

REPORTED SPEECH WITHIN MOODLE TESTS. ASSESSING GRAMMAR ASPECTS OF INDIRECT SPEECH

Ioana-Claudia HOREA, Rodica BOGDAN

Department of International Business, Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania

ioanahorea@gmail.com

bogdan_r_30@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Reported Speech or Indirect Speech is widely used in the formal register of the language, as at the level of professional communication collocutors are more likely to be interested in sending or respectively receiving the message that a certain job or task has been done instead of emphasising who the author or the performer is. Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), as professional communication devices, witness multiple instances of Indirect speech communication, hence the need of having such structures much discussed and often practised with our students in economics and with the students in law, during their language classes. A facility thoroughly implemented and largely used with all categories of students in our higher education institution in the time of the recent pandemic, namely the Moodle platform, brings about the online testing tool. This provides the possibility of numerous, accurate, quick self-evaluation tests that can be performed not only at class during the practical courses but also, if such set, at any time the teachers consider proper and allow it, due to the availability of this e-learning platform to all our students, with private accounts, wherever they have internet and a valid device to access it properly. The language teachers can employ this facility creating short tests that would quickly assess knowledge of language, acquisition of grammar aspects and ability to make good use of the structures belonging to the reported speech. With the instant feedback provided by the application, self-evaluations and improvement of knowledge by repeated self-evaluations become available and much valuable tools for hundreds of students, with no more need of corrections from the teachers, a time-saving and very useful learning and testing facility. This paper puts forward some examples of such tests, created by the authors and used during their classes or set for their students' individual practice. The examples given can be of help to other language instructors who have the possibility to use Moodle or a similar application and are willing to provide their learners with a modern tool of learning and testing, much appreciated by the students as well.*

Keywords: *Reported Speech; LSP; language assessment; Moodle tests.*

JEL Classification: *Z19*

1. Preliminary considerations

Following the recent pandemics, at least one aspect - a quite important one - can be retrieved as a relevant development in the educational process in our institution, namely the still ongoing availability of the Moodle platform for regular students, i.e. day learning (not only for those in distance learning). This facility still valid, it allows teachers to post theoretical information that can be easily accessed by students at any time, providing more opportunity for the latter to revisit and reinforce knowledge than previously, when they solely relied on the printed materials or, even less, on what was written on whiteboards or blackboards or projected from laptops during classes. As at least in our institution, this support - characteristic to the previous, 'forced' online schooling - is luckily preserved and we can benefit from the good practice of our institution providing each student an account on the Moodle platform and registering them to the courses of the current academic year.

2. Moodle as a regular support

Introducing Moodle to regular grammar classes seems to have been a good practice since a long while already, at least in some institutions. Plomteux discusses as early as 2013 the idea of "changing the status of learning platforms primarily designed for distance learning to integrate them in classroom work. In doing so, we could take advantage of the many reasons why a learning platform and an online course are better than typical old-fashioned classroom teaching: versatility of exercises, statistical tools and possibility of catering for different needs for each student." (Plomteux, 2013)

Thus, not only information is much easier transmitted and available at any time, but also numerous practical activities can be put at the students' disposal. These might be not only of the category restricted to online exercises, tests or other activities available during seminars or practical classes, but also other types of drills, with 'unlimited' time span, i.e. within extensive deadlines or featuring re-opened access for certain intervals of interest (before exams for instance), as assignments along the semester, very useful for reinforcement of knowledge, for revision of material, for self-evaluation a.s.o.

2.1. Grammar with Moodle

From our experience and not only, Moodle is perfect for just reinforcing basic grammar knowledge, providing theoretical support in a nutshell. It is common sense that Moodle alone cannot replace the direct, live grammar teaching lessons, cannot

replace the explanations of teachers in the various contexts, considering all aspects that might appear in face to face interactions. As noticed by other instructors and researchers in the field "the background of the students sometimes doesn't make them able to do the lesson on their own, with only the Moodle lesson and their general knowledge. Grammatical terminology, which is necessary to describe grammar facts and formulate rules, is not mastered at a sufficient degree by all students, and this weakness can prevent them from completing the lesson successfully." (Plomteux, 2018)

Several language teachers and researchers have been preoccupied with the idea of how grammar aspects could be best rendered through e-learning platforms. Ahmad et al. have researched into "developing instructional material of teaching grammar through Moodle" (Ahmad et al., 2022). Very relevant and instructive discussions can be found on the dedicated platform (Moodle.org), as held by several stakeholders such as Matt Bury, Mary Cooch, James Steerpike, about online teaching and learning through YouTube or Moodle, with several references, Even particular aspects are here referred and linked, such as the flipped approaches, generally comprising methods implying that 'students watch instructional videos in their own time, before coming to class where they can work together on practical problems, applying the knowledge they have gained from the instructional video.' (Kerr, 2020)

2.2. Aspects of Reported Speech

From the numerous topics of grammar that are of extensive use in professional communication, one of much relevance especially with the students in the first year of studies in economics is the Reported Speech. Very much met in the authentic texts and drills on various fields of economics, the Indirect Speech constructions are a common place for the reader of a business text. The skills of accurately transforming or transposing a direct speech structure into an the indirect speech one or vice-versa are of utmost importance in clearly understanding what is communicated or, on the other hand, in rendering a correct enunciation, with no ambiguous aspects that might impede perception of the right message. Professional communication by its nature is prone to changes of register and to the need of retelling something. Let's just imagine discussions between colleagues as referring to a recent business meeting, the transmission of info hierarchically or horizontally within a organization, the presentation of diverse situations to others involved a.s.o. As Ellie Pedrazzi notices "The indirect approach is a more refined and subtle technique" to be employed in a business environment when addressing to peers, colleagues or employers. (Pedrazzi, 2020)

It can be sometimes useful to indicate the students various sites where things are clearly explained and comprehension checking is also provided through short tests, such as <https://www.wallstreetenglish.com/exercises/direct-and-indirect-speech-exercises> or <https://www.businessenglish.com/grammar/indirect-speech.html?lang=eng>, but these are ancillary to the classes and the materials directly provided, as any other bibliography. Such resources can also be added on Moodle as links to the webpages of interest but we hereafter will refer only to the straightforward materials that can be created on the platform by the teachers, on the page of the discipline, and will remain there available as long as the access on the account is granted, being direct Moodle facilities and applications.

3. Availability of theoretical support

Along with customised expositions, presentations and explanations provided by language teachers during face to face interactions, some basic rules can be drawn and made available on platform pages as permanent resources that can instantly remind students the most important aspects of the grammar topic at stake, for instance of the reported speech as in the case of the current presentation. Appealing Moodle resources such as Page, Label, Book can make this grammar post more attractive than a simple uploaded file resource. Even that, anyway, is better and obviously more effective than none.

3.1. Grammar material on Reported speech in Business English

The following examples of grammar info posts, Figures 1a-c, are from the page of the discipline of a course of Business English I.1 taught to first year economic students in our Faculty, namely to students in International business.

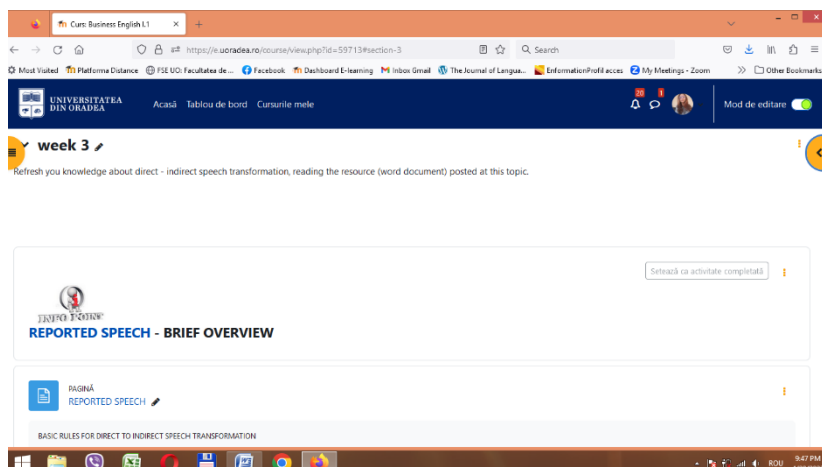


Figure 1a. Layout of the page section with the grammar point available

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

As seen in Figure 1a, a resource webpage was created within the page of the discipline, and a suggestive label was made to introduce it.

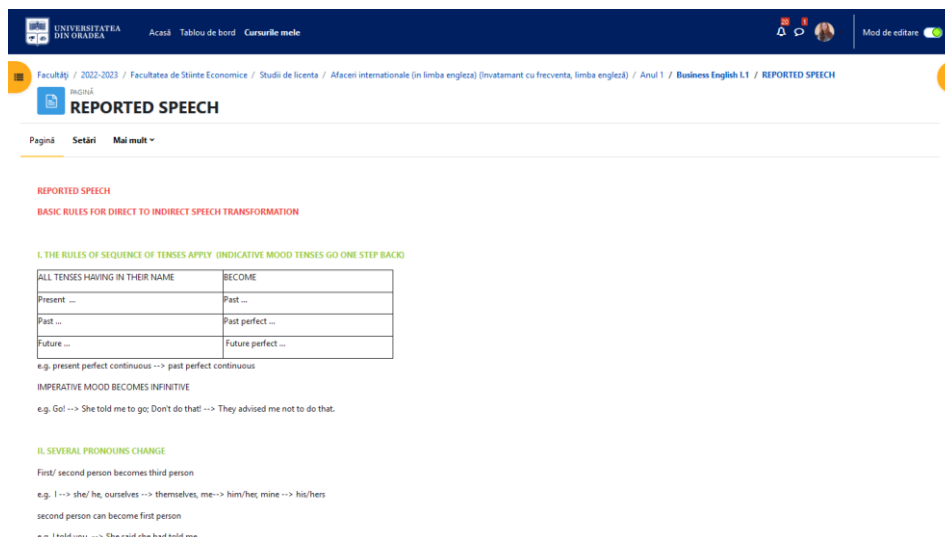


Figure 1b. Grammar info resource webpage - upper half

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

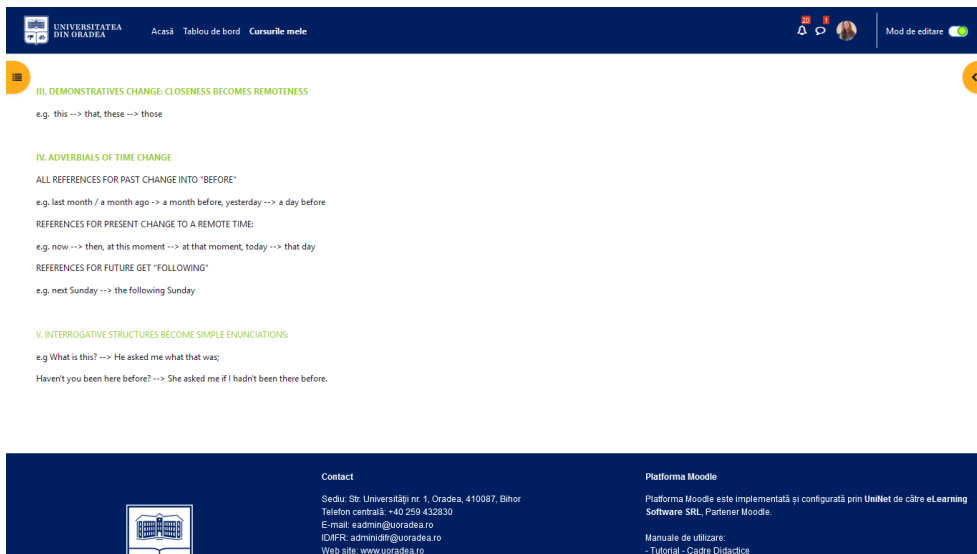


Figure 1c. Grammar info resource webpage - lower half

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

As seen in the images above, by accessing the link, the web page opens and the grammar info is displayed. It is there found on the same screen scrolling down. Here it is presented separated in Figures 1b and c, for reasons of visibility, as the complete info is too long to be clearly visible if arranged on one single screen.

3.2. Grammar material on Reported speech in French for Business

For briefly reminding the students the theoretical material on direct-indirect speech in French, the moodle application resource named "book" was used. It was given a title clearly indicating the content of the material, "Du discours direct au discours indirect", and the information was structured into four short 'chapters', namely the subtitles seen in Figures 2a-d.



Figure 2a. Creation of content in subtitle 1

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>



Figure 2b. Creation of content in subtitle 2

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

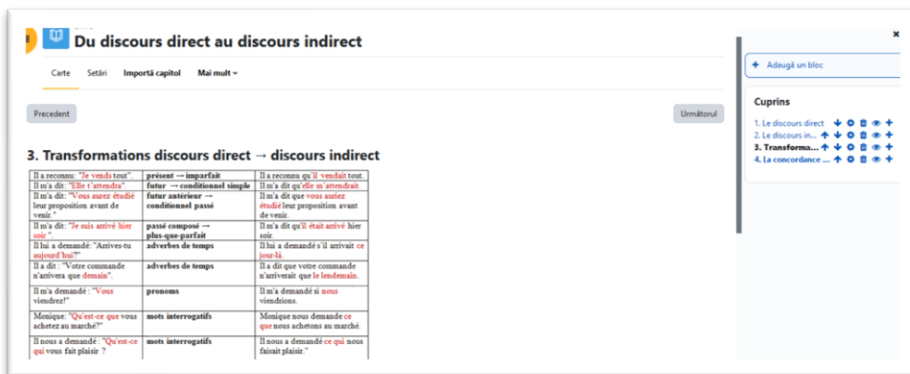


Figure 2c. Creation of content in subtitle 3

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

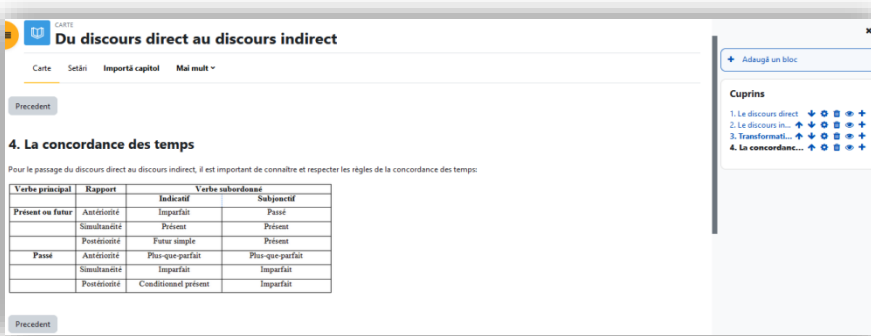


Figure 2d. Creation of content in subtitle 4

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

The result is a straightforwardly and easily accessible online presentation, with an appealing layout and facile browsing back and forth through the four subtitles, by

use of the arrows 'previous' and 'next'. The way the link to the material appears on the page of the discipline and then two of the four pages as they are displayed to the students accessing the link are exemplified in Figures 2e respectively 2f and 2g.

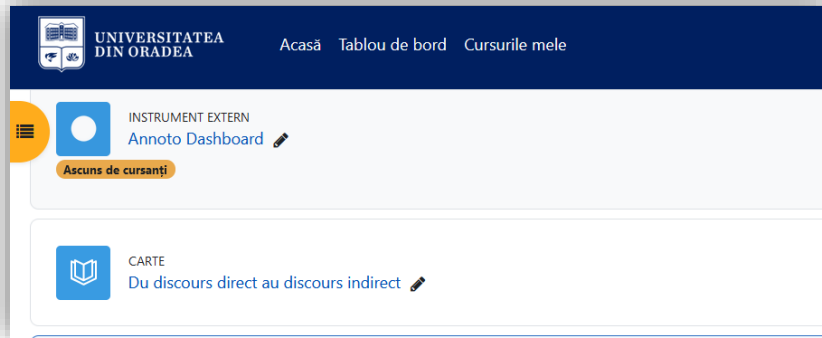


Figure 2e. Access button for the grammar info 'booklet', on discipline's page

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

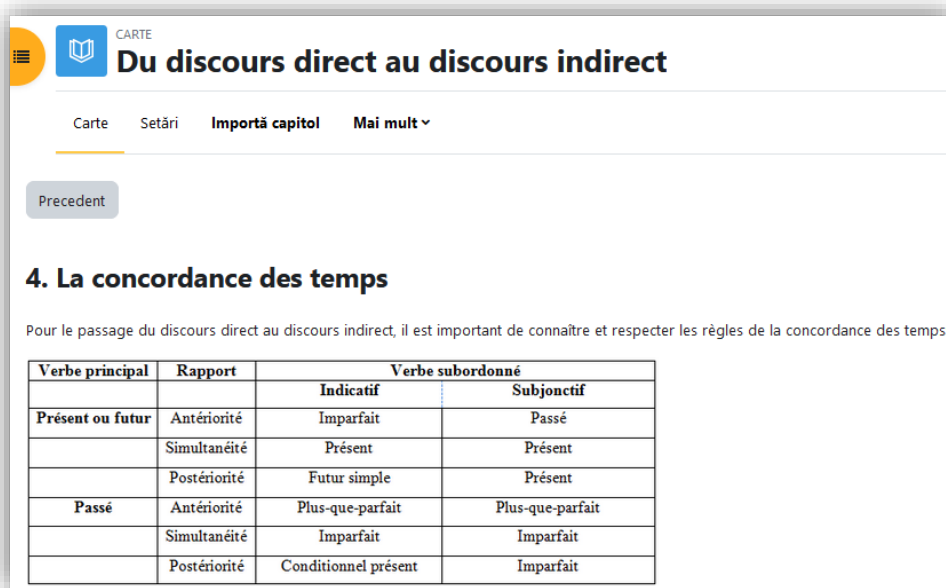


Figure 2f. Example of students' view - page 4 of the 'booklet'

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

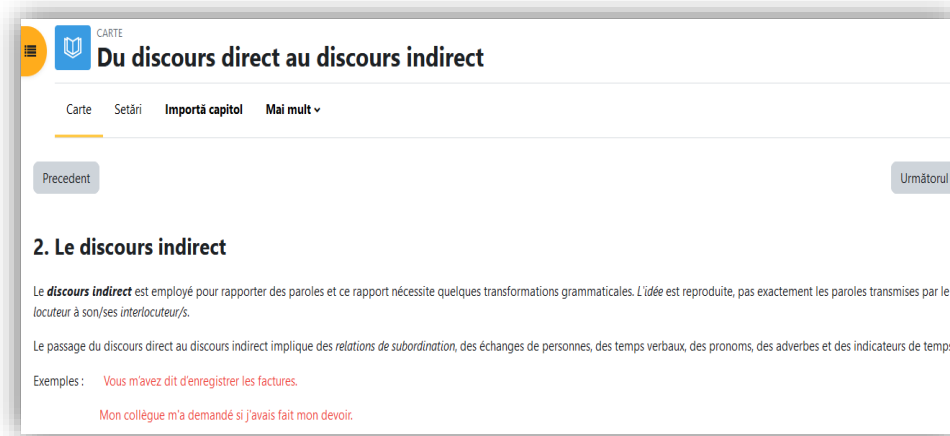


Figure 2g. Example of students' view - page 2 of the 'booklet'

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

4. Testing facilities

The most common type of exercise solving, allowing more possibilities of self assessing and of learning through the feedback the application provides, is the Moodle activity named 'Test', and this is the one that is going to be exemplified here further. Of course, other Moodle activities are also possible, for instance forums and assessments can be also made useful, but we chose to consider here the one we saw as most appropriate for our purpose.

4.1. Testing Indirect Speech for Business English


The following examples of tests are from the page of the discipline of a course of Business English I.1 taught to first year economic students in our Faculty, namely to students in International business.

The exercise exemplified below is created using the embedded answer (cloze) question type and the various elements introduced in the encoding process render the different sections of the final exercise that appears on the test when accessed.

Figure 3a below shows the exercise page section containing the primary data input, the instruction and the preliminary exercise. The elements in this section appear as a result of image insertion and ready text inclusion in the body of the question, followed by the creation of some boxes to be filled in with the right numbers. This last mentioned device is produced by means of the coding instruction "NUMERICAL", used as seen in Figure 3b, in the image that represents a screen capture of the field 'text of the question', presenting the way that particular part of the material was introduced and encoded, in the exercise production page.

1 Intrebare
Nu a primit
raspuns in4
Marcat din
10,00

Consider the following image of a campsite in the early '80s.



Write the corresponding number near the questions beneath and choose the appropriate variant for the reported speech structures following:

What have you been eating?

Does she cry at night?

Have you locked the car, Tom?


Where can I get some water?

Are you going to the disco tonight?

Figure 3a. Exercise page - data input and instructions

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

Consider the following image of a campsite in the early '80s.



Write the corresponding number near the questions beneath and choose the appropriate variant for the reported speech structures following:

What have you been eating? {1:NUMERICAL:=4}

Does she cry at night? {1:NUMERICAL:=3}

Have you locked the car, Tom? {1:NUMERICAL:=1}

Where can I get some water? {1:NUMERICAL:=5}

Are you going to the disco tonight? {1:NUMERICAL:=2}

Figure 3b. Encoding process - image and text insertion and use of the instruction 'NUMERICAL'

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

The indirect speech test proper comes next in the page section shown in Figures 3 c and d, and its layout here is a result of the use of the encoding instruction for multiple choice drills with one correct answer (as noticed in the layout with radio buttons)

and with variants vertically arranges, namely the 'MCV' instruction as it appears in Figure 3e.

She asked them ___ eating.

Oif they had been

Owhat had they been

Owhat they had been

Oif they were

Owhat have they been

He wanted to know ___ at night.

Oif the baby girl cries

Owhen she cried

Othat the baby girl cried

Owhat does the girl cry

Oif she cried

He asked Tom ___ locked the car.

O that the boy

Oif he had

Oif he has

Ohave you

Oif has he

Figure 3c. Exercise page - multiple choice drill testing Indirect Speech part 1

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

Oif has he

She asked the campsite attendant ___ some water.

Oshe can gets

Oif can she got

Owhere she could get

Owhere she gets

Owhere can she get

She asked him if ___ to the disco ___.

Ohe is going - tonight

Owas he going - that night

Ois he going - tonight

Ohe was going - that night

Ohe was going - last night

Începeți din nou Salvează Completează răspunsurile corecte Trimite și finalizează Închide previzualizare

▶ Comentarii

Figure 3d. Exercise page - multiple choice drill testing Indirect Speech part 2

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

As well as in the example above, the image seeable in Figure 3e is, again, another snapshot of the field 'text of the question' in the exercise production page.

She asked them ___ eating. {1:MCV:if they had been~what had they been~what they had been~if they were~what have they been}

He wanted to know ___ at night. {1:MCV:if the baby girl cries~when she cried~that the baby cried~what does the girl cry~if she cried}

He asked Tom ___ locked the car. {1:MCV: that the boy~if he had~if he has~have you~if has he}

She asked the campsite attendant ___ some water. {1:MCV: she can gets~if can she got~ where she could get~where she gets~where can she get}

She asked him if ___ to the disco ___. {1:MCV: he is going - tonight~was he going - that night~is he going - tonight~he was going - that night~he was going - last night}

Figure 3e. Encoding process - use of 'MCV' to create the multiple choice drill with vertical aspect
Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713>

4.2. Testing Indirect Speech in French Language for Business

A first example of an exercise is one in which the students merely have to identify between direct and indirect speech. They are given a series of structures and asked to mark the direct speech structures writing "d", respectively the indirect speech structures writing "i", in the cell next to them. This exercise was produced using the embedded answer (cloze) exercise type, specifically the instruction "shortanswer" for the introduction of the blank cells that are to be filled by the students with the mentioned letters. The page of the exercise creation process is seen in Figure 4a.

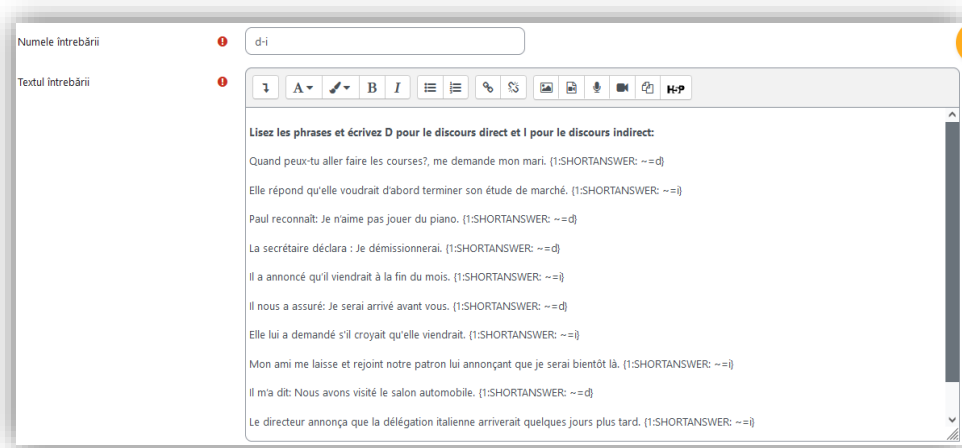


Figure 4a. Creating the 'shortanswer' type exercise

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

The resulting page, i.e. the test page that will appear to the students will contain the cell to be filled in as required, namely with "d" or "i" depending on the type of discourse they identify. The layout of the exercise as when accessed by the students is shown in Figure 4b, with the first cell filled in by us, as an exemplification.

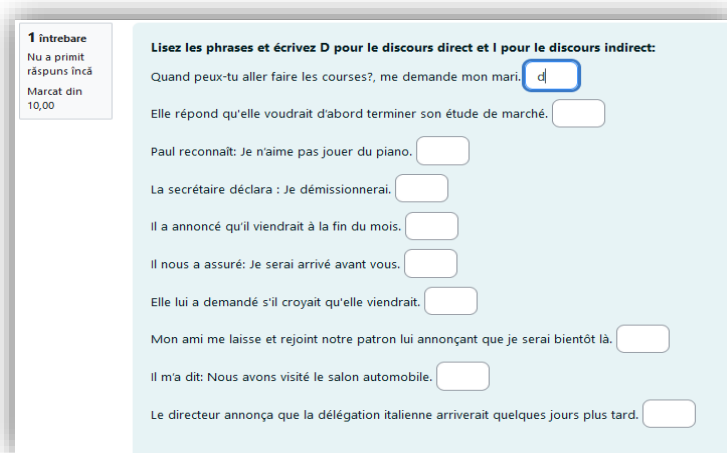


Figure 4b. Shortanswer type - resulting test page

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

Another exercise requires the students to choose the right structure from three variants. Such type of test can be created in several ways, using diverse multiple choice production drills. For the example here, what was opted for was the inline 'multichoice' instruction within the embedded answer cloze type of question, with an encoding procedure as seen in Figure 4c.

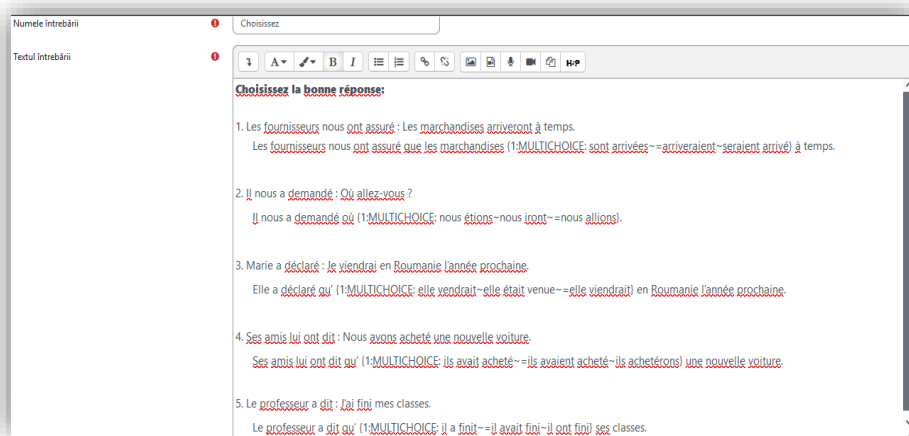


Figure 4c. Production of 'multichoice' drills with inline selection boxes

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

The resulting page is a neat exercise in which the students press the arrow at the end of the selection boxes and choose the variant they consider correct, from the three structures displayed at the drop-down arrow field. Figure 4d provides the screenshot of the final layout of the exercise, showing also the content of one of the selection

fields, with the variants visible at the dropdown arrow (by keeping the button pressed while taking the snapshot).

1 întrebare
Nu a primit răspuns încă
Marcat din 5,00

Choisissez la bonne réponse:

1. Les fournisseurs nous ont assuré : Les marchandises arriveront à temps.
Les fournisseurs nous ont assuré que les marchandises à temps.

2. Il nous a demandé : Où allez-vous ?
Il nous a demandé où .

3. Marie a déclaré : Je viendrai en Roumanie l'année prochaine.
Elle a déclaré qu' en Roumanie l'année prochaine.

4. Ses amis lui ont dit : Nous avons acheté une nouvelle voiture.
Ses amis lui ont dit qu' une nouvelle voiture.

5. Le professeur a dit : J'ai fini mes classes.
Le professeur a dit qu' ses classes.

sont arrivées
arriveraient
seraient arrivés

Figure 4d. Layout of the 'multichoice' exercise

Source: own production on the page of the discipline <https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084>

5. Conclusion

Valid as supplementary support, the Moodle platform can be made of much good use in current teaching and learning as well. Appreciated for the diversity it brings, for the availability of material at any time, for the large audience with reduced resources (no need to use so much paper, no painstaking actions of mistakes corrections as in regular live classes with exercises written on printed support) and, most relevant, for the possibility of extensive numbers of tests to be taken at once and with feedback instantly provided, in our view, the Moodle facilities are surely devices to be kept at least as extra aid and at least in higher education.

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Sites:

Moodle.org: <https://moodle.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=435160>

<https://www.wallstreetenglish.com/exercises/direct-and-indirect-speech-exercises>

<https://www.businessenglish.com/grammar/indirect-speech.html?lang=eng>

Pages on the institutional e-learning platform:

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=59713> - for English

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=20084> - for French