practice of the grammatical items. The teacher besides enabling the learners to conceptualize the functions of the reported speech in appropriate situations he/ she should make them practice the structures so that they will not make errors in the formation of reported in English.

(5) The prescribed textbook does not provide enough exercises for the reported speech. While teaching the reported speech the focus should be in the teaching and practice of tense change and the 'structures' of reporting of direct questions in reported speech. The students should be provided with enough exercises especially in changing tenses for the students.

(6) The English syllabus should explicitly address the unique features of reported speech, with particular attention to tense

back-shifting and the transformation of questions. This will help learners understand the grammatical rules more effectively.

(7) Textbooks should include comprehensive explanations of reported speech rules, numerous examples to illustrate differences between direct and indirect speech, and a wide range of exercises focused on tense shifts, pronoun changes, and the transformation of questions.

(8) Teachers should emphasize continuous practice of reported speech through interactive activities such as role plays, sentence transformations, and error correction tasks. These activities will help reinforce correct usage.

(9) Teachers should identify common errors and tailor interventions to address these mistakes. For example, focusing on correct use of auxiliary verbs in reported questions or ensuring consistent tense back-shifting.

(10) In Nepal, where English is often taught alongside the learners' native language, teachers should present reported speech in contexts that resonate with students. Examples might include discussing news reports, narrating real-life events, or drawing on Nepali discourse to highlight differences from English.

(11) Schools should provide supplementary resources, such as worksheets, online exercises, and grammar-focused apps, to complement classroom teaching and allow

for individual practice outside of class.

(12) Teachers should receive training in handling linguistic challenges and use innovative strategies, such as contrastive analysis, to aid students in understanding the differences between Nepali and English reported speech.

(13) Regular assessments on reported speech should be conducted, with follow-up feedback sessions to address errors. Detailed explanations of common mistakes will help learners improve their understanding and usage.

Conclusion

The study found that Nepali students face significant difficulties in learning reported speech, particularly when transforming direct questions into indirect ones. A key finding from the data is that errors related to tense changes had the highest percentage, indicating that reported speech remains a challenging topic for students. This difficulty, especially in tense transformation, suggests that students' mastery of reported speech is still limited.

These findings align with the earlier observations regarding the linguistic challenges in mastering reported speech, such as difficulties with tense shifts and question transformations. As suggested, addressing these specific challenges requires tailored teaching strategies that focus on tense back-shifting, providing clear explanations of pronoun changes, and offering sufficient practice opportunities to build confidence and competence in reported speech. Moreover, the students' mindset and motivation towards grammar should be nurtured through engaging and contextually relevant teaching methods, as recommended in previous sections (Sharma, 2002; Adhikary, 2019).

The high error rate, particularly in tense change, confirms the need for focused attention on this aspect in both curriculum design and classroom practice, as well as the incorporation of more exercises in textbooks and supplementary materials to support learners in overcoming these difficulties.

References

Adhikari, M. (2019). Challenges of teaching grammar to Nepali learners. *Journal of Language Education,* 7, 25-36.

Adhikari, P. (2019). Linguistics contrast and error analysis in English grammar: Implications for Nepalese learners. Language in Nepal: *Perspectives and Practices*, 6, 23-38.

Agnihotri, R. K. (1988). *Second language acquision: Socio- psychological and linguistic aspects.* SAGE Publication

Azar, B. (2002). *Understanding English Grammar* (third ed.). Pearson.

Bhattarai,G.R, & Adhikari, B. (2008). An experience of tranlating Nepalese grammar into English: A journal by Nepalese Linguistics. *Linguistics Society of Nepal*: Kathmandu.

Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen- Freeman, D. (1999). *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course.* Heinl and Heinle.

Chomskey, N. (1965). *Aspects of theory of syntax.* MIT press.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (fourth ed.). SAGE Publications.

Crystel, D. (2003). *English as a global language.* Cambridge University Press.

Dhakal, M. (2020). Challenges in learning reported speech: A case study of Nepalese EFL learners. *Journal of English Education and Development,* 8, 34-50.

Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding second language acquisition* (second ed.). Oxford University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (Second ed.). Edward Arnold.

Kumar, R.(2014). *Research methodology*. Sage Publication

Leech, G, & Svartvik, J. (2013). *A communicative grammarof English* (Third ed.). Routhledge.

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Heinle & Heinle.

Nguyen, T. T. (2018). Common errors in using reported speech by Vietnamesese EFL learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature,* 97-105.

Pokharel, S. (1997). *History and development of Nepali language.* Kathmandu Press.

Richards, J.C., & Schimidt, R.. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (fourth ed.). Routhledge.

Sharma, K.P. (2002). *A Comparative study of reported speech in Nepali and English.* Kathmandu

Swan, M. (2005). *Pratical English Usage* (third ed.). Oxford University Press.

Thompson, A. J., & Martinet, A. V. (1986). *A practical English grammar* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Thronby, S. (1999). *Uncovering grammar.* Macmillan Education.

Ur, P. (1996). *A course in languag teaching: practice and theory.* Cambridge University Press.