

# The Case of the Disappearing “That”

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## **Abstract**

When people learn their native language they automatically pick up many grammar and usage rules without even considering the reason why they are correct. However, when people learn a foreign language, they frequently learn the rules first and then learn to apply these rules, which is something that native speakers rarely do at the beginning levels. In secondary school, native speakers may be taught that some of the language they use is not the accepted standard. But apart from that, they rarely have the need to consider what the rules are. As a result, it is common to find that native speakers are perfectly capable of using a certain grammar point correctly but are totally unable to explain the reason why it is correct. In this paper, we are looking into such a point. Our research was in order to answer a very simple question raised by a student: when do we include or omit the word “that” in indirect speech? This is a question that most native speakers would be unable to answer to their student’s satisfaction, and indeed our research into grammar books also shows that many writers of grammar books are equally unable to explain satisfactorily. Many books simply say it is “optional” but rarely go into details of explaining why and when it is optional. So exactly why and when does “that” disappear? This paper has been written as an attempt to give more complete answers to solve the Case of the Disappearing “That”.

## **Introduction**

The motivation for writing this paper came from a simple question asked by a student about English usage. This student asked the Japanese teacher co-authoring this paper what the difference was between using “that” or omitting “that” in sentences like “He said that he was going” (as compared with “He said he was

going”). The Japanese teacher of course answered, “There is no difference. They’re both the same.” The student persisted by asking, “Well, which one is better to use?” To this, the Japanese teacher, realizing that he had never really thought about it, answered, “I don’t know. I’ll ask one of my native speaker colleagues.” When the Japanese teacher asked his native speaker colleague (his fellow co-author of this paper) what the difference was, the native speaker answered, “There is no difference. They’re both the same.” The Japanese teacher persisted by asking, “Well, which one is better to use?” To this, the native speaker teacher, realizing that he also had never really thought about it, answered, “I don’t know. Let’s check it out.”

At this point, both of us realized that we were giving our students a correct answer (“There is no difference.”), but it was an answer which we as language learners ourselves would not be satisfied to hear. We would naturally want to know the best way. When we hear or read things in a foreign language, in other words, when we are in the receptive mode, there is no problem in accepting that more than one way is possible. But when it comes to the active mode (speaking or writing), students frequently ask their teachers to give advice as to which way is better to use, or they hesitate or switch unnecessarily between one way and another when speaking; and as language learners both authors had frequently faced the same problem.

For this reason, we decided to investigate the matter and co-author a paper giving the results of our investigations, judging that these results would not be of interest only to us but to all other fellow teachers who have been asked such a question.

### **Similar research in the past**

In previous papers (Jones, 2007; 2008; 2012; 2013), the situation with another problem of modern English usage (conditional “was” or “were” after “if”) was researched using a two-pronged approach: (1) by examining the changes in the explanations in English grammar books over the last 100 years on the one hand, and (2) by analyzing written and spoken data from literature and videos of the last 20 years on the other hand. The results showed that there had been a steady change in the explanations given in English grammar and usage books. The attitude 100 years ago was that conditional “was” after “if” was substandard and should be restricted to informal colloquial usage. There was a period of change continuing up to 1980s,

when “were” after “if” was still the preferred form but it was admitted that some people used “was”. However, from the 1990s the attitude changed to considering that “was” after “if” was the normal form but some people still used “were”. Particularly from the year 2000, grammar books no longer referred to the use of the subjunctive, but stated that the verb used after “if” was in the indicative past tense.

### **Method for present paper**

In this paper we will follow the same two-pronged approach, looking at the explanations regarding the use or non-use of “that” in grammar books over recent years and analyzing the use or non-use of “that” in selected works of literature over the last 300 years.

One of the findings of Jones (2013), which came to light shortly before publication, was that English grammar books written in Japanese seemed to be extremely conservative, compared with English grammar books written in English, in that the only two English grammar books investigated that were written in Japanese were still referring to the use of “be” after “if” in the first conditional, something that had long since disappeared from the English grammar books written in English. Bearing this in mind, we will investigate the explanations given in both English grammar books written in English and grammar books written in Japanese, to see if there is any difference between them.

We will also investigate the attitudes displayed in grammar books towards the use or non-use of “that”. With the use of “was” or “were” in second conditionals, statements in grammar and usage books of the past showed that there was definitely a stigma attached to the use of “was”. But our own feelings about the difference between the use and non-use of “that” are that there is no idea of any stigma being attached to either of the uses.

To investigate the data from works of literature, we selected works from as many different eras as possible, as well as choosing works from writers that will show if there is any difference between usage in the UK and the US or between male and female writers.

When collecting data from literature, we immediately realized that it would be impossible to consider all examples of use or non-use of “that”. If we look at the following example of the use of “that”, it will be clear what problems are involved.

“I’m sure that she will say that the belief that I have that he will come will prove

to be correct.”

Clearly, this is not an example of natural or authentic English; it sounds just like a question from an entrance test asking students to distinguish between the different grammatical functions of “that”. Nevertheless, the sentence shows examples of cases in which “that” can be omitted, and also shows that “that” can come not only after verbs, but also after nouns and even adjectives and other parts of speech. It also shows that “that” can be used for various grammatical functions.

For this reason, considering the time that would be taken to search for all types of occurrence and the space limits for this journal, it was decided to restrict the investigation to examples of indirect speech, specifically those coming after the verbs “say” and “tell”.

### **Description of indirect speech**

In traditional grammar, it is fairly easy to describe the structure involved after “say” and “tell”. The following are simple examples, with the actual words (direct speech) in Line 1, a question in Line 2 and the answer (indirect/reported speech) in Line 3.

A: I am coming.

A: I am coming.

B: What did you say?

B: What did you tell him?

A: I said (that) I was coming.

A: I told him (that) I was coming.

Or,

A: I am coming.

A: I am coming.

B: What did he say?

B: What did he tell you?

C: He said (that) he was coming.

C: He told me (that) he was coming.

These typical examples of indirect speech are distinguished by the change in tense in the top set of three lines and the change in tense and subject in the second set of three lines; the possibility of using or omitting “that”; and the lack of quotation marks. If the actual words used in direct speech are given, they are enclosed in quotation marks.

However, when dealing with actual data, the situation sometimes is not so clear. Traditionally, after “He said/told”, the present tense in the original statement should change to the past tense. But in modern English, it is very common to hear or read indirect speech with no change in tense. Particularly, the following kind of example provides difficulties in categorization.

## The Case of the Disappearing “That”

A: I am coming.

B: What did you say?

A: I said I’m coming. (1) Or A: I said, “I’m coming.” (2)

In such cases, in Example (1) it is also possible to say “I said that I’m coming.”, whereas in Example (2) it is not possible to use “that”. Therefore, all cases of Example (1) have been included in the data, but cases of Example (2) have been excluded.

### **Explanations appearing grammar books**

To determine what advice to give to students who ask whether they should use “that” or omit “that”, we researched various English grammar books written in Japanese or English to see what the experts have to say regarding this problem.

What we were looking for was a clear explanation in these grammar books of the difference between inclusion and omission of “that”. What we were hoping to find was something which went beyond our own simple explanation of “There is no difference. They’re both the same.” In addition to this, we also hoped to find some information that would help us to advise our students as to which form is better to use.

### **Explanation of “that” in grammar books in Japanese**

Hashimoto (2007:122) explains that “that” as a conjunction used to be a demonstrative word in Old English (“þæt” [nominative case, neuter of the demonstrative word “sē” in Old English]). From a viewpoint of heredity, it seems that “that” still carries its original word image of demonstrativeness. In other words, “that” plays a role of guidance leading a *that*-clause which shows what someone says, tells, thinks, etc.

Keeping such image of “that” in mind, we would like to go through several grammar books sold in Japan and see how “that” along with a reporting verb (e.g., “say” or “tell”) is explained.

Investigating the limited number of grammar books for native speakers of Japanese learning English as a foreign language, we have so far checked how they explain “that” in sentences like “He says that she is honest.” According to those books, “that” is explained in either a section dealing with “Conjunction” or “Narration,” or both. We found in the books we investigated that three types of

explanation of “that” are observed, summarized as follows:

Type 1: “That” is omitted.

Type 2: “That” is omitted according to main verbs.

Type 3: “That” can be included or omitted according to the following situations:

(3a) The first “that” can be omitted when the main verb carries more than one *that*-clause in the same sentence.

(3b) “That” can be omitted when the connection between the main clause and the *that*-clause is clear.

(3c) “That” cannot be omitted when it clarifies the location of an adverbial phrase in the sentence.

**Type 1: “That” is omitted.**

Illustrating the following examples, Shimada (1962:268) points out that “that” as a subordinate conjunction is occasionally omitted.

(i) She said that she was right.

(ii) She said she was right.

Murata and Narita (1965:73) explain that “that” in the *that*-clause used as an object of the transitive verb can be omitted, and that it is often left out in a colloquial style (underlined by the authors of this paper). Miyai (1914:779) mentions that it is acceptable to delete “that” if the *that*-clause is comparatively simple or if “that” is unnecessary: “*He said (that) he would try.*”

**Type 2: “That” is omitted according to main verbs.**

Egawa (1975:352) explains that whether “that” can be omitted or not depends on which verb is used in the main clause of the sentence.

(iii) She said (**that**) she would come.

(iv) He admitted **that** he was wrong.

Like Example (iii), “that” is often omitted when a main verb (say, think, expect, believe, suppose, hope, imagine, remember, know, and wish) is used in the main clause of the sentence. However, Example (iv) has the main verb “admit,” and “that” stays as it is. Egawa describes that “that” is frequently used in a literary style; it is not left out of the subordinate clause. Verbs like “agree,” “learn,” “hold,” “maintain,” and “suggest” also need “that” in the subordinate clause. Ishibashi (ed.) (1998:858) state the same.

Nakahara (2010:527) mentions that “that” is omitted in many cases when the main verb of the sentence used in daily spoken English is a verb such as “say,” “tell,” “think,” “hope,” “wish,” “believe,” “know,” “suppose” that shows a *that*-clause as an

object of the verb. However, he also states that it is normal not to omit “that” when a main verb of the sentence is either “state,” “hold,” “maintain,” “conceive,” “assert,” “assume,” “reply,” or “suggest.”

(v) He says [that] it’s too late.

(vi) He maintained that she was innocent.

**Type 3: “That” can be included or omitted according to the following situations.**

**(3a) *The first “that” can be omitted when the main verb carries more than one that-clause in the same sentence.***

Egawa (1975:433) mentions that the first “that” can be omitted, but that the second “that” in both examples (vii’ and viii’) is necessary so as to prevent misunderstanding of the meaning of the message between the speaker and the listener. Without the second “that,” the sentences “he could not buy it” and “she was getting better” would be recognized as the ones stated by the speakers of the entire statements.

(vii) He said, “The watch is very expensive and I cannot buy it.”

(vii’) He said (that) the watch was very expensive and **that** he could not buy it.

(viii) She said, “I have been sick for a week, but I am getting better.”

(viii’) She said (that) she had been sick for a week, but **that** she was getting better.

**(3b) *“That” can be omitted when the connection between the main clause and the that-clause is clear.***

Ishibashi (ed.) (1998:858) explain that omission of “that” is desirable, especially in a colloquial style, because the main-subordinate clause relationship in the given context is clearly understood. Ogawa (1961:276) mentions that “that” is often omitted in a situation where “that” is clearly unnecessary, as in “*He said [that] he was tired.*”

In a book written some 115 years ago, Matsushima and Hoshino (eds.) (1898:391) explain that “that” is frequently omitted if the meaning of the sentence is clear even if “that” is not used:

“*He told me he would sent [sic] it him.*”

**(3c) *“That” cannot be omitted when it clarifies the location of an adverbial phrase in the sentence.***

Murata and Narita (1996:73) (cf. Example (ix)) and Ishibashi (ed.) (1998:858) (cf. Examples (x) and (x’)) explain that “that” is not omitted when an adverb or an adverbial phrase comes between the main verb and “that” so as to make the

meaning of the statement clear.

(ix) They told us once again *that the situation was serious*.

≠ They told us *that once again the situation was serious*.

(x) He told us yesterday *that* he had seen a glorious sight.

(x') He told us *that* yesterday he had seen a glorious sight.

We have observed how “that” is explained in the limited number of grammar books. Since they are mainly written and compiled for Japanese learners of English as a foreign language, it is necessary to first show learners how to use “that.” Then, they explain that “that” can or cannot be omitted in the cases mentioned above. Although we can categorize our findings as mentioned above, we have to make further investigations in grammar books in Japanese to clarify any difference between “that” and “no that” from the viewpoint of meaning.

### **Explanation of “that” in grammar books in English**

As described in the previous section, the English grammar books written in Japanese explain that there are three possibilities regarding the inclusion or omission of “that”. There were several descriptions, which in some cases were not very informative; in other cases, new information was added, but it was different for each book.

Based on these findings, we looked at the information in the grammar books written in English. As with the books in Japanese, an investigation was carried out on books covering a large span of years, ranging from Fowler’s classic *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926) to various books written since the year 2000, including the massive tome by Huddleston and Pullum (2004). What we actually found in the books written in English was a confusing variety of comments and suggestions which in many cases were of little or no help whatsoever, such as “optional” or “can be omitted”. The plan had been to investigate more books, but the data were already becoming so confusing that it was decided to leave investigation of any remaining grammar books in English until a later date.

After the tedious task of noting down all the examples and explanations, we attempted to fit all the descriptions into the following categories, this time, not according to the types given in the section on books written in Japanese, but according to how the explanations were (or were not) given.

A. Explains only “that” (does not accept “no that”)

## The Case of the Disappearing “That”

- B. Gives “(that)” without explanation (says only “optional” or “can be omitted”)
- C. Gives “(that)” with explanation
- D. Explains “that” and “no that” with examples
- E. Gives “that” and “no that” without explanation

This categorization turned out to be not as easy as it seemed, because many of the books had self-contradictory information in different places, or what was even more confusing, apparently self-contradictory explanations in consecutive paragraphs. In addition, some books gave no explanation; however, a closer investigation revealed that an explanation of the inclusion or omission of “that” was in fact given on a totally different page from the explanation of indirect speech, but with no cross-reference given. For this reason, the following two categories had to be added.

- F. Self-contradictory: says “that” but gives examples of “no that”; or vice versa
- G. Explains “that” and “no that”, but on a completely different page, with no cross-reference

The following is a summary of the explanations given in the books in each of the above categories.

### **Category A: Explains only “that” (does not accept “no that”)**

The following is a statement from Partridge (1947): “The omission of the conjunction of *that* sometimes causes a momentary confusion.” (p. 330). It should be remembered here that Partridge was giving advice to university students as to the “correct” forms of English to use when writing reports, so his statement applies only to written English. This is a perfectly reasonable statement, because in the case of written English, intonation and stress are in the eyes of the reader, as opposed to spoken English, where intonation and stress is provided by the speaker. Therefore, while in written English there may be “momentary confusion”, in spoken English the meaning would normally be clear. However, Partridge goes on to state “this defect is much commoner in American than in English writers.”

It can be seen from this, that for Partridge the omission of “that” is not an option, but a defect. A similar attitude that the inclusion of “that” is the norm is displayed by Dixson (1943) in a book that consists of grammar explanations followed by practice exercises. Dixson causes some confusion by explaining the use of “say/tell” and indirect speech in two separate sections in his book. In both sections, he introduces the indirect speech form after the reporting verbs and invariably includes the conjunction *that*. However, in the exercise for “say/tell” (p. 88), which is a fill-in-the-

blank exercise, the task is simply to select the past tense of either “say” or “tell”. There are 10 questions: the subordinate clause is already given and in every case it starts with (*that*). There is no indication of whether (*that*) indicates that “that” is optional, or whether it is a reminder not to forget “that”. It is totally unexplained.

In the indirect speech section (p. 132), Dixson’s only explanation is the reminder to change the tense of the verb in the subordinate clause to the past tense; the example answer includes the conjunction “that”. To confuse matters, there is a reference to the exercise on page 94 (an exercise on the sequence of tenses), where the task is to change a sentence in the present tense to a sentence in the past tense, as in the following example: “She says her name is Smith” (note that there is no “that”). This seems to indicate that “that” is omitted when the verbs are in the present tense but is included when the verbs are in the past tense. It is impossible to understand clearly what Dixson is trying to say regarding the use of “that”.

**Category B: Gives “(that)” without explanation (only “optional” or “can be omitted”)**

This category is remarkable for its exceptionally unhelpful statements or a lack of explanation. The unhelpful statements include “Zero THAT-clauses are just like *that* clauses, except that *that* itself is omitted.” (Leech et al., 1982:96); “As an alternative to a *that*-clause we frequently find a NON-INTRODUCED finite clause in the function of direct object.” (Van Ek et al., 1984:47); “In an informal style we can leave out *that*.” (Swan, 1984: 282) and “We can often leave out the conjunction *that*, especially in an informal style.” (Swan, 1984, p. 344); “The *that* used before reported clause is often omitted in informal contexts.” (Crystal, 1988:197); and “*That* is often optional.” (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005:21).

Of the above, Swan, Crystal, and Huddleston & Pullum may not be very informative, but at least their explanation is easy to understand.

Murphy (2011) simply gives examples of indirect speech, such as “Tom said (that) he was feeling sick.” (p. 90). This is followed by a series of examples, all using “said (that)”, followed by a complete-the-sentence exercise (p. 91) starting with “Helen said that...”. (Note that the “that” in this case is given without parentheses.) More examples are given on page 92, all using “said (that)” or “told me (that)”, followed by a change-to-indirect-speech exercise (p. 93) starting with the sample answer “You said you were tired.” (Note that “that” is not given.) There seems to be no explanation anywhere of what “(that)” means; or what the difference is between the exercises on page 91 and page 93. Presumably the learners are left to

decide for themselves whether it is preferable to include or to omit *that*.

Shimada (1962), previously mentioned in the section on English grammar books written in Japanese, also belongs to this category.

### **Category C: Gives “(that)” with explanation**

In this category, we start to find explanations. Zandvoort (1962) explains that reported statements “may be introduced by *that*, or they may be non-introduced” (p. 221) and gives the following example: “They say (that) he is better.” However, unlike most writers who say that *that* can be omitted in informal situations, Zandvoort gives the following example: “He says he shall never manage it.” This is a quote from the COD, but this use of “shall” can hardly be regarded as an example of informal language.

Leech and Svartvik (1975) state the following: “When the *that*-clause is object or complement or postponed subject, *that* is frequently omitted in <informal> use.” (p. 249). Thompson and Martinet (1986) comment that “**that** can usually be omitted after **say** and **tell** + object. But it should be kept after other verbs: **complain, explain, object, point out, protest** etc.” (p. 269). Carter et al. (2011) make a similar statement to the second half of Leech and Svartvik, saying: “We often omit *that*, especially in informal situations.” (p. 465). Following this, Carter et al. (2011) give a long list of examples, most of which omit “that” when it follows “say” or “tell”.

Matsushima and Hoshino (eds.) (1898), Miyai (1914), Ogawa (1961), Murata and Narita (1965), Ishibashi (ed.) (1998), and Nakahara (2010), previously mentioned in the section on English grammar books written in Japanese, also belong to this category.

### **Category D: Explains “that” and “no that” with examples**

The best example of this category is Fowler (1926). The following explanation is given in a section entitled Ellipsis:

Omission of *that* (conjunction). Though this is strictly speaking not an ellipsis, but rather an exercise of the ancient right to abstain from subordinating a substantival clause (And I seyde his opinioun was good – Chaucer), it may be conveniently be mentioned here. (p. 153)

From this quote from Chaucer we can learn that the omission of “that” is nothing new in modern English; it in fact predates modern English. However, Fowler advises against “ill-advised omission” of *that* in cases where it may cause confusion.

(Partridge (1947) gives the same advice but blames it on a defect of American English.)

In a later section entitled Substantival clauses without *that*, Fowler compares the following two examples with a comment, after stating that the topic has already been touched on in ELLIPSIS):

I know that my Redeemer liveth: I know I can trust you.

These are equally good English; if *that* were shifted from the first to the second, both would still be grammatically correct, but each less idiomatic than as it is. (p. 623)

Fowler then goes on to describe the cases in which “that” is retained, is omitted, or can vary depending on the case. (These are very similar to the three categories that have been introduced already in the section giving the explanations appearing in English grammar books written in Japanese.)

It may be useful to give tentative lists, to which everyone can make additions for his own use, of verbs that (1) prefer *that* expressed, (2) prefer *that* omitted, and (3) vary according to the tone of the context. (1) *That* is usual with *agree, announce, argue, assume, aver, calculate, concede, contend, hold, indicate, learn, maintain, observe, reckon, remark, state, suggest*; (2) *That* is unusual with *believe, dare say, presume, suppose, think*; (3) *That* is used or omitted with *be told, confess, consider, declare, grant, hear, know, perceive, propose, say, see, understand*.

It should be added that the tendency is to omit *that*, and some of the words in the first list may be thought to have become eligible for transfer to the third. Perhaps this is due to U.S. influence, where *that* is omitted much more freely than it is here. (p. 624)

These explanations by Fowler are far more thorough and easy to understand than in any other more modern grammar book written in English, even though they were written nearly 100 years ago. This makes it difficult to understand why so many modern writers of grammar and usage books in English seem to totally ignore Fowler’s clear and concise explanations, and in particular, the way he gives cross-references to his previous explanation.

If prizes are to be given for clarity and usefulness of explanation, the first prize obviously would go to Fowler, but the second prize would go to Greenbaum and Whitcut (1988). Regarding the advisability of omitting “that”, they say “When an introductory **that** can be left out, it is shorter and usually neater to omit it, particularly before short clauses.” (p. 704). (But in the same way as Fowler and Partridge, they say “Do not leave out **that** where confusion may result.”)

## The Case of the Disappearing “That”

However, they go on to say:

The choice of whether to leave it out chiefly depends on the relative formality of an introducing verb. Compare: He said he'd come; He asserted that he would come; I suppose you're right; I assume that you are right; She believes it's true; She postulates that it is true. (p. 704)

This rather confuses the issue. Although they claim that omission of “that” depends on the formality of an introducing verb (asserted, assume, postulates), their examples omit “that” when the introduced verb is in an informal form (he'd, you're, it's). Which of these two forms is the deciding factor?

Swan (1995) gives far more information. However, he gives examples of indirect speech using “that”, “(that)”, or “no that”, apparently at random. He states that “The conjunction *that* is often dropped, especially after common reporting verbs (e.g. *say, think*) in informal speech.” and “*That* cannot be dropped after certain verbs (e.g. *reply, telegraph, shout*).” (p. 502)

These latter three verbs have not been listed elsewhere as requiring “that”. The wording for this statement in Swan (2005) is slightly different: “*That* cannot be dropped after certain verbs, especially intransitive verbs -- e.g. *reply, email, shout*” (p. 578), showing appreciation of the technical change from telegraph to email.

Other books in this category give a variety of statements which basically have the same or similar meanings:

There are a number of common introductory verbs used to report statements, which are often followed by *that* (e.g. *say, tell, add, continue, answer, reply, mention, remark*):

We can omit *that* after an introductory verb, and often do in conversation, except after *reply, continue, answer* and *shout*. (Foley and Hall, 2003:112)

Where *that*-clauses follow verbs, the word *that* can usually be omitted, especially in informal language and after *think* and *say*. (Thornbury, 2004:149)

In informal speech and writing, the conjunction ‘that’ is commonly omitted.

‘That’ is often omitted when the reporting verb refers simply to the act of saying or thinking. You usually include ‘that’ after a verb which gives more information, such as ‘complain’ or ‘explain’. (Sinclair, 2005: 320)

The default case is the one where *that* is present as a mark of the subordinate status of the clause.

Departures from the default case, declaratives without *that*, are more likely in informal than in formal style. For the rest, the relative likelihood of dropping the

*that* depends largely on the structure of the matrix clause but also on that of the content clause itself. Factors which favor respectively the omission and the retention of *that* are illustrated in (the examples below):

In the examples with *that*, note that the verbs are longer, or they are separated from the content clause by a phrase, etc... . The pressure to retain *that* may be so great that the construction might be included among those where the subordinate is strictly obligatory. (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 953)

*That* is very frequently omitted in (the above) constructions, especially in informal spoken language. Omission of *that* is particularly common after *think*.

Omission of *that* is also common where the subject of the reporting clause and the reported clause are the same: (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 512)

However, 300 pages later in a section entitled “Reporting Verbs”, Carter and McCarthy make the following statement:

*Say* and *tell* are also by far the most frequent reporting verbs in indirect reports in everyday spoken language: (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 806)

This statement is followed by these two examples:

And after a moment he said that he had been in the valley for forty-seven years. Mrs Johnson told her that Robert was part of a consortium.

As can be seen, both of these examples use “that” after “said” and “told”, but, disconcertingly, this is followed immediately by a section explaining the difference between “say” and “tell” in which not a single one of the six examples includes “that”. There is no explanation of any difference between the first two examples and the next six examples. Although we have included this book under Category D, this particular section would probably require it to be put into Category F (self-contradictory).

The writers of the books in this category all give their own ideas about when “that” should be included or omitted. Unfortunately, it is not clear where they get their ideas from. There is no reference to collection of data to back up their ideas. As a result, the explanation of any one writer does not match the explanation of various other writers. For example, Greenbaum and Whitcut (1988) state that it depends on the formality of the introducing verb, but give examples where “that” is omitted before informal introduced verb forms such as “isn’t”; other writers seem to say that “that” is omitted before modals such as “mustn’t”, but Foley and Hall (2003) give repeated examples with “that” included before such verb forms; Huddleston and Pullum (2002) add a further condition, noting that the verbs are longer or are

separated by a phrase in the examples with “that”; some writers say that “that” is omitted in informal speech, others say that it is possible to omit “that” in informal writing also.

Egawa (1975), previously mentioned in the section on English grammar books written in Japanese, also belongs to this category.

### **Category E: Gives “that” and “no that” without explanation**

One feature of this category is that the writers seem to be so preoccupied in explaining some other grammatical point (back shifting, changing “here” and “now” words, or other explanations dealing with indirect speech) that they fail to explain or even fail to notice that their sample sentences include or omit “that” completely at random. Examples are Gucker (1966); Huddleston (1988)– who uses “that” with “said”, but omits it with “thought”, “didn’t know”, and “knew” when describing back shifting; Freeborn (1990); Leech et al. (2001)– who give two examples of “said” using “that” and six without “that”, and then explain about changing “here” and “now” and give a sample sentence starting with “They said that...”; and Eastwood (2005), who explains that “In informal English, we can often leave out ‘that.’” (p. 352) and then on the following four pages gives nine sample sentences, seven of which use “that” (including one case of “told me that”). In the next eight pages he gives 41 sample sentences, of which no fewer than 37 omit “that”!

### **Category F: Self-contradictory: says “that” but gives examples of “no that”; or vice versa**

Swan (1980) explains that the clauses in indirect speech are joined by using “that”, but then gives the following example: (Note: this book uses Section numbers; it does not use page numbers.)

So he comes into the pub and says (that) he’ll have a pint. (Section 533)

There is no explanation of the meaning of “(that)”, but the following four examples are given:

He said he was going home.

He said he loved me.

He agreed unenthusiastically, saying that it was difficult.

Alan said that he was looking for Helen this morning.

As can be seen, the first two examples omit “that” while the other two include it. But these are followed by a series of thirteen examples of indirect speech in Section

534, seven of which use “said” as the introductory verb; all omit “that”. Of the three examples using “told”, two use “that” while one omits it. Likewise for three other examples using “explain”, “thought”, and “proved”, two use “that” while one omits it. There is no indication anywhere of why “that” is included or omitted.

In four of the examples in Section 534, “said” is followed by a subordinate clause including a modal, but “that” is omitted in every case; this is contradictory to Section 538, where all the examples of subordinate clauses including a modal are introduced by “that”. Similarly, although nearly all the examples in Section 534 omit “that” after “say” or “tell”, the examples in Section 542 always include “that”. No explanation is given in either case.

Murphy (1985) gives all sample sentences with (that), such as the following: “Tom said (that) he was feeling ill.” (p. 94), but starts the practice exercise with “that” given without parentheses. In the next section (p. 96), further examples are given of indirect speech after “told”; in all cases it is followed by (that), but in the exercises, the first example is given without “that” (the opposite of the exercises in the previous section). How is the reader supposed to distinguish between “that”, “(that)”, and “no that”?

Christophersen and Sandved (1990) say that a statement in speech “is normally turned into a that-clause” in reported speech (p. 249), and refer to previous examples given in the book (p. 204-5). However, of the 16 examples given, there is not even one case of an example using “that”. As all the examples are cases of using modal auxiliaries, is the reader supposed to interpret this to mean “that” is not used when modals are used but otherwise “that” is always used?

Crystal (2004) states: “All the examples of indirect speech on earlier pages have displayed the conjunction *that*.” (p. 338), but despite this claim, Crystal gives four examples on the previous three pages, including one which does not display “that”. Regarding the inclusion of “that”, he also claims that “This is a stylistically neutral level, with respect to formality. But if the *that* is omitted, an increased level of informality is the result.” (p. 338). Despite his claim, surely “(that)” must be considered as the neutral form as “(that)” does not indicate any bias in favor of the inclusion of “that”, while “that” (without parentheses) indicates that “that” is the default value.

**Category G: Explains “that” and “no that”, but on a completely different page, with no cross-reference**

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) (A Concise Grammar of Contemporary English) and Quirk and Greenbaum (1976) (A University Grammar of English) are both based on Quirk and Greenbaum’s Grammar of Contemporary English, and were respectively published as the US and Great Britain versions. As earlier writers had mentioned that British and American writers differ in their attitudes towards the inclusion or omission of “that”, both versions were investigated. In addition, Quirk and Greenbaum (1976) is the Fifth Impression and states in its preface that hundreds of improvements have been incorporated. However, in statements and examples regarding the inclusion or omission of “that”, no differences were discerned. As such, both versions have exactly the same problems: that is, they cover the use of “that” in two different places and do not use any cross-referencing. The first place is in a section describing the formation of nominal clauses (p. 316) and the second place is in a section explaining direct and indirect speech (p. 341). In the section about direct and indirect speech, the following examples appear:

He said: “I am very angry” (DIRECT SPEECH)

He said that he was very angry (INDIRECT SPEECH)

There is no indication that it is possible to omit “that”, thus seemingly implying that “that” cannot be omitted. Three pages later, in a section on modal auxiliaries and indirect speech, they give the following example of indirect speech using a modal: “He said (that) he *would like* some tea” (p. 344), implying that “that” can be omitted before modals, but then follow with another example “John said that I might go”, apparently implying that “that” should be used before a modal.

Further investigation showed that immediately preceding the section entitled “Direct and indirect speech” they had a section entitled “Putative *should*”, in which all the examples using “should” include the conjunction “that”.

To further confuse the issue, as stated above, the description of nominal clauses was given earlier without any cross-referencing. In the section on nominal clauses, the following statement and example are given:

When the *that*-clause is object or complement (or delayed subject: 14.25), the conjunction *that* is frequently omitted in informal use, leaving a ‘zero’ *that*-clause:

I told him he was wrong. (p. 317)

This statement and example are followed by a note expanding the explanation.

[a] The zero *that*-clause is particularly common when the clause is brief and

uncomplicated. In contrast, the need for clarity discourages or even forbids the omission of *that* in complex sentences loaded with adverbials and modifications. Any parenthetical material between the verb of the superordinate clause and the subject of the *that*-clause is especially likely to inhibit deletion.

Note that there is a cross-reference in the first statement to the omission of “that” with delayed subject, but there is no reference at all to the omission of “that” in indirect speech; nor in the section on indirect speech is there any cross-reference back to the explanation in the section on nominal clauses. To put it mildly, this is not user-friendly.

### **Overall commentary regarding grammar books**

A major fault of many of the grammar books that we investigated is the apparently random inclusion/omission of “that” in the examples, which shows a lack of proper proofreading that plagues so many of these grammar books. It seems that the writers are so engrossed in the explanation of a particular grammar point that they totally forget that they are giving contradictory examples of the use of “that”.

This problem is further aggravated by the profusion of technical terms that are used for explaining the grammar points in these grammar books. For example, to investigate the inclusion or omission of “that”, should the researcher look in the index for “direct speech”, “indirect speech”, or “reported speech”; or for “nominal clauses”, “that-clauses”, “zero that-clauses”, “non-introducing that-clauses”, or “omission of ‘that’”, etc.?

However, unlike the use of “was” or “were” after “if”, there seems to be no stigma attached to omitting “that”; both the inclusion and omission of “that” are regarded as acceptable English (if we ignore the opinion of Partridge), so there is no problem of students being told that they are speaking substandard English, regardless of how they use “that”.

### **Occurrences in literary works**

A Kindle was used to carry out a search for the target words. As explained in Jones (2013), an iPad could not be used to carry out such a search because it does not search for discrete words (when searching for “if”, it also brings up words such as “life” or “different” where the combination “if” is included in the word). With the

## The Case of the Disappearing “That”

Kindle, it is possible to search for all occurrences of the discrete word “if”; it does not call up any extraneous words where the letter “i” is followed by the letter “f”.

From the start, it was clear that even with the Kindle there would be a problem with searching for occurrences of non-use of “that”. Such word searches can be used to find places where the target word is used; but obviously they cannot be used to search for places where it is not used. However, it turned out to be impossible to search even for places where “that” was used. For some reason, maybe because “that” is so common, Kindle does not search for “that”.

As a result of this problem, it was clearly impossible to search for all occurrences of use or non-use of “that” because that would require searching separately for every possible combination. This made it even more necessary to restrict the words appearing with “that” to the words “say” and “tell”.

The books selected for collection of data for the use or non-use of “that” were as follows, in chronological order, with the year of publication, and with a two-letter index to use in tables.

- GT Gulliver’s Travels (Jonathan Swift) 1726
- TJ History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (Henry Fielding) 1749
- PP Pride and Prejudice (Jane Austen) 1813
- WH Wuthering Heights (Emily Brontë) 1846
- 2C A Tale of Two Cities (Charles Dickens) 1859
- TS The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (Mark Twain) 1876
- LP A Little Princess (Frances Hodgson Burnett) 1906
- BD Bulldog Drummond (H. C. McNeile) 1920
- OX Murder on the Orient Express (Agatha Christie) 1934
- BT For Whom the Bell Tolls (Ernest Hemingway) 1940
- 2L You Only Live Twice (Ian Fleming) 1964
- Sh The Shining (Stephen King) 1977
- PS Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (JK Rowling) 1997
- DV The Da Vinci Code (Dan Brown) 2003
- WR Warrior of Rome 1: Fire in the East (Harry Sidebottom) 2008

As has already been said, representative books over a period of 300 years were selected. The main condition for selecting these books was their availability on Kindle. The first five books in the list above are all by UK writers, but at that time there was probably very little difference in literary English between Britain and the United States. Of the remaining 10 books, 4½ are by US authors and 5½ are by UK

authors (it was difficult to decide in the case of Frances Hodgson Burnett {the author of *A Little Princess*}; she was born in England but moved to America, and spent her later life in both England and America, so she was marked as half each). Of the total of 15 writers, 10 are male and five are female.

### Data analysis

The selected books were not analyzed in chronological order. At first, the analysis proceeded according to the description of indirect speech given earlier in this paper. However, when analysis was attempted of *Gulliver's Travels*, it was found that there appear to have been different ideas of what constituted indirect speech nearly 300 years ago. Specifically, the difference was in the use of quotation marks. In the present day, quotation marks are used to indicate the actual words used (i.e., direct speech), but in many cases in *Gulliver's Travels*, quotations were used to mark indirect speech. In addition, there seemed to be no standards regarding the use of a “,” (comma) between “say/tell” and the following quotation mark, as shown in the following examples. (Note that only the first part of the sentence is given.)

- (1) He said “that about 12 o'clock at noon...
- (2) The captain said, “that while we were at supper....
- (3) He said, “those, who entertain opinions prejudicial to the public....
- (4) He said “it was very reasonable to think....

As can be seen, examples (1) and (2) use “that”, while examples (3) and (4) omit “that”; and one example of each set ((1) and (3)) uses a “,” while the other example of each set ((2) and (4)) omits it. So there are four different combinations. Table 1 below shows the frequencies for each combination. The first line (GT) gives the frequencies when judged according to the definition of indirect speech given earlier on in this paper. The second line (GT “) gives the frequencies for the occurrences using quotation marks for indirect speech described immediately above. This second line is given to illustrate the situation that arises if the non-traditional forms of indirect speech that are not used in modern English are counted. However, for the purposes of comparison with the other books researched, only the data on the first line (GT) are used in this study.

A comparison of the frequencies for “that /no that” in the first line of Table 1 shows that “that” is used twice as frequently as it is omitted. These figures support

## The Case of the Disappearing “That”

our initial idea that “that” was used in the past more often than it was omitted. However, the frequencies in the second line show the opposite trend. When the two sets are added, the comparative frequency is exactly 50-50.

Table 1 Frequencies in Gulliver’s Travels (GT)

Title	said		say		told		tell		Total		%	
	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0
<b>GT</b>	4	5	6	5	10	2	2	0	22	12	<b>64.7</b>	<b>35.3</b>
<b>GT “</b>	11	26	0	1	20	15	3	2	34	44	<b>43.6</b>	<b>56.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	15	31	6	6	30	17	5	2	56	56	<b>50.0</b>	<b>50.0</b>

Key: that = “that” is included      0 = “that” is omitted

The “Total” line also shows that indirect speech is far more common (93-19) following an introductory verb in the past tense (said/told) than in the present tense (say/tell), while it is equally split (58-54) between the two verbs (“say” or “tell”).

Another problem that appeared was the use of “I dare say”. It appeared 18 times in *Pride and Prejudice*, 10 times in *A Little Princess*, and once each in *Bulldog Drummond* and *Murder on the Orient Express*. In all 30 cases, it was used without “that”; it was never once with “that”, regardless of the era or writer, so it seemed more reasonable to treat it as a fossilized chunk, rather than “dare” + “say”. Fowler (1926) also listed “that” as being unusual following “dare say”. For this reason, it was not included in the frequency count.

The results for all 15 books are as shown in Table 2. The headings are the same as in Table 1, with the addition of the year of publication and details of the author. The figures for the percentage show the ratio of inclusion and omission of “that” for each writer. Note that the percentages given on the bottom line of the table (Total) show the overall ratio of inclusion and omission of “that”, and the overall average of the percentages for all 15 writers. As can be seen, overall, there is a clear preference for the omission of “that”, with a percentage of 63.6%, nearly double the figure for inclusion of “that”.

It had been expected that the publications of hundreds of years ago would be more likely to retain “that”. However, it can be seen from the percentages of retention of “that” that the results are more like a yo-yo, bouncing up and down for consecutive writers, from way above 50% down to way below 50%, and then way back to above 50% again. After rising slightly above 50% in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, the frequencies stay below 50% until they suddenly rise for the last book, published in 2008, with a figure of 65.1%, which is even greater than the first figure recorded in 1726.

Table 2 Frequencies in books researched

Title	said		say		told		tell		Total		%		Year	Author	
	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0		UK/US	Sex
GT	4	5	6	5	10	2	2	0	22	12	<b>64.7</b>	<b>35.3</b>	1726	UK	M
TJ	17	117	41	87	37	58	22	54	117	316	<b>27.0</b>	<b>73.0</b>	1749	UK	M
PP	7	9	33	11	17	3	11	8	68	31	<b>68.7</b>	<b>31.3</b>	1813	UK	F
WH	3	46	6	45	7	18	13	14	29	123	<b>19.1</b>	<b>80.9</b>	1846	UK	F
2C	9	7	21	10	11	10	11	9	52	36	<b>59.1</b>	<b>40.9</b>	1859	UK	M
TS	18	43	4	9	0	4	1	9	23	65	<b>26.1</b>	<b>73.9</b>	1876	US	M
LP	2	6	7	16	10	3	4	7	23	32	<b>41.8</b>	<b>58.2</b>	1906	UK/US	F
BD	7	9	22	27	12	7	11	3	52	46	<b>53.1</b>	<b>46.9</b>	1920	UK	M
OX	8	15	13	11	13	4	9	4	43	34	<b>55.8</b>	<b>44.2</b>	1937	UK	F
BT	8	25	11	23	9	6	7	8	35	62	<b>36.1</b>	<b>63.9</b>	1940	US	M
2L	10	10	12	14	4	3	4	6	30	33	<b>47.6</b>	<b>52.4</b>	1964	UK	M
Sh	11	49	14	27	12	18	10	13	47	107	<b>30.5</b>	<b>69.5</b>	1977	US	M
PS	6	13	4	29	1	18	5	13	16	73	<b>18.0</b>	<b>82.0</b>	1997	UK	F
DV	1	32	2	22	9	26	8	25	20	105	<b>16.0</b>	<b>84.0</b>	2003	US	M
WR	21	13	12	9	12	5	9	2	54	29	<b>65.1</b>	<b>34.9</b>	2008	UK	M
Total	132	399	208	345	164	185	127	175	631	1104	<b>36.4</b>	<b>63.6</b>			

## Key to Titles

GT	Gulliver's Travels	OX	Murder on the Orient Express
TJ	Tom Jones	BT	For Whom the Bell Tolls
PP	Pride and Prejudice	2L	You Only Live Twice
WH	Wuthering Heights	Sh	The Shining
2C	A Tale of Two Cities	PS	Harry Potter & the Philosopher's Stone
TS	Adventures of Tom Sawyer	DV	The Da Vinci Code
LP	A Little Princess	WR	Warrior of Rome I: Fire in the East
BD	Bulldog Drummond		

Calculating the averages of the figures for retention of “that” for each century, the averages are 45.9%, 43.3%, 40.4%, and 40.6% for the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries respectively, which is a drop of only 5% over 300 years. With the averages for the sex of the writer (male or female), the figures are 40.7% for men and 42.5% for women. There is very little difference between these figures, and both of them are within the averages given above for each century.

However, when it comes to nationality (UK or US), there is a striking difference. The first five UK writers (between 1726 and 1859) have an average of 47.7%, while

the last five UK writers (between 1922 and 2008) have an average of 47.8%, showing a minuscule increase over the 300 years. Compared with this, the four US writers (between 1859 and 2003) have an average of only 27.2%. (The UK/US writer was not included in this count.) These figures certainly give strong backing to Fowler (1926) and others who claim that there is a greater tendency to drop “that” by US writers.

One word of caution that needs to be given here is that only fifteen authors were selected, and only one book from each author was studied. The selection of a different author or book may well have given a completely different result.

For example, Jones (2013), in a section investigating the use of one type of construction with singular “was/were” after “if” (as if ... was/were), found that two British authors of similar age writing historical fiction about the Roman Army and who therefore might be expected to show the same preferences, were in fact totally opposite in the use of “was” or “were”. One strongly preferred “was” by a ratio of 52:4 (93% “was”) while the other strongly preferred “were” by a ratio of 32:6 (84% “were”).

The same tendency for this structure was found even within the same writer. JK Rowling, of Harry Potter fame, preferred “was” by a ratio of 7:0 in the first Harry Potter book, but changed to preferring “were” by a ratio of 10:3 in the last book in the series.

For this reason, it was decided to take a further look at the writer of the last book in Table 2, as the percentages for this book seemed to be totally out of place compared with the percentages for the books above it in the list. The book investigated in the original survey, *Fire in the East* by Harry Sidebottom, was the first in its series, so the latest book in the series available in Kindle, *Wolves of the North*, was investigated in addition.

The results of this further survey are given in Table 3, together with the results from the bottom of Table 2 for comparison. As can be seen, there has been a dramatic change. Whereas in the first book, the percentage for the retention of “that” was 65.1%, the percentage for the last book was only 12.7%. This changes the author from having the second highest figure in Table 2 to having the lowest figure for any book that was surveyed.

Table 3 Frequencies in books by Harry Sidebottom

Title	said		say		told		tell		Total		%		Year
	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	that	0	
WR	21	13	12	9	12	5	9	2	54	29	<b>65.1</b>	<b>34.9</b>	2008
WN	3	31	0	21	7	12	0	5	10	69	<b>12.7</b>	<b>87.3</b>	2013
Total	24	44	12	30	19	17	9	7	64	98	<b>39.5</b>	<b>60.5</b>	

Key to Titles

WR Warrior of Rome I: Fire in the East

WN Wolves of the North

## Conclusion

With the exception of Partridge (1947), all the grammar books that we investigated seem to agree that there are situations where “that” can be omitted, particularly in spoken English; and again, with the exception of Partridge, there was no mention of any stigma involved in the omission of “that”. The consensus is that it can be omitted in informal situations, but there seems to be no clear agreement as to exactly what an informal situation is. Many, if not most, of the grammar books we surveyed made no attempt to define “informal”. For those books that did attempt to define it, “informal” seems to refer to the simplicity or lack of formality of the introducing verb (i.e., say, tell, think, etc.) or of the introduced verb (e.g., isn’t, doesn’t, won’t), or the simplicity of the structure (will there be any confusion if “that” is omitted?). No particular difference could be discerned between the grammar books written in English and those written in Japanese.

There are various conditions determining whether “that” must be included or whether it can be omitted. An important condition is the formality of the introducing verb. However, for the purposes of this paper, we limited the scope of our investigation to indirect speech where the introducing verb is some form of “say” or “tell”, after which “that” is optional; the main object of our investigation was to find a way to give a satisfactory answer to our students’ questions about the inclusion or omission of “that”. As our English classes range from simple conversation to business letter writing, it seems that we must determine our answer according to the situation faced by the student when we recommend whether “that” is to be included or omitted.

In spoken English, stress and intonation will indicate the meaning, even if “that”

is omitted, so it seems that the best advice would be to use the words of Greenbaum and Whitcut (1988), “it is shorter and usually neater to omit it”, and to tell our students to omit “that” unless there is any reason to include it. For emails or other such informal writing, the example that we found in literature can be followed, with the dropping of “that” being the norm, particularly in recent years.

Most of our students will not have to use formal writing. However, in business English, where confusion must always be avoided, the best advice would be to try to include “that” when speaking, and to include it without fail when writing.

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