# Block 2

## LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND SPEAKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 1</td>
<td>Teaching Listening-I</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 2</td>
<td>Teaching Listening-II</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 3</td>
<td>Teaching Speaking Skills</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 4</td>
<td>Speaking Activities</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 5</td>
<td>Assessing Listening and Speaking</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Block Introduction

The focus of this Block is to help learners of English develop skills to cope with listening and speaking in real life. Listening is an important though difficult skill which is often overlooked in the formal teaching of English as a second language. It needs to be developed consciously and systematically. The first Unit is an attempt to equip the teacher with the skills required to impart necessary listening skills to the learners. The Unit discusses the phases or stages of listening and the sample lessons for each phase. The second Unit discusses different kinds of listening and focuses on the selection of a listening task and resources to develop a listening task.

The third Unit, ‘Teaching Speaking/Oral Skills’ is about the need to develop effective speaking skills. The Unit highlights the difference between the features of writing and speaking so that conversational skills can be taught effectively. It also highlights the importance of being aware of the demands that a speaking activity places on the learner, so that the teacher can give support to sustain the activity. Unit four discusses at length, the activities which can be used in the classroom for developing advanced speaking skills.

The fifth Unit, the last one in the Block, is on assessing listening and speaking. It discusses the various issues and complexities associated with assessing these skills but offers some simple ways of assessment which can be done in the classroom context.
UNIT 1 TEACHING LISTENING -I

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction: Need for listening
   1.1.1 Why listening has been neglected so far?
   1.1.2 Importance of listening at secondary school
   1.1.3 Need for good listening behaviour

1.2 Listening skills and strategies
   1.2.1 The nature of listening
   1.2.2 The Decoding process
   1.2.3 Meaning making process

1.3 Effective listening
   1.3.1 Kinds of listening
   1.3.2 Factors that influence listening
   1.3.3 The listening environment
   1.3.4 Readiness for listening, the motivated listener

1.4 Developing listening tasks
   1.4.1 Approaches to listening
   1.4.2 Micro and Macro skills of listening
   1.4.3 Processes in listening comprehension

1.5 Let us sum up

1.6 Answers

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After completing the unit you will be able to:

- state the need for listening
- explain what the listening process comprises
- state the different kinds of listening and develop activities to exercise them
- take into account the factors that influence listening while organising the activities
- develop listening tasks keeping in mind the different stages of a listening lesson
- organise listening lessons in a way that ensure motivated listening

1.1 INTRODUCTION : THE NEED FOR LISTENING

The fact that listening is basic to learning and language learning is well established. Much of the information we acquire is through listening whether it is during a lecture, over the radio or television, advice from people, instructions and directions, suggestions and so on.

A growing change in communication patterns has made the skill of listening more important than ever. We have now BPO’s, Customer Care Cells, recorded railway
schedules or live problem-solving of mal-functioning gadgets that come to us over the telephone, when sought. This makes it imperative that we learn to listen well whether in formal or informal contexts.

Unfortunately, this is one skill that has often been neglected in the language class. If at all any listening is being done, it is done hastily as a part of the integrated skill approach. Most of the listening that students do in class is listening to instructions and explanations by the teacher, and at home to moralizing by the parent. Although focused listening to different genres of literature has made a beginning in our classrooms, the strategies to listen to a particular text are seldom provided.

1.1.1 Why has Listening been Neglected So Far

The reasons for neglecting this vital skill are various. They maybe any or some of the following:

- Teachers felt that it was more important to present new language items to the class. They used listening only to practice those items.
- They focused on emphasizing those skills that enabled more systematic instruction and evaluation like grammar, reading and writing.
- Listening has been viewed as a passive skill.
- It is a difficult skill to teach and not possible to assess listening comprehension which takes place in some hidden recesses of the listener’s mind. The outcome of listening is not tangible like writing or speaking.
- Often after a lot of listening practice there is no perceptible improvement which is frustrating for the teacher.
- Teachers believe that listening activities take up a lot of teaching-learning time and may require technical equipment.
- Some believe that this skill will be automatically picked up through exposure to the target language. It can be acquired naturally in response to the spoken word as with L1.

But over the years teachers’ experience with young learners has shown that:

- Listening is the foundation of literacy.
- Listening vocabulary is the first vocabulary of any child. A child acquires the vocabulary she listens around her. Exposure to new words through reading comes much later.
- There would be no language without the aural/oral component. A large part of communication is aural and oral.
- We need skills in listening for the very business of living, study and work, even to run businesses and governments.

1.1.2 The Impact of Listening at School

The aim of teaching a language is to prepare the learner for life. Listening, being a significant part of the business of daily living, needs to be practised extensively. Learners need to be prepared to handle situations in life even beyond the classroom and after leaving school where they might need to obtain information from radio or television talks and chats, videos on various themes, announcements, telephonic information, directions, or simply, as oral information from another person.
**Why is listening important?**

Listening helps to develop a person’s spoken competence which gets enriched with

- new grammatical structures when a speaker uses expressions that are new to the listener
- new vocabulary as listening exposes a person to the vocabulary in context
- new phonological patterns which enable the listener to learn the permissible combinations of sounds and the phonemic clusters as part of words in a particular language
- pragmatic information like deriving meaning from stress, tone, expression and body language of the speaker, which is an indicator of the speaker’s meaning, intent and purpose

Thus it is important that we provide listening experiences of different kinds based on a variety of contexts so that students can handle listening (encounters) situations in the real world adequately. We need to open up a rich source of linguistic material for the L2 learners. This implies that students need to be exposed to a lot of language in the form of day to day conversation, stories, poems, plays, directions, discussions and announcements.

**Listening is basic to oral skills**

Developing fluency in speaking has always been an important goal for language teachers. Often, in their enthusiasm to teach speaking they have overlooked the fact that any oral communication involves a lot of listening. Even a simple conversation cannot be sustained if one of the interlocutors does not have adequate listening skills. Just as speaking, listening too has its own fluency and accuracy without which communication may break down.

- **Fluency**: acquiring the patterns of listening like paying attention to the key words, using non-linguistic clues to arrive at the meaning, not having to listen word for word (meaning-making skills)
- **Accuracy**: ability to decode pieces of connected speech, word by word, noticing word boundaries (decoding skills)

Hence teachers in the classroom need to provide practice with goals and processes in mind. Listening should be practised at every level of language learning or acquisition.

The goals could be:

- **Pronunciation teaching** (to identify and discriminate between sounds, utterances)
- **Modelling** (for contractions like *I’m/We’ll*, or minimal pairs which distinguish certain sounds (*ship sip*) and stress patterns (*present pre*).)
- **Pragmatic input** (what certain utterances would mean in certain contexts like ‘I’m afraid… as being the beginning of a complaint or an expression of dissatisfaction or even a warning)
- **Feedback**: whether they missed the main ideas or misinterpreted the words of the speaker etc. (Perhaps you missed what I said about….*/What I really meant was…*)
The processes are the following:

- Decoding processes
- Meaning-making processes

Since much of the information made available to the students is through the voice of the teacher or through audio material, apart from the visual medium like books and the chalk board, the ability to understand speech in the target language becomes absolutely necessary. The teacher’s role would be to provide adequate assistance in understanding the oral form of L2.

**Learner concerns**

Most learners of L2 when asked of their area of difficulty often cite listening as the area where they feel most insecure. The reasons may be:

- They do not have concrete evidence that they are making progress in the skill.
- Listening happens in real time, which means that it is supposed to be understood at the moment in order to make a suitable response. One cannot play it back in one’s mind to decipher its meaning.

The L2 learner begins to feel inadequate at this deficiency and also begins to think that L2 speakers speak very fast. This creates a sense of insecurity amongst the L2 learners.

**Listening and other language skills**

Listening is inextricably linked to the exercise and development of the other language skills. Say, for example listening is directly linked to speaking. Although listening is an internal encounter yet we can get an idea of the extent of comprehension when the listener encodes his/her response in the spoken form, whether in a conversation or while answering questions in different formal and informal situations. All children need to have a human model to interact with linguistically in order to learn speech.

Though an oral response is a significant way to measure comprehension while listening, it may be borne in mind that many attentive listeners do not express their understanding in the spoken form.

Listening and reading are both decoding skills. Listening depends upon sounds and is an aural experience whereas reading depends upon the written text and is a visual experience (depending upon graphemes). In fact listening provides the foundation for reading:

- Decoding and auditory discrimination is the first step in reading where beginner readers try to sound out the words.
- Non-linguistic clues like pauses, voice variation and inflection can at later stage provide clues to meaning while reading.
- A child utilises her listening vocabulary as a basis for reading and those with a limited listening vocabulary may have limited reading and writing vocabulary.

Listening can be evaluated through listening comprehension scales which range from no comprehension to a high level of inferential comprehension. The levels of comprehension are the same as for reading beginning with literal comprehension (factual recall), interpretation (making logical guesses, finding relationships, using contextual clues) and then critical comprehension wherein the listener or the reader evaluates what she hears or reads. Thus it is necessary that students be provided an
opportunity to exercise all of the above skills through graded tasks. We all know that writing is nourished by the other skills of the language and that our listening vocabulary and the kind of language we listen to influence the skills of writing. It thus becomes evident from the above discussion that listening is vital to the learning of L2.

1.1.3 Need for Modelling Good Listening Behaviour

Listening has been made unpopular by adults, namely parents and teachers. Often parents, busy with their day to day chores or occupations, tend to ignore what the child is trying to say and rarely respond with more than impatient noises. They do not make eye contact and show cursory interest. This kind of behaviour is learned by the child who learns to switch off when asked to listen. On the other hand, parents demand the child’s attention when they discuss matters of importance to them or simply indulge in moralizing.

Teachers, too with their injunction to listen often make the act of listening, an unpleasant experience. On the other hand when the student is speaking, teachers tend to interrupt to correct and improve them. There are interruptions during a listening experience which may be caused by bells, announcements or peons coming in with notices.

Last but not the least, listening appears to be a daunting task for the students when instructions are not properly given and the students do not know what is expected of them.

It is therefore, important that both teachers and parents model active listening by doing the following:

- Put aside other work and pay attention to the child.
- Make a note of significant points and ask questions to clarify or repeat to confirm if that is what the child meant.
- Show that they are registering what the child is saying.
- Make eye contact and lean forward to indicate interest and attentive behaviour.
- Ask questions to clarify.
- Allow the child to complete what he/she is saying without interrupting and then ask questions.

This will model good listening behaviour and it will also allow the child to learn how to listen well and how to negotiate the meaning of what they are listening to.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Why is it important to develop the skill of listening?

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2. In what way does listening contribute to an individual’s linguistic competence?

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Listening Comprehension and Speaking

3. What are the difficulties in teaching listening?

4. What are the different ways parents and teachers model good listening behaviour which will encourage children to listen?

1.2 LISTENING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

In real life listening tends to be a more difficult skill than reading since the listening text is not permanent and there is no possibility of playing it back or referring to the text again. One can, however, negotiate meaning by asking the speaker for clarifications or asking the speaker to repeat what he or she said. But most of the time listening is done through discrimination of sounds and words, evaluation and processing of the message which involves many other non-linguistic clues. Often the emotional factor is very important and these comprise the speaker’s expression, the social setting, the speaker’s stance and the listener’s own expectations.

Thus two major processes are involved in listening. These are:

- The **Decoding process** - analyzing what is in the speech signal
- The **Meaning-making process** - the process used to build meaning by bringing in outside knowledge

An efficient listener engages with the listening text and processes the language at both the levels in order to arrive at the meaning. Needless to say that motivation to listen plays a significant role in the comprehension or **auding** (making meaning of what is said) of a listening text. There are various sub-skills that go into listening comprehension but these are not discrete and often function in relation to each other in clusters. Hence we cannot make hierarchies of the listening skills.

1.2.2 The Decoding Process

The decoding process is the process of translating the sounds (acoustic input) that the listener receives into standard forms of language (words, phrases or sentences)
using clues like pronunciation and inflection. Hence a piece of speech is reshaped into larger units of language.

The listener’s ears receive the phonemes of the language which are clustered into syllables and the syllables into words. The words fall into familiar clusters as in phrases or clauses or lexical clusters.

The decoding happens at the phoneme level, syllable level, word form level and chunk level. Then it happens at syntax level and intonation level and lastly at the meaning level - followed by the response of the listener.

Some of the significant decoding processes are at:

- **Phoneme level:** identifying the different consonants and vowels
- **Syllable level:** recognising the syllable structure by paying attention to the variation in stress, weaker syllables and so on.
- **Word Level:** identifying word boundaries (where they begin and end in connected speech, i.e. *What do you say?*= *What+ do+ you+ say?*) matching sequences of sounds to words, matching words that are in their standard forms and figuring out new words
- **Syntax level:** isolating phrases and clauses, making predictions using the beginnings of phrases and clauses, and anticipating the syntactic patterns and checking hypothesis (whether what was anticipated is true or not)
- **Intonation level:** making use of sentence stress, using intonation to support syntax, recognizing chunks of language (pauses between sense groups, tone groups)

Thus a listener uses the grammatical structure of the utterance and the pattern of intonation that binds together words in order to understand what is being said.

Initially these decoding routines are conscious and require effort but as the listener becomes more efficient these routines become automatic. A competent listener does not have to make a conscious effort to match the group of words in the listening input to her own vocabulary or try to recall a group of words several seconds after they have passed. Automaticity requires minimal mental attention.

To summarize, following are the sub-skills that are exercised in the decoding process:

**Perception skills**

- Recognizing individual sounds “/p/, /b/, /k/, /t/
- Discriminating between sounds “/pin/, /bin/
- Identifying reduced forms in connected/fast speech (elision and assimilation) “ ‘fish and chips’ ‘fishnchips’
- Identifying stressed syllables – Ëpolitics, poËlitical, poliËtician
- Identifying stressed words in utterances – I Ëwent to the Ëmarket.
- Recognizing intonation patterns:
  - Falling tone – Who is he?
  - Rising tone – Is she here?
Language Skills

- Identifying individual words and groups and building up possible meanings for them
- Identifying discourse markers which organize what is being said, for example, *then, I was saying, as a matter of fact, to start with* etc.

Thus in the L2 classroom we need to provide the learners adequate decoding practice to reach greater automaticity where the recognition of words and chunks comes easily. In the following units you shall look at various activities that help the learner to practice the decoding process.

### 1.2.3 The Meaning – Making Process

In order to understand the import of an utterance a listener does not need decoding processes alone, although these seem to dominate in the early stages. To arrive at a full meaning of the speaker’s message, the listener uses various non-linguistic clues and a range of contextual information that may be *independent* of the actual words used; this is referred to as pragmatics earlier in the unit.

The following come into play for arriving at the real meaning of what a speaker is saying:

- Listener’s knowledge of the world
- Knowledge of the speaker
- Knowledge of what has been said so far

According to Goodith White using *knowledge of the world* includes the processes below:

- Connecting groups of words to non-linguistic features such as expressions, gestures, or objects, in order to get clues to meaning
- Using previous knowledge of the topic to guess what the speaker might be saying about it
- Using knowledge about the patterns that certain oral interactions typically take in order to predict what is being said “ordering in a restaurant, making a telephone call to the travel agent, etc.

It is important for the listener to decide whether the piece of information he or she is receiving is important or not and how it relates to the previous piece of information or the context. It is also important to see how it relates to the interests of the listener.

Although practice in decoding is essential, these processes of meaning making must not be ignored even in the early stages of learning language, for these are cognitive processes and help to develop thinking amongst the learners.

In brief we can sum up the meaning-making processes as:

- Using the knowledge of the context (topic, social situation, cultural knowledge and comparing with earlier similar encounters etc.)
- Deriving meaning: storing the literal meaning of an utterance and accepting an approximate meaning and checking understanding
- Adding to the meaning by making inferences, conjecturing where things not clearly stated and dealing with pronouns and linkers to make connections
Selecting information and recognizing redundant information

Integrating information by connecting ideas, carrying information obtained so far and noticing the connecting words used by the speaker.

While interacting with a speaker the listener needs to:

- Cope with the speed of talking and accent of the speaker
- Recognize the speaker’s intention in saying something
- Identify the speaker’s mood/attitude to arrive at the real meaning
- Recognize the speaker’s cues about things such as when to take a turn at speaking and when there is a change in topic
- Predict what the speaker will say next

The teacher needs to decide whether she wishes to practice the decoding processes or meaning-making processes but these processes can be clubbed so that they feed into one another. Efficient listening also requires discourse skills which can be developed through conversation and extended talk. In conversation, the social interaction is more obvious as each short turn responds to previous turns and contributes to the development of the talk.

Similarly, students can be exposed to extended talk like the teacher’s little stories or the retelling of stories, incidents from life, anecdotes or interesting quips suited to the level of the learner.

Exposure to literature and ‘narrative’ continues not just as a discourse form but as a mode of mental organization, eliciting personal responses, retelling and extending the story and creative use of language, after the listening experience is over.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1. Explain the decoding process in a few sentences.

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2. What are the different ways a listener negotiates the meaning of what is being said?

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1.3 EFFECTIVE LISTENING

During the course of daily living we listen to a variety of things in various formal and informal situations. The things we listen to range from polite exchanges and enquiries to listening to talks, news and lectures. We may have discussions on serious or non-serious issues or seek consultation and guidance from different kinds of professionals. Some of these require a response from the listener for communication to continue while some do not offer any scope for the listener to respond in real time.

Listening may be reciprocal or non-reciprocal or it may be academic or conversational. Each situation requires different skills of listening.

A brief discussion on kinds of listening follows.

1.3.1 Kinds of Listening

It is necessary to understand the different kinds of listening that occur in communication. This will help the teacher to organise activities so that various kinds of listening skills are exercised and developed.

**Passive or Marginal Listening**

This kind of listening happens when our attention is partially divided like when children are doing their homework with the television turned on in the background, or when students are discussing in different groups within the classroom. There is a momentary ‘tuning out’ but there is enough consciousness to return to the activity on hand. In the classroom the teacher’s voice alerts students to attention. This happens on many occasions in real life.

**Attentive Listening**

There are situations in life when accuracy of comprehension is involved for the information received is vital as in directions, instructions, announcements and introductions. Failure to understand or remember any portion of the information might lead to problems. The importance of attention skills and negotiating skills becomes paramount in these situations. The listener has to pay close attention to what is being said and stop to ask questions, sum up what the speaker says in order to confirm if he/she has understood correctly or even ask the speaker to repeat what he or she said.

A teacher can develop activities based on directions and instructions such as when students carry out an experiment, or a process following the instructions step by step.

**Responsive Listening**

Responsive listening falls under the category of reciprocal listening for it requires a response from the listener in order to continue with the communication. Thus it is similar to attentive listening because the listener has to pay attention to the speaker’s words in order to make an appropriate response. This requires a different mindset and can be practised by creating situations where the students:

- Participate in a discussion
- have a conversation

A teacher may provide a theme or a situation for the students to discuss after they have heard a story, read a passage or a news item. Students may also practise conversation in simulated conversations based on different situations of life.
Selective Listening

This kind of listening happens when the listener is looking for a certain piece of information in a part of the listening text. It also happens when the teacher explains parts of a process or material from which the students choose certain parts. The teacher may ask the students to pay attention to certain parts of the listening text, or may give a few questions beforehand so that the students know what to look for in the text and become alert when they think that portion is coming.

Appreciative Listening

Appreciative listening is a pleasurable activity wherein a listener settles down to enjoy a dramatization, a story or a poem. This results in some kind of emotional reaction when the listener begins to identify with the character or shares the emotions that accompany the situations in the story.

Rendering of poems, stories on CD or told by the teacher or listening to a play can be followed by asking students’ response to theme, storyline, situation, character, motives and relationships.

Creative Listening

This involves the process of developing new and original solutions to problems presented through the spoken word. It is also the act of entering imaginatively into the experiences, the setting and the feelings of the characters in a story. (Being narrated, read aloud, over the radio or stage). The listener may listen to a situation and suggest solutions or after listening to a story give the story a different end.

Analytical or Critical Listening

Analytical listening makes a great demand on the listener because the listener needs to be careful, accurate and attentive in order to make inferences and value judgements regarding situation, process, places, persons or things.

The listener weighs what he/she hears against personal experience and forms an opinion. While listening critically the listener is alert to the attempts of the speaker to sway his/her opinion by the devices of propaganda or through an exaggeration as in advertisements.

1.3.2 Factors that Influence Listening

It has been noticed that often children fail to listen properly because they may not have a pleasant association with listening. Often the teacher forces them to listen to her, to what she is saying, the rules they have to follow, often sermonising or scolding. At home, parents do not indulge in active listening and often continue to pay attention to the activity on hand while just muttering ‘uh-huh’ or ‘hmm’ to what the children are saying. Hence, these occasions do not have pleasant associations, and as with other learned behaviour, the child is unable to listen wholeheartedly. In the classroom there may be frequent disruptions caused by the bells or announcements. Sometimes the students are not clear about what needs to be done.

Hence it becomes imperative that the teacher be the model of a good listener in the day to day classroom activities by listening to the students actively, responding to them and encouraging them to talk. The teacher can do so by making eye contact, asking questions or summarizing what the child just said in order to confirm what the child meant. Before the activity the teacher needs to provide clear instructions with a demonstration about what is to be done and how.
There are certain factors that might influence listening. They are:

Physical conditions of the student like:
- Hearing problems
- Fatigue, pain or illness

Or the physical conditions in the environment such as:
- Temperature and humidity causing sweating, shivering or discomfort
- Distracting noises in the environment
- Distracting mannerisms of the speaker/teacher like running hands through hair, smoothing clothes, or repeated phrases etc.

Psychological factors that may interfere with effective listening can be:
- Boredom
- Lack of interest in the subject
- Improper attitude towards school and teacher
- Prejudice and misconception about the topic

Experiential background
Attitudes of people grow out of their pleasant or unpleasant experiences. This may lead to:
- Lack of interest which may be marginal or totally absent
- Antagonistic attitudes that have grown out of unhappy experiences

Listening Vocabulary
It has been seen that children do not hear ideas that are beyond their understanding and words that are not in their listening vocabulary are not paid attention to. Hence it is important for the teacher to build the Students' listening vocabulary.

1.4.1 Approaches to Listening
Instruction in listening can be given in many ways. As stand-alone activities or integrated with other skills in a communicative task. Technically there are four approaches to teaching listening.

1. Direct Approach
Focused listening activities can be organised to enable students to realize the importance of listening. The teacher can also discuss what the listening process involves and enumerate the characteristics of good or poor listening. The students are aware of what they are doing and during feedback the possibilities of not having listened well are discussed. This makes the students aware of their listening behaviour and makes them more attentive.

2. Integrated Process
At times a teacher may reorient a reading or writing task and integrate with teaching of listening. The students may be asked to listen to a text and later read a summary of it to find out whether the summary is accurate or not. Alternately, they listen to a situation, following which the students write a letter or a report.
3. **The Incidental Approach**

This is the most common occurrence in the classroom where the teacher draws the attention of the learners to various things during the teaching learning process. Since the information provided is incidental which does not require students to do a task, many do not tend to listen carefully enough to retain the information they received thus. This approach does not prove to be very effective in training students to listen.

4. **The Eclectic Approach**

The eclectic approach is a combination of approaches 1 and 2 where the teacher, while integrating the listening activity with other skills focuses student’s attention to what they need to listen for and how.

In this unit we shall be discussing the first two approaches to teaching listening.

1.4.2 **Micro and Macro skills in listening**

There is a list of sub skills of listening prepared by Goodith White, 1998. They have been divided into perception skills, language skills, use of language of the world, dealing with information and interacting with the speaker. Amongst these, the first two can be termed as Micro skills and the remaining three Macro skills, which enable a person to understand a listening text in the right perspective.

Listening incorporates the following sub-skills (Goodith White, 1998)

**Perception Skills**

- identifying individual sounds
- discriminating between sounds to be able to get to the meaning
- identifying reduced forms of speech by noticing the weak forms of words in a flow of speech
- recognizing the elision of words and make appropriate guesses
- identifying stressed syllables and words in an utterance
- recognizing intonation patterns and their contribution to meaning

**Language Skills**

- Identifying words and phrases and constructing meanings from them
- Identifying discourse markers which organize the ideas in a text i.e. then, as a matter of fact, to reiterate, to conclude, however, etc.

**Using language of the world**

- Connecting groups of words to non-linguistic features such as expressions, gestures or objects in order to get clues to meaning
- Using knowledge of the topic to guess what the speaker might be saying about it
- Using knowledge patterns of social intercourse in order to predict the meaning i.e. formulaic language as in ordering in a restaurant or making a telephone call.

**Dealing with information**

- Understanding the gist or the essence of an utterance (overall idea of what you heard)
Listening Comprehension
and Speaking

- Understanding the main points and how they are related to each other
- Understanding details i.e. train time, flight details
- Inferring the information which is not explicitly stated or has been missed (ellipsis)

Interacting with a speaker

- Coping with variations among speakers i.e. speed of delivery or accent
- Recognizing speaker’s intention
- Identifying mood/ attitude of the speaker
- Recognizing spoken cues about things—such as when to take a turn at speaking or change a topic
- Predicting what the speaker will say next

A combination of the sub-skills are used simultaneously when a listener processes spoken language. The sub skills required for comprehension depend upon the kind of text one is listening to and the purpose or reason for listening. In addition, listeners will use strategies for coping with what they may have missed or understood.

1.4.3 Processes in Listening Comprehension

Comprehension of a heard discourse involves two kinds of processes very much like reading. One process involves looking at the component parts of the incoming message itself and decoding sounds, words, clauses and the syntax in sentences. This process is called Bottom Up, for it looks at the parts of the message itself.

When we use the **Bottom-Up Process** we use the micro-skills and:

- Scan the input for familiar lexical items
- Segment the stream of speech into its constituent parts
- Use phonological cues (sounds, stress and intonation) to identify the information focus in an utterance
- Use grammatical cues to organize the input into constituents (sense groups)

When we use **Top-Down Processes** we use the macro-skills and:

- Use background knowledge to comprehend the message
- Identify an interaction as belonging to a particular event i.e. storytelling, joking, praying, complaining, arguing etc.
- Assign places, persons or things to categories
- Infer cause and effect relationships
- Anticipate outcomes
- Infer the topic of discourse
- Infer the sequence between events
- Infer the missing details
In addition to these Richards mentions the ‘functional dimension’ based on purpose and context. Brown and Yule (1983) too, distinguish between interactional and transactional functions of utterances.

In brief we can say that successful listening involves:

- Segmenting the stream of speech into meaningful units (words and phrases)
- Recognizing word classes (grammatical units)
- Relating the incoming message to one’s own background knowledge
- Identifying the rhetorical and functional intent of an utterance or parts of an aural text
- Interpreting rhythm, stress and intonation to identify information focus and emotional and attitudinal tone
- Extracting the gist from an aural text
- Using our background knowledge and knowledge of the world to get the drift of the utterance.
- Predicting what the speaker might say next.

Check your progress 3

1. What are the different kinds of listening you would like to practise in your classroom?
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2. Mention the different factors that influence listening?
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3. Which approach to teaching listening would you like to use in your classroom?
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In what ways does a listener try to comprehend the meaning of something that he or she is listening to?

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

Though the most basic and essential skill in language learning, listening has been neglected due to various reasons in the classroom, the most important being the teacher’s belief that it need not be taught formally. The time consumed in conducting listening tasks and the difficulty in assessing the extent of the learner’s progress has been an inhibiting factor. The teacher today, is aware of the need for listening and makes a conscious effort to practise the skill in the classroom.

Listening is one of the basic skills in language acquisition and learning. Thus a teacher of English needs to be familiar with the sub skills, processes and kinds of listening. The teacher also should be apprised of the different approaches to teaching listening so that she may develop focused tasks for listening.

1.6 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Why is it important to develop the skill of listening?

   Listening is the foundation of literacy and aids the acquisition of the child’s language. Listening vocabulary is the first vocabulary of any child. A child acquires the vocabulary she listens around her. Listening is basic to language learning as a large part of communication is oral/aural. In daily life too we need the skills of listening for living, study, travel and work.

2. In what way does listening contribute to an individual’s linguistic competence?

   Listening helps a person to acquire a language. It also helps to develop a person’s spoken competence which gets enriched with new grammatical structures when a speaker uses expressions that are new to the listener.

   Listening exposes a person to the contextual vocabulary of the situation and helps the listener to acquire new vocabulary, new sound patterns and enables the person to derive meaning using other indicators like stress, tone, expression and body language of the speaker.

3. What are the difficulties in teaching listening?

   Students feel insecure doing listening activities as they find it to be difficult as they are not sure whether they are making progress as there is no concrete evidence to prove that.

   Much of listening happens in real time and one has to catch the meaning of what is said and give an appropriate response.
As far as the teacher is concerned it is a difficult skill to teach and it being an internal encounter it is not possible to assess listening comprehension. The outcome of listening is not tangible like writing or speaking. Often after a lot of listening practice there is no perceptible improvement which is frustrating for the teacher. If properly conducted listening activities take up a lot of time and teacher feel that they could do something else in its place.

4. What are the different ways parents and teachers model good listening behaviour which will encourage children to listen?

They can listen actively by putting aside whatever they were doing, make eye contact and show that they are listening by nodding or asking questions. They may summarise what the child said to show that they are listening and to confirm whether they have understood well. They should not interrupt the child when he or she is speaking.

Check your progress 2

1. Explain the decoding process in a few sentences.

The decoding process involves the translating of sounds (acoustic input) or segmenting the flow of sounds that the listener receives into standard forms of language (words, phrases or sentences). The listener uses clues like pronunciation and inflection. This kind of decoding happens at the level of phoneme, syllable, word and chunk level. Intonation and stress also help the listener to identify the chunks of language. Paying attention to the grammar and intonation the listener can predict what the speaker will say next. Decoding involves identifying sounds, discriminating between sound, noticing reduced forms, stressed syllables and the intonation pattern of the speaker’s utterance.

2. What are the different ways a listener negotiates the meaning of what is being said?

In addition to the decoding process a listener uses other clues to understand the import of what is being said. For this the learner uses his/her knowledge of the world, the speaker, the topic and what has been said so far. He or she also uses non-linguistic features like expressions, gestures, objects present at the situation to understand the real meaning behind the utterance. The listener also sifts the important information from the unimportant ones and use logical thinking to arrive at his or her conclusions.

Check your progress 3

1. What are the different kinds of listening you would like to practise in your classroom?

- Attentive listening to help the students understand the information and details accurately as in directions and instructions.
- Responsive listening to develop their skills in oral interaction with others.
- Selective listening to help them to focus on one portion of the listening text while assessing their own work or confirming what they understood is correct.
- Appreciative listening to develop their creativity and their aesthetic sense.
- Creative listening by presenting problems to which they would find solutions and learn problem-solving.
Lastly critical listening to teach them not to take anything they hear at its face value.

2. Mention the different factors that influence listening?

Apart from the knowledge of the language and linguistic competency there are other factors that influence listening.

The factors may be the physical condition of the listener which affects listening. Physical conditions of the classroom which may come in the way of effective listening, like the temperature of the room or external noise or mannerisms of the teacher.

Sometimes the students’ mental frame, mood, attitude or lack of interest may come in the way of listening well. If the topic is unfamiliar, the student may take time to understand. And last, but not the least if the language of the listening text is difficult and is not aligned to the students’ listening vocabulary, understanding may be affected.

9. Which approach to teaching listening would you like to use in your classroom?

Sometimes the direct approach to help them focus on one idea and to understand their own listening behaviour. I would also like to integrate listening with other skills in the activities to encourage oral participation, collaboration and association. Largely, I would use the eclectic approach to make the students into conscious and active listeners.

10. In what ways does a listener try to comprehend the meaning of something that he or she is listening to?

A listener uses both the bottom-up and top-down process of listening. The bottom up process involves decoding and using perception skills using sound, word order, pause, stress and intonation as a guide. The top-down process involves other non-linguistic clues like an understanding of the context and the speaker, knowledge of the topic and using the body language to infer the purpose of the speaker’s speech. The listener also uses logical thinking and prediction skills to guess what the speaker will say next or why the speaker is saying something.
UNIT 2 TEACHING LISTENING II

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction – Organising instruction in listening
   2.1.1 Kinds of listening and activities to exercise them

2.2 A listening lesson
   2.2.1 Selecting a listening task
   2.2.2 Selecting resources
   2.2.3 Developing a listening task
   2.2.4 Stages of a listening lesson

2.3 Conducting the Listening Task
   2.3.1 Keeping in view the factors that influence listening
   2.3.2 Organising the class for listening
   2.3.3 Conducting a listening lesson

2.4 Listening activities
   2.4.1 Listening for Perception
   2.4.2 Listening for comprehension

2.5 Production activities during the post-listening stage

2.6 Let Us Sum Up

2.7 Suggested reading

2.8 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After completing the unit you will be able to:

- develop activities to exercise different kinds of listening
- prepare a listening lesson
- prepare the classroom and the class for the listening task taking into account the factors that influence listening
- conduct a listening lessons in a way that ensures motivated listening
- organise meaningful post-listening activities

2.1 INTRODUCTION: ORGANISING INSTRUCTION IN LISTENING

A lot of language can be learnt or even acquired more through listening than through any other means. Learners do listen to a lot of language during classroom talk, teacher explanations, during question and answer sessions, announcements, instructions and speeches at school.

In spite of this, listening as a skill needs to be practised formally and in a structured manner at school. Development of listening skills is important for in real life a person may have to listen to various kinds of utterances and many a time the text is fleeting and a person requires some amount of skill to separate the ‘grain from the chaff’,
meaning thereby to sift the main and vital information from a lot of text. During conversation a listener needs to respond in real time and often has to read between the lines and interpret the meaning using non-linguistic clues like expression, gestures and situational details.

A listener does not merely hear. In fact, listening is a process that involves hearing, recognizing, interpreting or comprehending language. And in order to do this a learner needs to have:

- discipline
- concentration, and
- comprehension

In real time listening, a listener is responsible for communication to come alive. He or she does so by giving adequate responses, which may be oral or through expression, nods or gestures.

We have already discussed the value of listening in learning language and learning per se, since listening is the major source of acquiring information.

### 2.1.1 Kinds of Listening and Activities to Exercise Them

In the previous unit you have learnt about different kinds of listening. In this Unit you will learn how to organise activities so that different kinds of listening skills can be developed.

#### Attentive Listening

This kind of listening is required when every bit of information that comes to the listener is brief and vital, such as in giving directions, announcements and introductions. This kind of listening process is largely a bottom-up process because the listener has to pay full attention. A teacher can develop activities like the following:

- ‘Listening and do’ activities in which students listen to a set of instructions to make something, draw something or complete a puzzle.
- Completion tasks in which students listen to text for details and complete the information in the task. The tasks can also be labelling a diagram or a map, listening to personal details in a biography, listening to a factual passage and completing a paragraph containing essential information.
- Perception and discrimination activities in which students listen to a set of words to find the odd one out, or find the rhyming pair, listen and select the word they hear of a pair or listen to sentences and mark the word stress or intonation patterns.

#### Responsive Listening

Responsive listening is the kind of listening that requires the listener’s response. This kind of listening can be exercised through activities like:

- Listen and respond where the listener hears one part of the conversation and says what the appropriate response may be or makes the response; classroom conversation and role play are examples of this kind of listening.
- Take part in class discussion wherein the participants listen and provide their opinion, agree or disagree, add information, seek clarification, seek approval of the other members or sum up what someone else said in the discussion.
Teacher’s questions during a lesson or at strategic points in a story telling session for prediction or inference. This requires the listener to respond appropriately.

**Selective Listening**

This kind of listening happens when the listener is looking for a certain piece of information as a part of the listening text. The teacher can read aloud a piece of text or play a CD and ask students to focus attention on one/a few parts of the text like:

- Pay attention to the speaker’s views on a particular topic/issue as one listens to his/her speech.
- Listen to a discussion or an interview and focus on particular questions.
- Listen to a description and focus on a particular aspect being talked about.
- Listen to a text focussing on the portion which one missed out during the previous playback.
- Listen to a story and note what one character said or what the author says about a certain character.

As discussed in the previous unit, the teacher may ask the students to pay attention to certain parts of the listening text, or may give a few questions beforehand so that the students know what to look for in the text and become alert when they think that portion is coming.

**Appreciative Listening**

A lot of literature can be used for appreciative listening. Students can be asked to respond to and appreciate theme, character(s), style and ideas of pieces like:

- a radio play where they discuss the issue, situation or the characters
- a story on CD or told by the teacher where they respond to the situation, character (feelings and motives) or the theme
- events from history being narrated in a story like fashion where they critically respond to the appropriateness of the character’s actions (Muhammad Bin Tughlaq’s shifting of capital from Delhi)
- the rendering of a poem or a song and saying what they like most about the song, the ideas, the expression or the techniques of the poet, the voice of the renderer or the music of the piece
- Students can also say why they can or cannot identify or empathise with the poet/speaker/character in a piece they listen to.

**Creative Listening**

This kind of listening has a cognitive demand on the listener who is expected to provide an original solution to the problem. The listening text poses the problems or is used as a stimulus for thinking or discussion. Some of the activities can be:

- Listening to a story and suggesting a different end.
- Listening to a story and suggesting different ways the problem on hand could be solved.
- Listen to a story of olden times and say how it would have progressed had the situation occurred in modern times.
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

- Listen to a newscast and suggest what needs to be done by the authorities or the people.
- Listen to a description of an issue of universal nature like global warming, deforestation, pollution or desecration of our historical sites and suggest ways to overcome them.

Analytical or Critical Listening

As discussed earlier, analytical listening makes a great demand on the listener because the listener needs to be careful, accurate and attentive in order to make inferences and value judgments regarding situation, process, places, persons or things. The listener needs to use one’s background knowledge, experience and beliefs in order to come to a conclusion.

Students can be made to listen to the following and draw conclusions of their own.
- a speech during a political campaign and say how much of truth it has
- an advertisement and say how much exaggeration there is in it
- a person’s utterance in a particular situation and say how much of the professed feeling appear to be true
- listen to utterances and infer the real motive of the speaker and compare it with the professed motive, like when a factory owner talks about the complexities of using a modern machine or when a senior officer tells his/her staff about the virtues of self dependence for odd jobs in the office etc.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Given below are different activities. Write the kind of listening they help to exercise. Write the names in the blanks provided.
   a) listening to an anecdote and saying whether the students empathise or do not empathise with the character/protagonist.
   b) predicting what will happen next in the story
   c) listening to a description of a place and marking areas and places on a map
   d) listening to a story and suggesting different ways the protagonist could have tackled the problem
   e) paying attention to certain portions of a text to get particular information
   f) listening to an advertisement and saying if there is any exaggeration in it

2.2 A LISTENING LESSON

A listening lesson can be effective leading to satisfactory outcome if the listening objective is clear, a suitable listening text is selected and an achievable task built around it. We shall now consider various aspects of text selection and task development that is suitable for the age and the cognitive level of our students.

2.2.1 Selecting a Listening Task

At the outset it is essential to remember that listening comprehension is not an all or nothing process. It is not realistic to expect a total recall of the listening text. A teacher can ask questions depending upon what he or she expects the students to
do and help them focus on pertinent portions of the text. The listening text will have some amount of redundancy which allows the students to register what they need to retain and note down. At the beginner stage, the text is straightforward with minimal redundancy to prevent the young students from getting distracted but as the students become more proficient they would need to learn to sift the main ideas from a host of details, many of which may be irrelevant.

A listening activity becomes meaningful and easy to comprehend when it is constructed around a contextualised task so the students are clear about the place, persons or objects in question and the purpose. Students may be asked to mark places on a map, follow directions, or listen and follow instructions, listen and respond to a story, a poem, an event from history or a speech.

In order to select an appropriate task a teacher must first define objectives which may be based on the kind of listening he or she wishes to practise with his/her students.

**Define objectives**

The first step is to define the objectives of the task. The objectives may be among the following:

**Perception Activities**

- Recognizing individual sounds
- Discriminating between sounds
- Identifying reduced forms in connected/fast speech (elision and assimilation)
- Identifying stressed syllables and words in order to infer the purpose and meaning of the speaker
- Recognizing intonation patterns to find out the intended meaning

**Comprehension of information**

- Orientation- determining what kind of a text they are listening to (a story, a letter, a description)
- Understanding the meaning of a direction or instruction (listening and physically responding like drawing, marking on a map, making an object etc.)
- Understanding the gist (the overall idea of what one hears)
- Understanding the main points of a description or a speech
- Understanding the details, for example, train timings, radio or television schedules, schedules of activities of a school or an institute, listening to inventories
- Inferred information which is not explicitly stated as in discussions, responses to a question during an interview, author’s viewpoint or a character’s utterance
- Retelling, summing up the message in own words

**Ascertaining the difficulty level of the listening text**

The parameters for a teacher to check the difficulty level of the listening text would be amongst the following:

- Is the vocabulary largely within the students listening vocabulary?
● Are the students familiar with the topic?

● How is the text organized? (a narrative with sequence of ideas or a description with main points and details or a comparison and contrast)

● Is the text simple and short with minimal redundancy for them to process the information easily?

● Are there a limited number of things or persons involved?

● Are the speakers in a conversation markedly different for easy discrimination? (a child and an adult with marked differences in the voice or a man and a woman etc.)

● Is there any kind of visual support along with the task? (a sketch, a map, a picture or diagrams to assist comprehension)

● Is the text short enough to retain the attention of the students?

● Is the text relevant and interesting?

● Does the text have some new information to capture the listener’s attention?

2.2.2 Selecting Resources

Since the act of teaching and learning is to prepare the students for life, it is imperative that the listening text be authentic and taken from different walks of life. Selecting an authentic text would make the learning realistic and allow the students to see the objective behind the listening activity. The environment is replete with resources and it is imperative that the students be provided an opportunity to listen to a voice and style other than their own teacher pre-recorded material. Since modern gadgets have made it possible to record a lot of things off the television or a radio, the teacher ought to make use of radio talks, discussions, advertisements, plays or narrations that the media provides.

Below are some of the ideas that a teacher may employ while preparing a listening task for his/her students:

● Pre-recorded talks, speeches, plays, stories, anecdotes, discussions, interviews, narrations, poems, dialogues or monologues

● Record and use actual listening material from the environment like speeches, announcements, advertisements, conversation, speeches

● Download interviews, speeches, stories, plays, descriptions or narrations from the Internet and play them using a computer.

● Play CDs of films or portions of films and adaptations as per need of the task

It is, however, essential to bear in mind that not all the listening text will be perfectly tuned to the needs or the level of the students. Unlike a reading text, which can be adapted and fine-tuned to the students needs and level, the listening text is bound to have some unfamiliar and difficult vocabulary, some amount of jargon (in a scientific text) and some redundancy. It is, thus, important to listen to the text and make a note of the words that you must pre-teach, the kind of pre-listening activity you need to do and the kind of tasks you need to prepare.

The students may be asked to identify the main points of a listening text which is otherwise interesting but has some amount of redundancy.
A careful development of the task and scaffolding would be able to make the listening activity appear less stressful and difficult.

### 2.2.3 Developing a Listening Task

Like a reading lesson, a listening lesson can also be divided into the three stages of pre-listening, while listening and post-listening. Pre-listening activities help to mentally prepare the students regarding the theme and the expectations of the task. The while-listening tasks are short and simple which students can do as they listen or soon after they finish listening. The post-listening tasks are largely tasks on language production which may be based upon the students’ response to the text or any of its aspects, like a discussion or role play or a creative writing task.

**Pre-listening Activities**

Pre-listening activities prepare the students to what they are going to hear. This stage also helps the teacher to assess the students’ background knowledge to fine-tune the task to suit their needs. During the pre-listening stage, the teacher may do any one or more of the following:

- Ask questions or have a discussion to activate students’ background knowledge and assess how much they know about the topic.
- If required provide them with background knowledge necessary for students to understand the task.
- Explain what they are going to listen to and what they are expected to do in the task.
- Allow the students to read the task so that they know what to look for in the text they will hear.
- Pre-teach some of the vocabulary which might otherwise hinder comprehension.
- Assure the students that they need not pay attention to every word.
- Assure the students that there will be more than two playbacks to enable them to comprehend what they are listening to.

Some of the pre-listening activities a teacher may organize are:

- looking at pictures, maps or diagrams
- simple activity on vocabulary or grammatical structures the students will encounter in the listening text
- predicting the content of the listening text
- going over the directions or instructions for the activity so that students are clear as to what is expected of them
- practising doing the task with the teacher’s help after explanation and demonstration by the teacher
- scaffold the task by demonstrating what is to be done and how
- drawing attention towards new vocabulary and pre-teach it

**While-listening Task**

The while-listening task will be aligned to the objectives of the task which will direct the purpose for listening. It is important to suit the activity to the students’ level of
language proficiency. Certain while-listening tasks especially for practising perception skills need to be done where the students have minimal writing.

Tasks like completion tasks, very short answer, table completion or labelling a diagram can be done alongside and completed after the listening is done. These activities would be closely aligned to the listening text.

In order to ensure students participation and success the teacher might like to keep the following points in mind:

- Writing should be kept to the minimum in a completion task. Students should be provided with the task, they must read through it and understand what is expected of them. They can seek clarification in order to be clear about their expected role so that there is no anxiety while the listening text is played or read aloud.
- Demonstrating with an example before the beginning of the listening experience.
- Basing questions on the main idea or other major ideas in the listening text.
- Asking students to predict what is to come next in the text to raise their motivation.
- Listening texts should be relatively short.

Below are some examples of while-listening tasks:

- Listen and do (selecting, marking or labelling a diagram, making an object)
- Listening and selecting or sequencing pictures (as in a story or a process)
- Listen and mark the route (on a map) or mark the location of places
- Selecting items on a list according to the inventory heard
- Completing a chart or a story map on listening to a story
- Completing a picture or drawing a picture based on instructions heard
- Listening for the gist and saying what the main idea is
- Listening for detail and completing a passage, or labelling on a diagram or filling in a table

Post -listening Activities

Post listening activities are largely production-based and mostly oral. Following are some of the post-listening activities that can be organised in the class:

- Students are invited to give their personal responses to different aspects of the listening text
- Students can hold a discussion in small groups on any one aspect of the listening text
- Students can be involved in retelling the gist of the text or story to the class
- Mimic of scenes of the story by one group while the remaining class describes the scene being depicted
- Students can draw any one scene of the story or poem they listened to and the others interpret the drawing
Students can work in groups and each group can give the story a different end.

Students can retell a story from the perspective of another character.

Many of these activities require collaborative work wherein students share their ideas and work upon them. This is an occasion when real-time listening happens which provides them with practice in listening for communication in real life.

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions.

1. What may be the various objectives of tasks based on comprehension of information?

2. How can a teacher ascertain that the text is suitable for his/her students?

3. What is the significance of the pre-listening stage?

4. Suggest some while-listening tasks?

5. What are some of the post-listening activities?
2.3 CONDUCTING THE LISTENING TASK

The factors that influence listening have been discussed in detail in the previous unit. Thus a teacher must bear the points in mind while organizing a listening activity in the class. It is important that listening activities must not be organized for merely the sake of listening to anything but should have an express objective.

2.3.1 Keeping in View the Factors that Influence Listening

Here are a few things that a teacher needs to do regarding various factors that may influence listening.

Ensuring suitable physical conditions

The teacher must provide a conducive environment in the classroom and opportunity to all learners to listen effectively. Here are some things that the teacher may do:

- Seat students with hearing problems closer to the source of the sound.
- Organise the listening activity when the class is fresh and eager to do the activity.
- Ensure that all students are comfortably seated and the weather is not too oppressive.
- Organise the activity when extraneous noises around the classroom are minimal (we cannot totally avoid extraneous noise).
- Avoid distracting the students by constant movement or interruptions.
- Remove distractions like charts or models of previous lessons.
- Avoid mannerisms of behaviour or speech if you yourself are reading the text aloud.
- Close windows or doors to reduce distraction and too much noise.

Ensuring that students are motivated and interested

All physical condition being conducive, a listening task may still fail to yield the desired results if the students are bored and do not have interest in the subject. The teacher may ensure a few things that might create interest in the students. These are:

- During the warm-up, stir the students into thinking by making a controversial statement so that they feel compelled to answer.
- Select a topic or a genre that would interest the learners- it ought not to be too familiar or too unfamiliar.
- The content or context may be such that arouses the curiosity of the students.
- Evince interest by being animated and enthusiastic yourself
- Avoid a topic about which the students have less prior knowledge.

Ensuring the language is a bit challenging but comprehensible

Every teacher is aware of the listening vocabulary of their students. The effort of the teacher is to extend their vocabulary by presenting new items in a context or through interesting situations where many of the words can be guessed from the context. It is important that the students’ listening vocabulary is built upon the vocabulary already learnt or acquired. The teacher may:
Select a text which is largely comprehensible but for a few new expressions and words.

Pre-teach only the essential vocabulary and ask the students to guess the meaning of the remaining from the text. This kind of inference will help to build their repertoire of listening vocabulary.

If the text or the situation is emotionally dynamic or it is interesting and engrossing, the new vocabulary might be acquired easily or learnt with the teacher’s help.

### 2.3.2 Organising the Class for Listening

A listening task can be a stand-alone activity or can be integrated with other skills in a group activity.

There are a few things a teacher may bear in mind in order to make the activity effective.

- Announce that the students are going to do a listening task so that they can put away books or other material which they would not require.
- Ensure that there is no map, chart or any remains of blackboard work of the previous lesson that may act as distracters.
- If the students are expected to listen and then follow up the activity in pairs or groups, ensure that the grouping is done before the listening experience proceeds.
- Normally a listening task is an individual activity but students may check out their answers with their neighbours. If there is such a provision then it must be announced before hand.
- Ensure that the technical equipment is ready at hand and is in working order. A last minute scramble for bits of equipment and accessories can lead to spells of unproductive time. It is advisable to play the CD before the class commences to ensure clarity, and audibility.
- Seat the students in a way that all can hear the text. The teacher can go to the last bench to ensure that the text is audible there.

Ensuring the above can increase the productive value of the activity.

### 2.3.3 Conducting the Listening Activity

The different stages of the listening lesson have been discussed in an earlier section. Once the plan has been made it is necessary to execute it in a way that is fruitful and effective, which might mean making some last minute changes depending upon the response from the students.

Goodith White recommends the following steps of a listening lesson

- A warm up on the topic of the listening passage
- Asking some ‘gist’ questions for the students to answer so you are sure they are aware of the main idea of the text
- Checking the answers and asking them to note the relevant points when they listen to the text a second time
- Setting the while-listening tasks that require the students to listen for details (completion or selection activities)
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

- Playing the CD again, probably once for each of the tasks set
- Allowing students to check their answers with their neighbours before the plenary discussion
- Encouraging students to listen (selective listening) to portions they were unable to understand well during the earlier playbacks
- If required, reading aloud certain portions of the text that students found difficult to catch or comprehend
- Using the topic or the language of the listening input for an ‘extension’ or ‘transfer’ activity in which students use other skills, for example, writing or speaking

Here are a few things to keep in mind.

- Allow more time for listening to the text. You will notice that things that were missed in the earlier playbacks seem to unfold in subsequent playbacks. It is important to allow the students to listen again to understand or catch the required ideas or points. (In normal class the tape is played for only 3-4 minutes three or four times. The rest of the time is spent on discussion.)
- It is important for students to guess why they were unable to catch the meaning or the sound. Provide clues before subsequent playbacks to help them focus on the relevant portions.
- Pre-teaching of all new vocabulary is not required or even desirable. Allow the learners to develop their own listening strategies for understanding the new words or sounds they encounter.
- Allow students to respond to the text individually and then in groups. You will find that they might notice features that you had not noticed.
- Do not expect all the students to listen in the same way and remember the same things. There are different ways to listen and receive a text. Students might listen with different degrees of concentration, depending upon their interests and reasons for listening. If students are left to engage with the listening text in their own ways the ensuing discussion will be richer and more lively with each student taking responsibility for views and responses.
- Don’t turn your listeners into passive listeners. They are often listening to an disembodied voice on the CD which they cannot stop. Allow them to question and ask for repeat playback of a certain portion.
- Good listeners become good speakers. Interlocutors in a conversation change roles rapidly from listener to speaker. They listen, show interest or sympathy to make the conversation going.
- Do not expect 100% comprehension. According to a study by Bone (1988) people often listen at only 25% of their potential and ignore, forget, distort, or misunderstand the other 75%.

Concentration rises above 25% if they think they are listening to something important or something that interests them. Even then it can never rise to 100%.

Assessment of while-listening tasks

To encourage students to listen and complete the task in a stress-free manner, the teacher would have discussed and scaffolded the task. Even during assessment the
environment should be stress free and students should be given an opportunity to share their responses with their neighbours and correct their work after a discussion. Students can be asked to do the task in pairs or groups in consultation with each other. This will take away the stress of being evaluated.

It is important for students to evaluate their own skill of listening by focusing on certain aspects during subsequent playbacks. Allowing them to listen again and correct their own responses will also help them to develop their own listening strategies.

**Check Your Progress 3**

1. What are some factors that a teacher needs to ensure for the success of a listening task?

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2. Why are multiple playbacks necessary during the conduct of a listening activity?

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### 2.4 LISTENING ACTIVITIES

The different kinds of listening that can be exercised in the classroom have been discussed in the earlier section.

Apart from that, listening activities can be broadly divided into ‘Listening for Perception’ and ‘Listening for Comprehension’. Perception activities are largely based on sound, inflection, stress and intonation. They are concerned with the technical part of the language being used by the speaker. On the other hand Comprehension or meaning-making tasks focus on the ideas and the content of the speaker and also on the real import of an utterance, which involve not only sharp hearing but inference and logical thinking.

#### 2.4.1 Listening for Perception

Amongst the perception activities a teacher can organize in the L2 classroom are the following:

- Selecting one in a pair of words with minimal sound difference.

  Look at the pair of words. Listen and tick the word you hear.

  pass  purse  hard  heart  flow  flowed  sill  seal

- Sound discrimination activities can also include finding the odd one out.
Listen to the words and find the word with a different vowel sound.

hat flat park smack that trap
under usher umbrella uniform unless (Beginning sound)

- Perception Activities can also be based on completing a pattern. Listen to the first set of words and complete the pattern of the next set.

feather father leather ..............
ways waist ............... paste lays laced

- Activities based on stress can be to ask students to listen and underline the syllable (in disyllabic words) or word that is stressed. aca’demic, a’cademy, acade’mician

- Listening for intonation. Students can listen to a word or a group of words said with different intonation and asked to say the purpose of the speaker.

For example in a conversation like the following:

A: All those who have received their unique identification number need not apply again. Right? (Rising tone)

B. Right. (Falling tone)

The first ‘Right’ with a rising tone implies a question while ‘Right’ with a falling tone would imply confirmation or agreement.

- students can be asked to listen to words with a weak letter in them and underline the weak syllables.

violet postman forget attend character thorough

Perception activities are largely bottom-up activities but are essential for a listener to understand the actual meaning, the purpose of speaking and the emphasis laid in an utterance.

2.4.2 Listening for Comprehension

Listening activities for comprehension may vary between the focus of the task which may be on;

- Listening for gist
- Listening for detail

Listening for gist

This activity does not require attentive listening as much as deploying strategies like: predicting, guessing, using non-linguistic clues for understanding and focusing on the main ideas. This requires a top down approach to listening where non-linguistic clues provide essential information. Various kinds of text may be used for providing practice in listening for gist. These may be:

- Speeches
- Stories or narratives of any kind (prose or poetry)
- Descriptions
Students can be asked to complete a brief summary of the text, make a guess as to who is speaking and to whom and the situation, and other information as may be gleaned from it. They may be provided a list of main points out of which students select the ones relevant to the listening text. Selective listening may be used in listening for gist as well. Critical listening can be exercised where the listeners try to get to the actual meaning and draw their conclusions citing reasons for doing so.

**Listening for detail**

This activity requires attentive listening and can be exercised in various ways like:

- Listen and draw (listening to the description of a scene and drawing it)
- Listen and guess (listen to a description of an object and naming it)
- Listening to instructions to make something or do something
- Listening to schedules and timetables for particular information

Both kinds of activities would require multiple playbacks and at times both kinds of listening may be required to understand a text well. The same text, largely stories, can be exploited for understanding the gist and detail.

### 2.5 POST-LISTENING ACTIVITIES FOR LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

Just as a reading activity is best concluded with a writing task, a listening activity can be meaningfully wound down with a speaking activity. This allows the students to make use of the ideas and the language they heard in production activities of their own.

It also makes allowance for them to discuss the inferences they have made and conclusions drawn, their response to the text listened to and extend the listening text using ideas of their own. During the post-listening stage students also have an opportunity to associate what they heard with their own experiences and talk about the situation from their perspective.

Some of the production activities that students can do after a listening activity are:

- Discussions
- Role play
- Retelling of a story from a different perspective
- Extending the story or the exposition by placing it in another context
- Saying what they would have done if placed in the shoes of the protagonists
- Suggesting a new solution to the problem
- Responding to character, situation, ideas heard
- Appreciating aspects of the listening text- theme, character, action, expressions etc.

Students may use ideas and language from the listening text and expand upon them. This will provide them with an opportunity to use language in a meaningful way.
Check Your Progress 4

1. Provide an example of each of the following activities you might like to organize in your class:
   a) Listening for perception
   b) Listening for gist
   c) Listening for detail

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2. What is the significance of post-listening activities?

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit has focussed on developing activities to exercise different kinds of listening, preparing listening tasks and conducting listening lessons for motivated listening.

2.6 SUGGESTED READING

Cameron, Lynne. 2001. Teaching Languages to Young Learners. Cambridge University Press, UK


Field, John. 2009. Listening in the Language Classroom. Cambridge University Press, C/O CUP India


2.8 ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

1. a. appreciative listening   b. responsive listening c. attentive listening d. creative listening e. selective listening f. analytical/critical listening
Check your progress 2

1. The following are the objectives that a task based on comprehension of information may have:
   - Orientation (what kind of a text it is)
   - Getting the gist
   - Understanding meaning of directions or instructions
   - Identifying the main parts of a speech or description
   - Getting the details of a description
   - Inferring information
   - Summarising information
   - Analysing information

3. The teacher needs to ensure the following:
   - vocabulary is within the ‘listening’ vocabulary of the students with some amount of challenge
   - familiarity with the topic
   - organisation of the text is not too complex or abstract
   - does not have too many ideas, characters involved
   - different speakers have distinct voices so that they can be identified easily
   - students are motivated and enthused
   - task is interesting

3. It helps the teacher to ascertain the background of the students. It mentally prepares the students for what they are going to listen to or what they are expected to do. The teacher may pre-teach only the essential vocabulary and leave the rest to be inferred.

4. Some of the while-listening tasks may be:
   - Listen and do (follow instructions)
   - Listen and make (follow instructions to make something)
   - Listen and select (the relevant words of points)
   - Listen and mark (a route)
   - Complete the paragraph
   - Tick the correct statements
   - Complete the chart/table

5. Post-listening activities are largely oral and can be:
   - Answering questions
   - Discussions
   - Role play
   - Retelling
   - Providing a new perspective
Check your progress 3

1. A teacher needs to ensure the following for the success of a listening task.
   - Physical conditions are suitable
   - The text selected appeals to the students
   - Students are motivated and are in a mental state to listen
   - The language of the text is simple but with a little bit of challenge

2. Multiple playbacks are necessary in a listening class because:
   - The first playback is used basically to get a broad picture or gist of what is hear (including orientation)
   - The second playback is used to get the main ideas, drift of the discussion, main events etc.
   - Subsequent playbacks can be used to get to the details or check on the correctness of one’s comprehension through selective listening

Check your progress 4

1. Listening for Perception:
   Selecting one of the two similar sounding words heard
   Saying whether something has been said with a rising or falling tone and what that implies
   Listening and marking the word that has a different pronunciation

Listening for gist:
Listen and complete the summary or cloze exercise based on a story or an anecdote
Listen and complete a story map
Listen and say what the giver of the speech is trying to say

Listening for detail:
Listening to a description and marking how it is similar or different to something else
Listening to a train schedule and completing a chart

2. Post listening activities help to consolidate the ideas or the language heard during the listening experience. It allows the students to respond to what they heard or think creatively and present their ideas putting it in a new perspective. It helps to conclude the listening activity into a production activity using open-ended tasks.
UNIT 3  TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS

Structure
3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Needs of the Learner
3.3 Interactive and Non-interactive Use of Language
3.4 Objectives of Teaching Speech Skills
3.5 Accepted Techniques in Teaching Conversational/Oral Skills
3.6 Demands of an Activity that Involves Discourse
3.7 Reading Aloud does not help much in Learning Speaking
3.8 Distinguishing between the Different Features of Writing and Speaking
3.9 Group Work for Socializing and Developing Oral Skills
3.10 An Effective Oral Skills Lesson
3.11 Role of the Teacher in a Speaking Class
3.12 Let Us Sum Up
3.13 Key Words
3.14 Suggested Readings
3.15 Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to:

- understand the major aspects of speaking skills
- identify and distinguish between the needs of the learners
- use some accepted techniques in teaching speaking skills
- understand the difference between writing and speaking and use this understanding in teaching speaking skills
- understand and appreciate the role of activities to teach the speaking skills
- understand, analyse and evaluate the importance of group work in developing oral skills
- identify the characteristics of an effective speaking class and provide for the same in your speaking activities
- study, analyse the different stages of a speaking lesson
- understand your role at various stages of a speaking lesson and provide the maximum support to the learners for an effective speaking lesson
3.1 INTRODUCTION

An important element of communicative approach is a student’s ability to use and understand the spoken language’ (Leech and Svartvik, 2000). This is because, underlying any social interaction, is the human desire to make contact with other people and to cross the gap between their thoughts and one’s own. Vygotsky, (1962) has said that ‘language is the primary tool through which we use words to capture our own and other people’s ‘sense’, our own contextualised understandings and connotation for events and ideas’.

‘As human beings, we are driven by a need to make sense of and to make ‘sense to’ others, in what has been described as an innate drive for ‘coherence. . .’ (Meadows 1993).

Most of the language used is in the spoken form. In fact, language derives its vitality, sustenance and dynamism from speech. In the learning of any foreign language we need to first comprehend the import of the spoken utterance and then make active use of language to express meaning, which other people can make sense of.

Speech skills or oral skills have two major components. The first comprises the motor perception skills wherein the learner of a foreign language is exposed to sounds and structures of the target language, which the learner perceives, recalls and articulates in the correct order. The language in these imitative and repetitive exercises is presented in a discrete manner without a contest. The learners practice the sounds of the language (phonology), vocabulary (lexis) and grammar (syntax) without the basis of content and situation. Though it serves a purpose at the elementary level, this does not prepare them for fluent use of the language in real life for personal use. The learner is not able to transfer his/her knowledge from a language-learning situation to language-using situation.

The second major component of speaking comprises the ‘interaction skills’. As the learner progresses through various listening-speaking contexts, s/he begins to reach a level where the foreign language is merged as it were with the situation and the learner begins to think in the language.

Interaction skills involve the use of language for a certain purpose, according to the audience or listener and the situation. The learner may have to seek information either in a face-to-face contact or over the telephone, describe things, express opinion, narrate incidents or converse with friends.

In the second language classroom there is now a growing need for the development of speech skills where a learner develops a wide range of language resources and skills. Language using experience in a variety of situations means that a learner’s resources can be used across an increasing range of contexts. This would have to be developed by a variety of activities in different language contexts.

Taking responsibility for how other people will understand what you say and for making sure that you understand them, is an aspect of discourse that develops as one grows.

3.2 NEEDS OF THE LEARNER

By the time the learner reaches the secondary level, s/he would have acquired the skill of using both conversation (face-to-face or telephonic) and extended talk comprising descriptions and narrations, which are part of linguistic discourse.
Spoken language, especially conversation, requires quick, almost instantaneous production and understanding. There is no time to prepare what to say in advance. We need to shape our message as we go along. That is why informal talk is characterized by pauses, fillers, false starts, repetitions, etc. which give us time to think. One need not use a complete sentence in order to make oneself understood—sometimes a word or two or even our facial expression and gesture will do.

The learner needs “to be able to talk intelligibly, using appropriate word stress. Some of the important language functions that the learner would need to perform at this stage are:-

- greeting friends, superiors, strangers
- introducing self and others
- making telephone calls or answering them
- asking for or giving information
- asking for things in shops, counters and restaurants
- asking questions for clarification, advice or help
- expressing opinion or reactions to programmes, plays, books or films
- participating in discussions and debates
- giving or receiving instructions
- describing things, places or persons narrating anecdotes, stories and discussing them carrying on sustained conversation with friends, family or strangers giving a report of an event

Check Your Progress 1

1. Suggest three more functions of the spoken language which learners may require.
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2. What are the three aspects which govern what we say? Give an example of an utterance to explain your point.
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3.3 INTERACTIVE AND NON-INTERACTIVE USE OF LANGUAGE

Of the various language functions mentioned in the previous section some require an interactive use of language like talking to friends, asking for things, asking for
information or seeking clarifications, Sonic functions require a largely non-interactive use of language like telling a story, reporting an event or speaking in a debate where there is limited interaction with the audience. **Interactive** and **non-interactive** uses of language are the two varieties of spoken language.

Conversation is **private speaking** and normally has two or more participants who take turns to speak. This kind of speech is more spontaneous and cannot be prepared beforehand. It is impromptu and needs alertness and a constant processing of ideas and language in the mind of the speakers as they respond to each other.

Non-interactive use of language is **public speaking**. It is less interactive than conversation. Sometimes it is not interactive at all. For instance, a speech is generally prepared and written down beforehand. It may be read out to an audience. Public speaking is intermediate between speaking and writing.

These two kinds of speaking can also be called **conversation** and **extended talk**.

### 3.4 OBJECTIVES OF TEACHING SPEECH SKILLS.

The major responsibility of a teacher are the following:

- teaching of sounds of the language as well as stress, rhythm and intonation.
- stringing together features of pronunciation (sound, stress, rhythm and intonation) in grammatical and meaningful sequences.
- teaching the speech sequence in appropriate social situations to enhance social acceptability.
- teaching the learners to identify and select points relevant to the purpose and situation as per social acceptability.
- teaching the sequencing of ideas into a coherent whole in extended talk.
- helping individual learners to develop fluency, pleasant conversation and ease of speech.

### 3.5 ACCEPTED TECHNIQUES IN CONVERSATIONAL/ORAL SKILLS TEACHING

The communicative classroom lays a lot of emphasis on the learning of speech or oral skills. By the time the learners reach the secondary classes they would have mastered the sounds of English, aspects of stress and intonation to an extent that they are intelligible to others. Their expression or the sentences they construct may be simple. There may be some who may not have obtained language proficiency to this level. It thus becomes the task of the teacher to practice and consolidate what the learners may have learnt in their previous classes.

Some of the techniques to teach oral skills are given below.

**The Conversation Class or the Question and Answer sessions**

One of the common methods of teaching oral skills is the ‘Question and Answer session’ in which the teacher sits with a group of learners and asks them questions about their home, family, study, play, etc. The learners answer the questions with no other motivation but to respond to the teacher’s queries. Thus, this is not always very productive as it is not very interesting. It also lacks a clearly defined topic or purpose to talk. With young learners it serves a purpose, however limited it may be, as the learners are still learning to string words into appropriate responses. But with older learners this is not a very motivating activity.
The Topic Based Discussion Class

Another kind of fluency-based activity is the topic-based discussion. The teacher plans discussions on different topics and encourages all the learners to participate while taking turns. Even though the topics are interesting, the learners may or may not be inclined to participate, as it is a discussion for the sake of discussion. In addition, the discussion may not carry personal relevance for the learners and thus they have no incentive to talk.

It is thus important that the learner must have some involvement with the topic so that s/he may share his/her understanding of the topic with others.

Another disadvantage in the topic-based discussion is that if it was carried out with the full class, which might, at any given time be a group ranging from 30 to 50 learners, the linguistic gains would be minimal. In a whole class discussion, not many learners would get a chance to speak. Moreover, the time available to each speaker would not be much. As in any normal class the brighter learners would monopolize the activity while the rest of the class would lose interest.

Task Centred Fluency Practice

With increasing importance being given to Communicative Language Teaching, communicative tasks are being used to develop fluency. These activities are done in small groups by the learners, and may involve interaction, asking and answering questions, exchanging notes, agreeing or disagreeing or role-play. The tasks have a clear purpose and a tangible output, which depends on effective interaction between or amongst the learners. The learners of one group share the outcome of their activity, which might be in the shape of a report, a speech or a presentation, with the other groups in the class.

The learners have a concrete task to work with and clear guidelines given by the teacher in a situation, which is akin to problem solving. It also provides a basis for feedback.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Have you tried the three types of activities discussed in this section? In which activity did you have to provide the maximum support? Specify the support that the learners required from you?

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2. Which activity did you find most effective with your learners? Give reasons.

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3.6 DEMANDS OF AN ACTIVITY THAT INVOLVES DISCOURSE

Teachers plan different kinds of speaking activities in their classes involving conversation or extended talk like narration or description and are sometimes disheartened at the sudden and abrupt end of the activity with the interaction reaching a deadlock. In spite of his/her best efforts, the activity falls flat as it may be too challenging for the learners or too simple for them.

If the teacher was aware of the demands that a speaking activity places on the learners, s/he would be able to provide the impetus or support that would help to sustain the activity.

The teacher could give the following suggestions to his/her students:

Cognitive demands: Access previous knowledge on the topic. Make choices. Utilize this knowledge effectively in interaction for the successful completion of the task. Think of ideas and organize them.

Language demands: Find words and phrases related to the topic on hand or the topic selected. Find appropriate words and phrases to use during interaction with fellow learners.

Discourse demands: Carry on the conversation in a way that it does not come to an abrupt end. The activity may be supported by the teacher’s prompts if help is solicited.

Interactional demands: Carry on a conversation with classmates as would lead meaningfully to the successful end of the activity. Use language that is appropriate and socially acceptable during the interaction especially while disagreeing or citing a different point of view. Elicit the required response from the classmates according to the demands of the activity.

3.7 READING ALOUD DOES NOT HELP MUCH IN LEARNING SPEAKING

A large number of teachers use reading aloud as a main weapon to improve their learners’ oral English. They ask the learners to read aloud from their textbooks/course books. They listen for mistakes and ‘correct’ them as they arise by interrupting the reader and requiring him/her to repeal a word or phrase according to the model they provide.

Research has shown that this activity is not recommended on a number of counts (J.A. Bright &G.P.McGregor).
1. The test in a textbook is for a reading lesson. A reading lesson creates an imaginative response in the mind of the reader from the visual stimulus of black marks on the paper. (imaging and picturing). Reading aloud interferes with this business of imaginative response.

2. Where reading aloud is used frequently, it slows down the speed of reading whereas the purpose of teaching reading is to increase the speed of reading.

3. Only a few individuals get practice and the others have nothing to do and hence are bored.

4. It may be a very embarrassing experience for the reader. If there are a large number of corrections it will lead to a deterioration of performance.

5. The pupil’s practice is random instead of specific. Nobody knows when the reader will be asked to stop - on an error of pronunciation, stress, intonation or phrasing. With so many interruptions there can be no fluency in reading aloud. The teacher then urges the pupil to read with more expression, which cannot be forthcoming in such a situation.

6. The use of the text in the book may not lead to learning the cut and thrust of real conversation.

7. The job of reading aloud a literary text without any practice or preparation is a difficult one and only the best pupils can do it.

8. Unless the pupils are going to be announcers or teachers the ability to read aloud is of little practical value compared with the ability to play an effective part in conversations, discussions and committee meetings.

9. Reading aloud of this kind is purposeless. Nobody listens because everybody has the text. The sensible ones ignore the background mumbling and read on.

Reading aloud is and remains a kind of theatrical activity where one is performing in front of others. Stories and speeches are read aloud with expression and gestures more as entertainment. Moreover, those who have to read aloud professionally always read from a prepared script or text and the mental processes that are required in speaking do not come into play.

These points notwithstanding, reading aloud, is not totally without purpose. It can be used to improve expression, voice modulation, stress and intonation for those who wish to become radio/television announcers.

Check Your Progress 3

1. While conducting a speaking activity what kind of support do you normally lend to your learners? Have you found any difference between carrying a prepared task to class and doing an activity on the spur of the moment?

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2. Does reading aloud help in developing speech skills?

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3.8 DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT FEATURES OF WRITING AND SPEAKING

In order to teach conversational skills effectively, it is important to understand the differences between speech and writing.

Speech and writing have different transmission systems. The language of speech is not ‘spoken’ writing. In fact normal conversation which sounds so normal to the ears looks fragmented, rambling, unstructured and difficult to read if transcribed. In the same way in normal communication we do not speak like the book.

This does not mean that speech and writing have two different grammars. They do not. The shared grammar is used differently on the two channels,

For example the apparent statement- He hasn’t left (?) said with a rising intonation means that a person is asking if someone has left, something that is not desired in the situation. If transcribed, this word order of a statement: is concluded with a question mark.

Normal speech is processed in real time, and being transitory, it leaves no trace other than what we remember. It requires fast, almost instantaneous production and as a result it has many pauses, repetitions and incomplete sentences. There are silent pauses, voice filled pauses like ‘erm’, false starts and regression, fillers like you know, short forms and ellipsis in which a few words that are otherwise understood are left out.

This is because the speaker had to plan, organize the message and control the language. On the other hand, the listener has to process the stream of speech, which may have an unfamiliar accent, complex words or a quick pace of delivery. There is a great demand both on the speaker and the listener. Contrary to this, written text is organized and in complete sentences which a reader can read and reread in order to get to the meaning.

In spoken language, the speaker has a direct contact with the listener. In fact the speech situation requires a listener who influences the direction of the conversation by providing feedback or seeking clarification. The feedback given by the listener may be verbal or non-verbal like raising of the eyebrows. The speaker thus adjusts and adapts his/her speech according to the listener. It is only then that communication takes place.

(In writing there is no such direct contact, although the writer always has an idea about his/her audience. But in the case of newspapers and periodicals, the writer does not even know who his/her reader would be. That does not imply that written communication is not reciprocal. As said above, it is important to keep the needs and background information of the reader in mind while writing so that the written message can be comprehended easily. If faced with difficulties that hamper
understanding, the reader cannot seek immediate clarification from the writer. S/he may decide to continue reading or give it up.

To maintain the reciprocity of speech it is essential that the speaker elicits whether the listener has understood by asking whether s/he has understood. Conversation is not just a matter of giving and receiving information, it requires the cooperation of both participants. ‘There is a lot of turn-taking as the speaker and the listener share the role of speaker and listener. Cooperation is also achieved with the use of fillers like you see, well and tag questions like We have covered the whole hook, haven’t we?’

Finally speech, as in daily life (not recorded ones), is transitory and has no permanent record except that the main import of the message or an interesting portion of the utterance remains in our memory. Written communication can be recorded permanently.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Write five differences between speaking and writing.

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3.9 GROUP WORK FOR SOCIALIZING AND DEVELOPING ORAL SKILLS

Developing oral/speech skills does not amount to practicing the structural elements of speech i.e. phonology, vocabulary and grammar alone. There ought to be a basis of content and situation to keep the learner motivated. Since speaking is a communication tool in society by which people stay in touch, make contact and share understanding, practice in speaking also ought to be done in groups with a concrete task on hand. ‘Living through a situation and finding the appropriate language always helps in acquiring sound speech habits’ (Kshanika Bose).

Not only does working in groups help the learners to socialize in simulated micro groups of society, it also allows a larger number of students to participate.

Research has given us the 2/3 formula which shows that a 40 minute class with a strength of 40 learners per class, a learner gets less than a minute to participate in the speaking activity: Group work provides a framework whereby a learner can have maximum participation.

Group work gives an opportunity to learners to speak in small groups comprising of their classmates and this is a non-threatening situation for them. It reduces the hesitation and embarrassment a shy learner may feel in a whole class. It allows the learners to open up and shed some of their inhibitions. In addition group work provides a feeling of security and a sense of belonging as the learners sit huddled, working out a problem, putting their heads together in a non-competitive atmosphere. Thus personal rapport is built leading to cooperation and assistance to each other.

An atmosphere of healthy competition is built when the groups try to see which group has performed best. Individuals have the comfort and security of their group.
Gains and losses, if any, are shared by all members of the groups alike. The inter-group competitive spirit helps the groups to move ahead and to the activity ns efficiently as they can.

With the physical distance between individuals reduced, communication is more free and better. Learners feel emboldened to experiment with language and receive immediate feedback from their peers, thus modifying or correcting their utterances.

Group work also helps the learners to share visuals or any other material required for the activity. It is also not necessary that all the groups work on the same task. This reduces the tedium and monotony of a single activity being reported repeatedly.

Group work makes allowance for cooperative learning and peer teaching. Learners are likely to learn better from each other than from the teacher as mistakes get corrected in a healthy cooperative atmosphere and incidental learning from each other takes place as learners closely watch each other working.

The basic skills of interaction get honed as the learners begin to take turns while speaking and adjust their speech to suit the others. Clarifications are sought and suggestions made without any acrimony and embarrassment.

The teacher on his/her part is free to move about the room and render specific help or support as per the needs of the groups. It also gives them an opportunity to observe the learners and make an assessment of their progress. Teachers can note down the efforts of the teacher and regrouping needs to be done.

While organizing group work a teacher may face certain difficulties. For instance the learners may get too excited and the class become noisy. Or, sometimes in a hurry to complete the activity learners may lapse into LI, thus defeating the purpose of a speaking lesson. At times certain learners fail to get involved in spite of the best efforts and regrouping needs to be done.

In a large class, with cramped space, putting the learners in a group becomes a problem. During the activity the teacher may find it difficult to supervise so many groups at a time.

**Check Your Progress 5**

Have you done group work with your class? Complete the following:

1. Size of the class.
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2. Number of groups and size of the groups,
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   ................................................................................................................

3. Distribution of the kind of learners in each group
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4. The organization of the class for group work
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3.10 AN EFFECTIVE ORAL SKILLS LESSON

It has been noticed that however well meaning a speaking lesson is, it often fails to succeed. The oral skills lesson can be made effective if a few things are kept in mind.

The learners need a stimulus to say something in English. At the same time, it needs some ideas and language items to help the students in the speaking activity.

Here are a few things that could be taken care of:

**The Simplicity of the Task**

It is always wise to make a humble beginning and then move up towards complexity. To set the learners on a communicative activity at the initial stage, it is important that the task should be simple and achievable. The task should give a sense of purpose and direction. Learners should be clear why they are doing the task. It should be interesting and within the range of the learners experience.

**Preparation**

A well-prepared task is a successful task. Hence it is important to carefully work out the different aspects of the task, anticipating the needs of the task and the problems that a teacher may come across in conducting the task.

In order to avoid problems, it is advisable to set a task which is feasible for the teacher to prepare. It should not be too complex in terms of copying or photocopying or recording. If the speaking lessons need hours of preparatory work then the teacher would not be able to organize too many in a term. It should be simple and easy to prepare using the resources easily available to the teacher.

**Tangible Output or Result**

Both the teacher and the learners should be able to visualize the output of the activity. The learners should know where their interaction would be taking them. The activity in itself should generate thought and the learners may be required to write down the result in the form of a presentation. It could be a story, a short talk, a report, a completed grid or chart. In brief, it could be something that the learners can show and compare.

The tangible output or result helps the learners to focus on what has to be done. It also provides a clear signal to the teacher and the groups that the task is complete. A tangible output is easy to compare, assess and provide feedback on.
**Language Practice**

The task or oral activity should allow for optimum language practice by the learners. The language items and ideas could be suggested to the learners so that they could launch on the speaking activity right away. Learners should not have to spend time puzzling out the activity with no speech taking place.

**Interaction**

Open-ended activities which allow the learners to use their imagination and brainstorm ideas generate a lot of talk. This will help them to exercise their thinking skills, refer back to their previous knowledge and past experience and help their interactional skills to come into play. This would also lend some variety to the activity and the feedback session would be interesting and animated.

**Interest Level**

As said earlier, it is of paramount importance that the learners should have a purpose to talk. The task ought to be interesting with the output well in view of the learners. If the learners have a personal season to talk, then motivation would be very high. Hence the choice of the topics for the activity could be closely relm to the lives of the learners.

The activity should not be too challenging as to deter the learners. It should neither be too simple or be boring. A bit of a challenge is essential to keep the interest level high.

Fantasy or exotic topics requiring the use of day-to-day language can also prove to be interesting and motivating for the learner.

**Organisation**

Physical aspects like the organisation of the class during group work also play a significant role in the success of the activity. Learners should be comfortable with adequate space to sit and face each other. Rows of students can be asked to turn around and face their classmates behind them.

Groups should be of mixed abilities so that the bright ones can be distributed amongst the different groups. Some activities can be done well when learners of the same caliber are bunched together. This is a decision that the teacher would have to make.

Groups need not be fixed and a little change from time to time helps to rejuvenate the groups and enables them to bond with other children too.

**Check Your Progress 6**

1. Select a speaking activity from your textbook and discuss it in terms of the criteria mentioned in this section.

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**3.11 ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN A SPEAKING CLASS**

Let us look at the role that a teacher has in a speaking class. As you will see, it will be very different from a writing class or a listening class.
Preparation of the task

As discussed earlier, it is profitable to mull over different aspects of a speaking activity and jotting down the requirements as per class organization, visuals or other material, handout if any, ideas and language expected to be generated and used, time required, problems that may arise and any basic support that the learners might need.

Teaching Speaking And Listening

The various stages of the activity should be clear before setting it up. A well-planned activity in which the broad outcomes are predictable to the teacher goes on smoothly and efficiently. A lot of time is often wasted when the teacher needs to think in the class what the next step ought to be.

Presentation

The presentation of the task goes a long way in its successful completion. First and foremost, the teacher ought to appear enthused with the idea and transmit the same to the learners by giving them an example or a sample of what is to be done and what the outcome would be.

The next step is to present the activity. It is advisable to present the activity to the whole class before grouping them, as learners get distracted after groups are made and material is handed out. Explain the basic and provide a sample to make it clear.

The instructions should be simple, crisp and clear. For added advantage the teacher may ask one or two learners to repeat what needs to be done in the activity. A trial run may also be conducted to ensure that all have understood the activity.

If the teacher so feels, s/he may give the basic language structures or some vocabulary for the learners to use. But this should not be restrictive and learners may use different structures if they wish to. Autonomy plays a vital role in increasing the level of motivation.

Process

The plan of the activity needs to be followed and it is better that there should be no last minute changes as it may throw the activity out of gear.

After the grouping is done, the teacher may ask the groups to divide roles by appointing a ‘secretary* to note down points or a leader to act as a mediator.

The learners would have to jot down their points individually before sharing them with the group. It would be the responsibility of the leader to ensure that every member in the group has had a chance to contribute.

If the teacher feels that certain groups need help with the language, s/he can write the words or structures on the board for them to consult.

While the learners are discussing, the teacher can clarify ideas if support is solicited. If the teacher goes to a group and asks what they have done and offers suggestions or makes corrections the interaction will be inhibited. Hence, it is important to reserve one’s comments till the feedback session. The teacher can, however, make a silent note of the areas which need help or intervention.

It is important to see that the learners are not lapsing entirely into mother tongue and that only a few learners are not dominating the show.
Winding up

Some groups may finish earlier than the others. They can be asked to move on to the next stage. Say, for example, if the tangible output is a story then the group can practice how to present it to the other groups.

Some groups take an unusually long time to complete a task. They may spend valuable time in discussing at length or digressing or getting into an argument. The teacher can gently remind the group to move towards the output. To avoid this, it is important that a time be fixed for an activity and the learners reminded once in a while that feedback session is fast approaching. This will help the slower ones to wind up the activity faster.

Feedback

As soon as the learners have completed the task and the outcome achieved, both the learners and the teachers feel that the activity is over. But the activity the learners have completed was a means to practice specific language. The language used or the ideas collated need to be appreciated and evaluated from the language point of view.

Feedback is an integral part of an activity and can be organized in a variety of ways. Learners may be asked to make an oral report, make a presentation by enacting or reading aloud. All the groups should have a chance to present their report and the teacher or other learners in the class provide feedback. It is here that the teacher gives his/her comments, which the learners note down for future reference.

The teacher also gives his/her comments based on his/her observation of the groups as the activity was in process. Important aspects like discussion skills, turn taking, points of grammar with the help of questions can be discussed during the feedback session.

Language errors are discussed and the correct forms given to the learners. The teacher may even give a remedial exercise to help correct the errors that come to light during the activity.

3.12 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have become aware of the need to make a conscious effort to teach the speaking skill instead of making acquisition of oral skills to be an incidental part of an English lesson. You would now agree that Spoken English should be formally included in a language course. You have also discovered how the spoken and the written forms of English use grammar differently and how their characteristics differ. You have become aware of the different techniques to teach/practice oral skills in your English class. You can now enumerate the characteristics of an effective speaking class and your role at different stages as a facilitator.

3.13 KEY WORDS

Coherence : the quality in speech that holds the ideas together and provide a smooth transition from one idea to another

motor perceptive skills : the skill of perceiving and producing the sounds and structure of language
interaction skills : deciding what to say, when to say it and how to say it
reciprocity of speech : the need to adapt speech according to the listeners responses
contextualised : used in a particular situation isolated and without a context speaking at length on a particular topic imagining the content of the text (le-contextualised extended talk imaging and picturing.

3.14 SUGGESTED READINGS


Harmer Jeremy, *Communicative Language Teaching*, ELBS, Oxford University Press

3.15 ANSWERS

1. Suggest three more functions of the spoken language, which learners may require.

Three (more of the) functions that the learners may require are:

- asking for and giving advice
- thanking
- apologizing

2. What are the three aspects, which govern what we say? Give an example of an utterance to explain your point.

The three aspects which govern appropriate speech are:

- our audience- who we are speaking to
- our purpose- why we are speaking/language function
- in what situation we are speaking.
Our choice of words, our intonation, our stress patterns and our posture and facial expressions will depend on these. Say, for example if we are talking to a friend who is in a senior position in the same office our conversation will differ at home and in the office. If we are talking to child, we use different tone and words than we would use with an adult. We also choose our words according to our purpose. We would use polite words if we are making a-request.

**Check Your Progress - 2**

1. Have you tried the three types of activities discussed in this section? In which activity did you have to provide the maximum support? Specify the support that the learners required from you?

   If you conduct a classroom conversation you need to provide support in the shape of:

   - suggest ideas  
   - prompt with cues  
   - give examples/illustrations  
   - help to begin the sentence, etc.

   For the topic discussion class you might also need to:

   - select a topic that would be interesting for your learners  
   - provide a sample/demonstration  
   - suggest the appropriate grammar  
   - help generate ideas through leading questions.

   For the task-based activity class, the students may get support from each other. You would need to be around to give help if it is solicited and give clarifications during the feedback session.

   Here too you might need to demonstrate before the learners launch on the activity themselves.

2. Which activity did you find most effective with your learners? Give reasons.

   The task based fluency exercise would be the most effective as there would be:

   - a clear purpose to do the task as it would have a tangible output  
   - more interaction amongst the learners  
   - since the task is a problem solving one, the learner motivation is high.

**Check Your Progress - 3**

1. While conducting a speaking activity what kind of support do you normally lend to your learners? Have you found any difference between carrying a prepared task to class and doing an activity on the spur of the moment?

   You might help them with the ideas and their logical sequence by providing appropriate vocabulary and grammar.
Does reading aloud help in developing speech skills? It doesn’t because of the following:

- It provides only a few learners an opportunity to read in a class.
- There are so many interruptions while the teacher corrects their pronunciation.

It is embarrassing for the reader as s/he gets continually snubbed with the teacher’s checks and corrections.

The learners do not get any practice or exposure to real conversation. In addition, it also does not help teaching reading skills because of the interruptions and focus on production of sounds rather than getting at the meaning.

**Check Your Progress 4**

1. Write five differences between speaking and writing.

The differences are: Writing is largely formal except in the case of notes, messages and personal letters one writes. Day to day speaking is mostly informal. Speaking/conversation makes allowance for incomplete sentences and once in a while imperfect grammar whereas writing stresses on accuracy.

Meaning in speaking depends on pronunciation, stress and intonation whereas in writing it is the correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The listener has to process the stream of speech, which may have an unfamiliar accent, complex words or a quick pace of delivery. On the other hand, writing is more organized and complete to which a reader can return again and again to puzzle out the meaning. Spoken language has direct contact with the audience who influences the speech unlike writing which has a particular audience but no direct or immediate contact.
UNIT 4  SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

Structure

4.0  Objectives

4.1  Introduction

4.2  Learner Needs

4.3  Activities for the Development of Advanced Speaking Skills
    4.3.1 Narratives : Using Stories
    4.3.2 Using Dialogues
    4.3.3 Role Playing
    4.3.4 Participating in a Discussion
    4.3.5 Class Debate
    4.3.6 Radio Show
    4.3.7 Interpreting
    4.3.8 Resource Book for Speaking Activities

4.4  Let Us Sum Up

4.5  Key Words

4.6  Suggested Readings Answers

4.7  Answers

4.0  OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to:

• understand the major aspects of discourse that the learners need, in order to be proficient in the speaking skills;
• identify learners’ needs and organize suitable activities and provide the required support;
• get acquainted with some major speaking activities;
• be able to organize these activities effectively in the class while understanding the role of the teacher;
• understand the significance of using stories in developing speaking skills;
• be able to conduct activities like radio-shows, role play and debates for your learners;
• make use of any opportunity in the class to exploit real life situations for organizing speaking activities that would carry personal meaning for the learners;
• be able to plan in order to manage time efficiently during the activities; and
• integrate the speaking activities with other skills to make them more meaningful.

4.1  INTRODUCTION

“All life comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other; for all life comes back to the question of our relations with one another” (Henry James). Truly, speech is primary to us humans, through
which we keep in contact, share understanding, share culture and yet retain our identity. Of the two kinds of discourse, that our speech is made of, the most common is conversation and “the ability to chat, to exchange amicable conversational turns with another speaker, forms the basis of our social life.” (G. Brown et al. Teaching Talk)

As mentioned earlier in the previous unit, language is a tool for socialization and speech is the common medium of communication. The development of speech skills especially conversational skills is of utmost significance in the education and the socialization process of an individual.

Over the last decade, Second language teaching and learning has undergone a sea change in India, with greater emphasis being laid on the development of speaking skills along with reading and writing skills. No ELT material or English textbook is considered complete without attention to speaking and listening. These activities are varied, interesting and yet rooted in the learners’ life and experiences. While relating the curriculum to the real life needs of the learners, efforts are being made by teachers, school authorities and the system to build into the curriculum various real life situations which will systematically and efficiently help learners to acquire a repertoire of oral skills.

With the advent of the communicative approach there has been a shift from a teacher-dominated classroom to a participative classroom in which the learners are equal participants in the learning process, contributing to its development. The traditional class made little allowance for the learners to use the spoken language. This left them unsure of themselves, whenever they were required to speak for personal purposes.

Conversational skill is now increasingly finding its place in the second language curriculum, with several Boards of Education giving some weightage to this skill at least through continuous assessment.

### 4.2 LEARNER NEEDS

When learners reach the secondary level, they would have achieved a considerable degree of fluency and can express themselves in simple English. They would have had practice in conversation and extended talk like describing a thing or a person, narrating events or telling simple stories.

The learners would now need further practice in order that they can:

- with greater grammatical accuracy;
- improve their pronunciation;
- practice speaking with confidence and fluency on a variety of topics and in a variety of situations;
- extend their vocabulary and expression; and
- improve their communicative ability.

They would need both controlled and free practice in developing the skills of conversation, discussion, telling stories, giving talks, taking part in debates and declamation. These are longer utterances and make intellectual, social and linguistic demands on the learners. The learners would also need to further practice working effectively in groups or individually on different functions of the language.
4.3 ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ADVANCED SPEAKING SKILLS

Different activities can be organized to practice different types of talk and increasingly long stretches of talk, including the **narrative and non-narrative** kinds. Debates and discussions can be organized in the class to develop the skills of argument and expressing opinions.

Some of the major speaking activities at this stage are:

- using stories
- participating in a discussion
- participating in a class debate
- participating in role play « preparing a radio show

These activities will be presented as under:-

- description of the activity
- teacher’s role in the activity

4.3.1 Narratives: Using Stories

No one can deny the primacy of narratives. ‘Story telling is the most ancient and compelling of human activities’ according to John Morgan and Mario Rinvokicri.

All the races and tribes of this world have their repertoire of tales that have come down through generations They were initially transmitted orally and only much later came to be recorded in the written form.

In fact, ‘telling stories and jokes and describing things that have happened to us are things most of us do frequently. They are essentially monologues and normally don’t require the sort of complex negotiation required in two-way conversations (Roger Gower and Steve Walters 1983).

For younger children narratives or stories occur not only as a form of discourse but also as a mode of mental organization - especially recalling from memory the sequence of events and details of the characters. This also gives them further practice to use the language presented and a contextual environment to improve their vocabulary.

The key features of narratives are:

- the organization of events in time
- the action of participants
- cause and effect
- a problem and resolution of the problem
- a thematic structure
- a temporal structure
- underlying emotions or feelings

The person telling a story has to bear all these in mind and organize them in a manner that the listener’s attention is retained. In brief, the storyteller ‘must visualize the scene, the characters, their speech, their movements. See it all happening as a
coloured film in your mind. Then describe it for the audience’ (C.N, Mackay, *Speak for Yourself*). This requires a fair amount of proficiency in the language. In order to construct a cohesive narrative the learner would require:

- the use of relative clauses;
- connectives;
- pronominal reference (use of pronouns);
- adverbs; and
- (verb) tense and aspect to convey temporal relationships.

**Using stories to generate talk**

1. This is simpler than telling a story. One of the activities that the teacher can do is to narrate a story and at the end of it ask learners to select from a bunch of pictures the one, which relate to the story and explain why they think so.

2. Another activity can be to tell a story and give a few statements about the characters, their actions or the locale. The learners sit in groups and discuss which amongst these are true to the story and which are not. They convince each other about the choice they have made.

**Teacher’s Role**

The teacher needs to maintain a selection of stories, which s/he can go on augmenting as time goes by. These stories must be those which would interest the learners of secondary classes. S/he would also need to collect a lot of pictures from old books and magazines. There ought to be an adequate number of pictures, some of which would be related to the story and some not.

Similarly for the second activity, the statements ought to be carefully thought out and ought to generate discussion requiring the learners to use language functions like expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, recalling and narrating, helping classmates to recall certain portions of the story and drawing attention to certain facts.

**Encouraging the learners to tell stories**

It is often difficult to recall a story and say it well without preparation, if one is requested on the spur of the moment. But providing some support by way of words, characters, or a skeleton of a sequence of events can and does help the learners to imagine and narrate a story that can hold the listener’s interest.

**Skeleton stories**

Learners can be given skeleton of stories, which they expand as they like. Different groups can be given different stories. It would, however, be interesting to give the same skeleton to two or three groups to see how each group has developed it. This would not only bring variety in the classroom but also allow the learners to have autonomy in developing their story. The learners may give the characters some qualities or motives for example. They may also weave descriptions into the story to bring it to life.

The feedback session should not focus so much on the degree of interest of the story being narrated, but the organization and the telling of it.

It is important to keep in mind the following:-

1. The facts given should be clear and simple.
2. The story chosen must be one that can be interpreted or expanded in more ways than one.

3. Some help (if solicited) in the form of suitable vocabulary or expressions may be given.

**Story waiting to be completed**

Another way to encourage story building and story telling is to narrate a story and leave it incomplete. The learners try to bring it to a logical end in their groups. They can then have a presentation of the stories thus completed.

In both the above activities the teacher would encourage the learners to use relative clauses, adjectives and adverbs and cohesive devices to weave the sentences together. The story would be narrated with a fair amount of fluency. In addition, the teacher may suggest a few phrases that the listeners might use for interrupting and clarifying and the phrases the speaker may use when returning to the story after the digression.

**Using Sound Sequences**

In this activity the teacher plays a recorded sound sequence on an audiocassette. The learners listen closely and tell their interpretation of the sounds in the form of a story to the members of their group. The group finally selects the most interesting story and sends one storyteller to tell the story to the whole class during the feedback session.

This not only brings into play the learners’ imagination but logical thinking as well, as they connect the sounds they’ve just heard to events, based on their interpretation of the world and their past experiences.

A stimulating array of sound sequences is available in the book *Sounds intriguing* by Alan Maley and Alan Duff.

**Teacher’s role**

Since the sounds provide the only clue to the stories or anecdotes it is important that the learners should be able to catch all of them. Hence it is important to ensure that the recording is audible to all. A few words related to the sounds can be pre-taught in an informal way so that these could be woven into the story.

**Dictation**

Another way to provide stimulus to a story building and story telling activity can be a set of words, which are dictated to the class. An example of such a set from the book *Once Upon a Time* is given below.

- schoolmaster
- bachelor
- mother
- death
- funeral
- obsession
- psychiatrist
- hypnotise
- seven roses
- throw away
- improvement
- success
- button
- hole
- faded
The words are noted by the ‘secretary’ of the group and after the dictation is over they are put on the board. Each group then constructs a story from the list following the order of the words given.

**Teacher’s Role**

Initially the learners might find some difficulty in stringing the words together into a sequence of a story. The teacher may make the task easier by expanding the words into meaningful phrases, which the learners could use in their stories. The phrases would help to provide context to the words.

It is important to ensure that the words selected are rich in content so that they can generate thought and imagination while providing a base for the context.

**The actual storytelling**

Before the actual storytelling by the learners, the teacher would remind the story-tellers to rehearse the story once in their groups. It is worth noting here that a very well rehearsed story is also not conducive to language development as it lacks the hesitations, instances of imprecision and impromptu changes, all of which are an indication of active use of the language. In this particular activity, however, too much of rehearsal is not required.

Other suggestions that could be given are:-

- start with an expression or phrase to catch the listener’s attention like ‘Have...
- using pauses and variation in the speed of delivery to create drama or excitement;
- modulate voice to indicate different characters, or create a scene like the call of the cicadas or revving of a motorcycle;
- indicate that the story is’ coming to an end through the use of language or modulation of voice or facial expression; and
- use any props or gestures to bring the story to life.

‘An anecdote is a true story about something that happened to ourselves or someone we know or have been told about. People tell anecdotes because they need to share the event that amused, enraged, or embarrassed them. In telling they relive themselves’ (Marion Geddes, Gill Sturtridge & Sliiela Been).

**Teaches’s Role**

The teacher can incorporate suitable anecdotes in day-to-day teaching. The teacher may begin an anecdote and tell it with

I. a ‘lead in’ informing the learners that s/he is about to narrate an anecdote.

II. a background to the story using necessary information about a place, the person or the process being talked about to set the scene.

.... quoting the utterances of the characters or people being talked about.

S/he may then give an outline of the anecdote s/he just narrated. S/he then provides a few more outlines for the learners to expand and pad up in their groups. The learners get some guidelines for their anecdotes. These are:-

Imagine the scene and the happening.

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**Speaking Activities**
Think of a suitable lead-in.
Organize the background information so that it does not become too long or boring.
Think how they can create the mood or atmosphere to match the anecdote.
Use direct speech to quote what the characters said.
Use voice modulation to create character and interest
Give a punch-line (a funny concluding statement) at the end.

The teacher could encourage learners to think of other anecdotes from their real life experiences. A brighter group of learners may be given exotic ideas or fantasy for their anecdotes like - a lion once felt like having a cold drink.

Picture composition

This activity helps the learners to visualize a scene of an event or a story.

The teacher clraws an incomplete picture on the board. Students are divided into groups. Each group is given a turn to add to the picture. Once all the groups have taken their turns and the picture is considered complete, each group tells its version of the story to the whole class.

We give below an example which different groups could work on

Teacher’s Role

The teacher may make the first figure and allow the learners to make the others. The complete space of the chalkboard must be used for this activity. Care needs to be taken to see that the picture does not become too cluttered, as loo many things would have to be talked about. This activity allows the learners who may not be good at speaking but are good at drawing to contribute to the development of the lesson.
Check Your Progress 1

1. Which oral skills do the activities on selecting pictures or statements related to the narrated story exercise? How does that help the learners in real life?

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2. What are the skills involved in story telling?

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3. What is meant by a sound sequence?

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4. What are the various things that a speaker must keep in mind while narrating an anecdote?

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4.3.2 Using Dialogues

Learners will have to be prepared to make conversation in real life. They need to learn certain rules of form-relating to grammar, phonology, choice of words as well as social conventions (for starting a conversation, interrupting someone, or emphasizing points)

Listening to dialogues especially those spoken by the native speakers help the learners to see how language operates in society. They offer-
genuine samples of spoken language; contextualised sentence patterns;
practice of sentences patterns; and scripts, like short plays.
Initially the dialogues can be used for listening practice. If required, the learners can repeat the dialogues after the tape for stress and intonation practice. The teacher can then use the dialogues for extensive listening practice wherein the learners understand context, the speakers and their relationships. Following this, the teacher can focus on certain aspects of the dialogues to help learners see why a certain expression was used.

They may then practice using the words and the phrases in role-play.

Dialogues, however, have their limitations and at best can offer practice in sentence patterns. These are required to help the learners practice formulae of social interaction.

**Teacher’s Role**

The teacher may use audiocassettes with taped dialogues or can tape the dialogues with the help of colleagues and friends. S/he, however, has to make sure that the language level is appropriate to the situation and the speakers. The participants of the dialogues should be clearly characterized. The teacher can put up pictures to show who is speaking.

The tape should be audible to all learners in the class.

Repeating all the sentences could be a boring exercise. Hence only key sentences need to be repeated for intonation and inflexion.

### 4.3.3 Role Playing

Role-play is when students play the parts of other people in a situation. It has no defined script but the players have a general idea about what they are going to say. Role cards can be prepared beforehand in which the situation, the feelings or the thoughts of the characters are given in the form of points. Learners can also enact a telephonic conversation, an interview, where an employee asks for a raise in salary or an angry person at the booking counter.

Role-play could be preceded by a demonstration by the teacher and a few volunteers or by playing a tape.

The points on the role-cards are short phrases or sentences and may be used by the players as the take-off point.

The situations that the role-play recreates may be largely from the learners’ experience. Using an unfamiliar or strange situation can also be challenging and interesting. This could be preceded by a discussion on the situation or a sample taped dialogue.

**Teacher’s Role**

The teacher’s role is in clarifying what a role-play entails. Some materials, textual or otherwise have role-play built in along with the themes. The teacher can also select role-play situations from other texts or from real life.

The teachers would have to:

- prepare role cards;
- build the context of the scene but not give away all the information;
- divide the class into pairs or groups of three for the role play;
- ensure that learners look at their role cards, read them silently and try to absorb the information to be used in their speech. Remind them that they
ought not to give away anything to each other.
ensure that the weaker learners understood what is to be done;
ask a pair/group to demonstrate for the benefit of the class; and
provide feedback at the end of the activity.
The actual role-play can indicate whether the role cards need to be modified in any way or whether the learners need any more language practice.

4.3.4 Participating in a discussion
Discussions are an important part of a language lesson. It may be the pre-reading activity or even a post-reading activity. When it is followed or preceded by a reading text it not only gives a purpose to discuss, but also provides the basic information on the theme for discussion.

Discussion as a pre-reading activity can prepare the learners for the reading (As a post—reading activity the learners can delve into the theme or give their opinion on it. This not only gives a fillip to their imagination but also provides a sense of participation and confidence.

If we were to consider discussions in life we will notice that we discuss a topic in different ways. Much depends on the purpose, occasion or the persons with whom we are discussing.

While discussing we may be trying to:-

- clarify our thinking
- explore the meaning of something in consultation with our friends
- try to find out what the other person feels about the topic or issue
- try to convince another about our point of view
- have an argument

Learners need to learn how to carry on a discussion in a amiable manner. The points that the learner would bear in mind are:-

- allowing and encouraging the others to continue talking
- redirecting the discussion
- inviting others to give their point of view
- clarifying points in a polite manner
- agreeing or disagreeing (without unpleasantness)

In addition to discussions on the text, the teacher can generate a discussion on any other issue by using a telling picture, a slogan, an advertisement or a news item.

Teacher’s Role
The teacher needs to demonstrate a bit of a discussion with the help of a few volunteers. S/he may play a tape to familiarise the learners with the expressions used, for example inviting a person to join in, or expressing disagreement politely. Learners may repeat these sentences with the right stress and intonation. Once they know what to say at what point of the discussion, they can begin the actual discussion with the teacher acting as a facilitator, observer and manager.

It is important to move around unobtrusively so that the learners do not become
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

self-conscious. S/he may note errors in grammar or usage and take these up in remedial work.

At places during the discussion the teacher might have to gently intrude when s/he finds only a few learners dominating the discussion.

The discussion must lead to a clear task and the activity must have a sense of completion. Conclusions must be drawn within the stipulated time and the whole process achieved democratically. Digressions would have to be kept in check.

The activity of discussion can be rounded off by inviting one member from each group to report on the group’s discussion. All the points of view can be presented using appropriate language, earlier practiced with the teacher. If there is a shortage of time, the groups can put up posters carrying the summary of the groups’ ideas.

4.3.5 Class Debate

A debate is a formal, organized argument. It revolves around a ‘motion’ which is an issue stated in the affirmative on which a vote is taken. It is organized by ‘time’ and by a set of ‘procedures’. It is conducted by a chairperson. (For details refer Advanced Conversation, Marion Geddes, Gill Stutridge and Sheila Been, Macmillan, 1991).

However, the class debate can be a more flexible and informal affair. The debate can be used by the teacher for evaluation purposes wherein the oral skills of the learners can be assessed.

Teacher’s Role

The teacher can select some issue or a topic that lends itself to debating and ask for volunteers who would speak ‘for’ or ‘against’ the motion. One learner can be asked to be the ‘Chairperson’ who would invite the speakers to speak. A panel of judges may be selected from amongst the remaining learners in the class. The criteria of judging a debate can be spelt out, or elicited from the students from the very beginning. The participants can prepare for the debate keeping the criteria in mind, Weightage would be allotted for content, ideas, delivery of speech, persuasiveness of the argument, creativity of argument and language competence.

The teacher can make her own notes regarding these and in a general session provide her feedback and suggestions to the class. It is important to sum up and state whether the ‘motion’ was changed at the end of the debate.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Suggest ways of using the textbook for ideas for role-play.

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2. How would you organize a discussion at the end of the reading text?

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3. Suggest five topics for the class debate.

4.3.6 Radio Show

Learners can prepare their own radio show on any theme. They can interview people, read out snippets from the newspapers or periodicals, include an anecdote, or a very short skit, use sound effects and background music for their chat show.

They can use incidents or events from the school, home or neighborhood. They could use themes that concern everyone as the pivot of their radio show. They could even have a chat show in which they can invite some famous person and request him or her to share their experiences or ideas on certain issues.

Teacher’s Role

Before the learners begin to work on their own show, it is important to expose them to various kinds of radio shows or chat shows on TV. Ask the learners to watch or listen to a particular programme and discuss the various aspects of the programme the next day so that the learners can have an idea of how a radio show is done. Often such shows are broadcast simultaneously on different channels and different groups can watch different channels. They could discuss the programme they watched in their small groups and then later in a whole class activity. The ideas that emerge about a show can be put on the chalkboard.

Learners can then decide what they could include in their show.

After the learners have watched or listened to a few TV/radio shows, the different ideas used in them can be discussed. Following this the teacher may provide autonomy to the learners to decide on the theme or the components of their show.

The technique of recording may be demonstrated to them and then they may be asked to work on their radio show.

In the feedback session, the groups present their shows, which are discussed by the whole class. It is important to begin with a word of appreciation and highlight the strong points of every show. Comments on overall performance, presenters, the quality and audibility of the voices, expression, interest level, clarity of speech may be invited from the learners. The objective of this project would be largely fun and enjoyment although many kinds of language functions would be practiced during the course of the development of the show and its presentation.

4.3.7 Interpreting

Interpreting is a popular profession amongst language learners. It can also be called liaison interpreting, which one sometimes has to do when there is a foreign visitor or
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

a visitor from another region whose language you alone know in the given situation. One has to interpret when the visitor mingles with the people of the host country, goes shopping or sightseeing.

Interpreting in the language classroom would be a simulation exercise where one of the participants of the conversation pretends not to know English. For this a situation would have to be created and role cards given to all participants. The scene could be a shopping mall with the visitor trying to find out about various goods or foodstuff. This kind of simulation can be very interesting.

Care needs to be taken that the simulation is not interrupted by other learners, who correct the ‘interpreters’ utterances. This could be done by the ‘visitor’ himself/herself, when he/she echoes the sentence of the interpreter. Sometimes if the interpreter has not interpreted correctly (something that the ‘visitor’ has been able to make out) the ‘visitor’ can refuse to understand and seek clarification.

This activity can be very interesting as the other learners can come up with sentences of their own leaving the ‘interpreter’ groping to translate what they said using a lot of repetition and pauses.

**Teacher’s Role**

The teacher needs to explain the activity to the learners and give a demonstration with the help of a few volunteers.

S/he needs to assure the learners who are playing the role of the interpreters that pauses, repetition, hesitation and regression are common in day-to-day speech and that ought not to inhibit them.

This is also a good listening activity, as the ‘interpreter’ has to give the exact import of the utterance of the other persons.

The teacher may use a tape recorder to record the sentences so that it could be played back and the ‘interpretation’ discussed.

The learners would be using a lot of noun clauses like- He says that.../He means that.../He wants to tell you that ....

Since nothing in this activity is rehearsed, it is a challenging activity involving the mental processes of providing immediate equivalent to what one said.

**4.3.8 Resource Book for Speaking Activities**

The teacher needs to have a collection of speaking activities based on various aspects of the learners’ lives. The reading list given below would provide the teacher with many activities for the second language learner. There are certain activities, which the teacher would have to adapt for his/her class.

Reports of school events, newspaper clippings, advertisements, posters and fliers of various programmes also can go into the file which could be used at the opportune moment for an activity.

The following can be used as stimuli:

- School events
- Neighbourhood events
- School trips
Neighbourhood tabloids
Periodicals
Interviews for selection as Prefects and Editorial Board Member
Topics of current interest
Letters to the editor
Television programmes
News

**Check Your Progress 3**

1. How would you use a letter to the editor to generate a speaking activity?

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2. Mention different speaking activities that you might develop from this stimuli.

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**4.4 LET US SUM UP**

In this unit you have become aware of the different activities you can organize to exercise the intermediate and advanced speaking skills. The possible themes, support material or classroom organization required for different activities are made familiar to you. You have also learnt how to organize each activity keeping in mind the objectives, the learners, the time on hand, the linguistic or communicative gains from each.

**4.5 KEY WORDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>share understanding</td>
<td>understand what others think and say and help others to understand what one thinks and says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal purposes</td>
<td>using language in one’s own daily life for day to day purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repertoire of oral skills</td>
<td>abilities to do different things with spoken language for performing the different functions of language in conversation or extended talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fluency</td>
<td>ability to speak without hesitation, many pauses or false starts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

narrative and non narrative : language used for telling a story or a sequence of events and language used for describing for expository purposes or for arguments, etc.

transmitted orally : contextual

environment : skeleton

stories : conveyed from one to another orally without any written form being used the environment in a particular situation stories of which the bare sequence of happenings is given as hints and which need to be padded up with characteristics - the certain feelings and emotions of the characters and other situational descriptions.

incomplete stories : telling a story without completing it, inviting and stimulating students to give their own version of the ending

sound sequence : a set of recorded sounds, arranged in a sequence to be used as a stimulus for students to build a story on

4.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Cameron, Lynne. Teaching Languages to Young Learners, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Bose, Kshanika. 1979 Teaching of English - A Modern Approach CIE


Harmer Jeremy, Communicative Language Teaching, ELBS, Oxford University Press

4.7 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Which oral skills do the activities on selecting pictures or statements related to the narrated story exercise? How does that help the learners in real life?

They exercise the skills of listening to a story not only as a form of discourse but also as a mode of mental organization especially recalling from memory the
sequence of events and details of the characters. This also gives them further practice to use the language presented and a contextual environment to develop their vocabulary.

Listening to a story allows them to notice the organization of events in time, the intentional action of the characters, their underlying emotions or feeling, cause and effect, a problem and resolution of the problem, the thematic structure of a narrative, etc.

Selecting pictures or statements belonging to the story help them to see the organization and the interplay of emotions of the characters. If done in groups, it also helps them to discuss and convince their classmates why a statement or picture is true to the story. They also get an opportunity to exercise language functions like expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, recalling and narrating.

2. What are the skills involved in story telling?

Story telling is a form of extended talk where there is less interaction with the audience. Yet in order to hold the attention of the listeners the storyteller must visualize the scene, the characters, their speech, their movements, He or she must see it all happening as a coloured film in his or her mind. Only then he or she can describe it for the audience.

Story telling requires a fair amount of proficiency in the language. In order to construct a cohesive narrative the learner would require:

3. The use of relative clauses;
   connectives;
   pronominal reference(use of pronouns);
   adverbs; and
   (verb) tense and aspect to convey temporal relationships.

What is meant by a sound sequence?

Sound sequence is a sequence of different sounds played by the teacher in the class. The learners build the story based on the sequence of the sounds. This ensures an imaginative response and exercises the skill of narrating the story and also convincing the listeners why they think that this must have happened in the story. This also enables the learners to use their experiences to build the story.

4. What are the various things that a speaker must keep in mind while narrating an anecdote?

A speaker would normally relate an anecdote which has left an impression on him/her whether pleasant or unpleasant. The speaker has to conjure the event s/he wishes to narrate, s/he needs to imagine the scene and the happening.

S/he then needs to provide background information in a way that it does not become tedious. S/he needs to think how s/he can create the mood or atmosphere to match the anecdote.

Then s/he needs to present the utterances of the persons involved in direct speech for a better impact.
To top the narration s/he needs to give a punch-line (a funny concluding statement about the state of things or what s/he learnt from the anecdote, etc.)

Check Your Progress - 2

1. Suggest ways of using the textbook for ideas for role-play,

Characters from the stories, biographies or autobiographies can be recreated through role play. The sentences in direct speech can be spoken by the learners while playing the part. Students can build dialogues of their own according to the situation.

The same activity could be used for evaluation when one group does the role play and the other group guesses which characters are being represented.

2. How would you organize a discussion at the end of the reading text?

It is important to see that the reading text has a potential for discussion i.e. that it deals with certain issues which could be debatable. Actions or utterances of the characters can be evaluated by the learners who would present their opinion based on their experience and previous knowledge.

It is important for the teacher to ensure that the speakers respect each other’s point of view and present their own in a polite and convincing manner. It is also important to ensure turn taking to prevent a few confident and fluent learners from dominating the discussion. The reticent learners can be encouraged to join in through a few questions or by seeking their opinion.

3. Suggest five topics for the class debate.

A few topics could be-

- There should be no examinations in school. a Uniforms in school lead to regimentation
- Special schools for bright students create a division in society
- Parent should take a very active part in a students’ selection of career.

Check Your Progress 3

1. How would you use a letter to the editor to generate a speaking activity?

Mention different speaking activities that you might develop.

A discussion can be generated on the issue mentioned in the letter. A role play can be organised wherein a reader can meet the writes of the letter and tell him how s/he agrees or disagrees with him/her. The editor of the newspaper can call up the writer of the letter and inform him or her about the response to his/her letter.

The activities thus can be-

discussion

debate (the issue mentioned in the letter)

role play

telephonic conversation
UNIT 5 ASSESSING LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Structure

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Some Task Considerations for Listening And Speaking

5.3 Testing Listening Skills
   5.3.1 Stages of a Listening Task
   5.3.2 Listening Activities for Testing

5.4 Rating Scale for Listening

5.5 Assessing Speaking Skills
   5.5.1 Rating Scale for Spoken English

5.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.7 Suggested Reading

5.8 Answers

5.0 OBJECTIVES

As teachers of a second language we want our learners to comprehend and use the language in real life situations. Under the circumstances we need to develop their oral and aural skills. In order to ensure that this is really happening we need to assess these skills.

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- understand the need for assessment of oral-aural language skills;
- appreciate the important role of assessment for enhancing the development of oral-aural skills;
- understand the complexity of assessing these skill areas, and identify some simple ways of doing so within the classroom context;

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As teachers we need to be very conscious of the role as well as complexity of assessment, so that it helps the learner and does not become counterproductive. Assessment has often come to mean something threatening which learners shy away from. We need to consider this very carefully in planning an assessment methodology.

The skills of listening and speaking go a long way in developing fluency in the second language. However, we need to remember that listening and speaking are also social skills. Socio-emotional factors influence these skills. For example, the child’s self image, the level of confidence, the willingness to experiment and make mistakes without fear of ridicule will affect the development of good listening or speaking skills. We need to keep in mind the personality traits of children. The assertive child or the shy and timid child will respond very differently on a speaking task, and their performance may have nothing at all to do with their degree of language competence.
It may just be a reflection of their personalities. It is therefore extremely important to be aware of the purpose of assessment, and make sure that this purpose is not undermined in any way.

Assessment is useful if it is looked at positively, as a process which enables and enhances learning. It becomes more effective if the learners happily participate in this process. The teacher’s role is to ensure that assessment is friendly and non-threatening.

### 5.2 SOME TASK CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSESSING LISTENING AND SPEAKING

The effectiveness and appropriateness of a task is an important consideration for the purpose of assessment. Learning a second language is not just a matter of memorising a different set of names for the things around us; it is also an educational as well as a social experience. Learning is more effective if learners are actively involved. We find that activities for practicing listening and speaking no longer concentrate on purely structural and lexical training. They have expanded into the fields of value education, personality building and practical applicability. The impact of learning a second language on shaping the learner’s personality is slowly being recognised. As teachers we would like our learners to be sensitive towards the feelings of others and share their joys and worries. The atmosphere within a class can largely be determined by the teacher who quite often sets the tone by choosing certain types of topics and activities.

Assessment helps a teacher to develop opportunities for effective and real communication in the classroom, so that language functions and structures are practiced in meaningful ways. For example, two devices which may help the teacher in making up communicative activities are: information gap and opinion gap. Information gap forces the children to exchange information in order to find a solution to a problem that they have been given. Opinion gaps are created by using controversial texts where the children are required to take a position and defend their views, or by letting children share their feelings about common experiences. Thus, by applying the principles of information gap and opinion gap to suitable traditional exercises the teacher can change them into more challenging and meaningful communicative situations. It is for the teacher to remain alert and use the feedback from assessment to determine what is working well and what requires modification. The class then remains constantly alive. It is not a matter of repeating the same activities year after year, but of constantly creating new opportunities to suit the requirements of each class and learner.

### 5.3 TESTING LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is a skill that is used frequently. As adults we spend almost half of our communication time in listening. Learners receive 90% of information at school by listening. However listening as a skill is seldom developed consciously or tested. Although now there is a recognition that listening ability must be developed and assessed.

Listeners do not passively receive aural input, they actively involve themselves in the interpretation of what they hear. In doing so they bring their own background knowledge and linguistic knowledge to interpret the aural input. Listening involves a sender, a message and a receiver. Listeners have to process messages as they come and cannot backtrack or look ahead. In addition the listener has to cope with the sender’s choice of vocabulary, structure and rate of delivery. It is important for
teachers to help their learners become effective listeners. In order to do this, the assessment of listening skills also gains importance as this skill will then be taken more seriously.

When preparing listening tasks for assessing purposes, which sometimes resemble reading comprehension tests, some important elements to be kept in mind are:

**The listening stimuli**

This should represent typical oral language and not the written language read out to learners. The language should resemble language heard in the classroom, in various media, or in conversations. These should be interesting and short. They should relate to the learners’ experiences and should not be coloured by gender, socioeconomic or racial/ethnic issues.

**The questions**

Multiple choice questions are preferred. These should focus on important aspects of the passage and not trivial details. Answers must relate to the passage and not be based on the learner’s prior knowledge.

Performance tests are also acceptable where the learner selects a picture or performs a task based on oral instruction. Learners may have to select a picture after listening to the description. They could also be given a map and asked to trace a route.

**The test environment**

The environment should be free of external distractions. If a recorder is used, it should have good sound quality. If the test administrator is presenting material, it should be presented clearly and with appropriate volume.

**Authentic materials**

It is good to use authentic materials like radio and television programmes, public address announcements, speeches and lectures, telephone recordings, movie recordings etc.

Measuring the development of listening is not an easy task. Listening involves cognitive skills such as recognising sounds, coding the sounds into meaningful units, processing a discourse in terms of cohesion and logical order (i.e. being able to connect the various sentences spoken with the logical order in which they have been presented). Listening also involves being able to infer the speaker’s intentions, his/her purpose. It includes the ability of picking up non-linguistic cues such as gestures, facial expressions, intonation, etc. Social skills such as responding with attentiveness to a speaker are also aspects of listening. If we wish to describe the development of listening ability, we need to take all these factors into account. Several assessment scales have been developed to show the range of listening abilities within a group or class. These scales look at aspects of listening comprehension, commonly used strategies and appropriateness of interaction. While the first two look at cognitive and intellectual skills, the third deals with social skills. Most scales are able to only roughly categorise where a person should be placed. They are useful only because they are able to highlight areas of knowledge, not performance, in which the child needs to concentrate efforts for improvement. One common way of assessing the development of listening skills is by rating or marking children on suitably designed listening tasks. These tasks need to be carefully planned so that they assess children’s performance in various aspects of listening. Based on the type of response that is expected from the listener, listening comprehension and listening perception, activities can be classified into two types.
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

a) Activities which require productive checks as responses
   - write words or sentences
   - make notes
   - reconstruct the story

Here the listener is expected to listen, comprehend and recreate what was heard. It therefore involves active mental processing on the part of the listener. Such activities measure higher order listening skills such as comprehension and understanding.

b) Activities which require non-productive checks as responses
   - tick marks
   - crossing
   - numbering
   - lettering
   - raising of hand
   - showing a picture or object.

Here the listener is expected to receive the auditory input and respond to the correct sound quickly in one of the ways mentioned above. These tasks measure lower order listening skills such as attentiveness, sound discrimination, and concentration.

We need to provide a range of listening activities which cover the various aspects mentioned above. Children’s responses can be marked and each child’s progress assessed. If a child has a specific problem, the teacher would need to deal with it individually. Children enjoy listening tasks and these should not become fearsome things simply because they are being marked. Children should be able to see evaluation as an indicator of their own progress as well as an indicator of their strengths and weaknesses, so that they are able to make efforts to improve their listening abilities.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Write your answers in the space given below:

1. What are the points to be kept in mind when designing a listening task for assessment? Elaborate.

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5.3.1 Stages of a Listening Task

Listening tasks involve three steps, which are as follows:

Pre listening: when planning for the task decide:

- what to listen for
if more linguistic or background knowledge is required
whether to address the overall task or merely some different words and phrases

While listening tasks: When monitoring comprehension

- verify predictions
- decide what is important and what is not
- ask learners to listen again to check their answers

After listening: Assessing comprehension and strategy

- assess understanding of a particular area
- assess overall progress
- decide if appropriate strategies have been used
- integrate listening with the other skills
- modify strategies for the next activity, if required

Check Your Progress 2

Note: Write your answers in the space given below:

1. What are the three stages involved in designing listening tasks for assessment? Discuss.

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5.3.2 Listening Activities for Testing

Task should involve real life situations such as locating a place on the map, exchanging information regarding name and address, or eliciting information from a story. The goal of the activity should be clearly specified. Each activity should be designed to test listening strategies, some of these strategies are listed below:

- Discriminating important from unimportant parts of a message
- Identifying the main ideas
- Identifying supporting details
- Replication of the important ideas heard

When designing pre-listening activities keep in mind/give support by:

- learners’ background knowledge
- clarifying, if required, any cultural information needed to understand the task
- creating an awareness of the purpose of the task
listening comprehension and speaking

- providing for group discussion as a background

**Sample pre listening tasks could be:**

- Looking at pictures and maps
- Reviewing grammatical structures for test readiness
- Reading something relevant to the task
- Predicting the content
- Going over the instructions
- Doing guided practice

**While listening tasks** relate directly to the text and learners attempt them during or immediately after listening. During the while listening stage we should:

- allow learners to read the instructions before attempting the task
- keep writing to a minimum while listening, therefore, use multiple choice, true/false or fill in the blanks questions
- guide learners through the task
- ask questions that are focussed

**Sample - While Listening Tasks**

- Listening with visuals
- Filling in graphs and charts
- Following a route on a map
- Checking off items in a list
- Listening for the gist
- Searching for clues
- Completing the blanks

**Post Listening Activities**

Listening is usually tested through post listening activities. These activities should reflect if the learners have successfully acquired listening strategies.

When developing post listening tasks we must make sure they replicate authentic situations e.g. listening to a weather report and then deciding what type of transport to be used and the type of clothes to be worn, etc.

Finally, when designing listening activities, one of the challenges faced is integrating the listening activities into classroom experiences and maintaining learner interest and motivation. Care should be taken to ensure that the listening activities do not just emphasize the right and wrong answers but the process of getting the meaning from the choices given.
Check Your Progress 3

Note: Write your answers in the space given below:

1. What should be kept in mind when designing pre listening tasks?
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2. What should be kept in mind when designing while listening tasks?
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Guidelines for Developing Listening Activities

- Orient learners to the recorded programmes by doing several such activities in the class.
- Discuss different strategies to use to answer the questions
- Review the vocabulary list in the task. Is it familiar to the learners?
- Preview the recorded material or video
- Identify the type of programme – song, news, drama, etc.
- Make a list of predictions about the content
- Decide how to divide the recorded material for intensive listening
- Ensure that learners are clear about what is expected from them
- Let them jot down key words
- Let them answer the questions on the worksheet
- Monitor the comprehension and assess the progress by self monitoring.

5.4 RATING SCALE FOR LISTENING

Level five - Good listener

Primary level: Able to understand speech about personal topics, involving concrete objects. Ability to understand tone of voice, give appropriate listener responses.

At the higher elementary level: Able to understand different styles of Indian English and the ability to understand abstract concepts required for academic purposes. Ability to seek clarification when the speaker is unintelligible, and critically evaluate the speaker’s tone of voice. Gives appropriate listener responses in a wide range of social setting.
Level Four: Competent listener

Primary level: Able to more or less understand speech on personal topics involving concrete objects. Some ability to understand tone of voice of the speaker and give somewhat adequate responses.

At the higher elementary level: Some ability to understand different styles of Indian English and can process some abstract concepts required for academic purposes. Can somewhat critically evaluate the speaker’s tone. Able to give appropriate listener responses in many social settings.

Level Three: Listener of adequate ability

Primary level: Can understand some conversations in English but may require some repetition.

At the higher elementary level: Able to understand spoken English to some extent. May require repetition or explanation. Limited ability to critically evaluate speaker and may get occasionally confused.

Level two: Listener of limited ability

Primary level: Can barely understand speech about personal information and concrete object. Needs translation in the mother tongue.

At the higher elementary level: Ability to process spoken English to a limited extent. Not able to understand unfamiliar abstract concepts, requires some degree of translation into the mother tongue.

Level one: Weak listener

Primary level: Can hardly understand English speech except said at very slow speed about personal matters. Needs paraphrase in the mother tongue.

At the higher elementary level: Can understand English speech about personal matters. Clarification can only be asked in the mother tongue. Considerable amount of paraphrase is required in the mother tongue.

5.5 ASSESSING SPEAKING SKILLS

Before we even begin to discuss the testing of speaking skills we need to actually identify the series of language operations that the skills of speaking will involve. When designing the tasks to be used to test a particular skill, we need to conceptualise how the skill will be tested and validated.

Testing spoken ability is said to be one of the most difficult tasks. Some of the parameters to be kept in mind are:

Planning

Speaking tests have to be planned carefully keeping in mind the number of learners as they are tests that have to be conducted at a personal level or at best in a small group. In case there is pair/group work involved, it is important to ensure attendance of everyone, plan the total time to be taken, and also levels of proficiency of the different speakers. This could mean really long hours of work for the examiner if the numbers are large.

The test taker

It is necessary in any speaking test to clearly define the test taker. These may be broad parameters eg.
● Expected linguistic output.

● Age appropriate tasks.

● Background of the test taker in terms of exposure to the language outside the classroom.

● Awareness of long term disabilities like speaking, hearing, vision problems, etc.

● Cognitive style, this refers to the way an individual perceives information. Some test takers may not be able to interpret a graph so if the task is related to answering questions based on the graph, the candidate may not be able to do so.

● Motivation, concentration, emotional state, test preparedness are other conditions that may affect test results

_Mechanisms of speech processing_

We must remember when designing any task for testing speech, that there are certain mechanisms involved in speech or conversation. We produce speech by first conceptualising the message, then formulating it in a particular language, and finally articulating it. We need to know this for the purpose of validating a test as well as understanding the operations that the test takers perform when attempting a task.

_Criteria for developing speaking tests_

It is important to define a set of criteria on which the speaking test must be based. These could be:

● Managing interaction

● Providing personal and non-personal information

● Elaborating/justifying

● Expressing opinions

● Justifying opinions

● Persuading and comparing

● Complaining/asking for information

● Negotiating

● Making excuses

● Explaining

● Narrating

● Paraphrasing

● Summarising

_Review of tests_

When reviewing a test these are some of the criteria that should be kept in mind.

● Purpose. What is the strategy the task is looking at?
Listening Comprehension and Speaking

- Information. What is the information expected from the speaker? The nature of the information expected is important. If it is too abstract it may not be as forthcoming as information that is more concrete.

- Response format. What is the expected format of the response?

- Criteria for assessment. Is the candidate aware of the criteria for assessment?

- Time constraints. Is the time clearly specified?

- Examiner and speaker relationship is very important as it sets the tone of the test.

- Topic familiarity leads to superior performance.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: Write your answers in the space given below:

1. What is to be kept in mind when planning a speaking test?
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2. What aspects of the test taker should be kept in mind when designing speaking tests?
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3. What are some of the criteria that should be kept in mind when reviewing a speaking test?
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5.5.1 Rating Scale For Spoken English

Level five: Can speak fluently on familiar and common topics; may have difficulty on finding an adequate vocabulary for unfamiliar topics.

Can produce simple sentences correctly. There may be a few errors in complex sentences, idioms, and collocations.
Most of the words are pronounced correctly. However, there may be some minor problems with stress in words and in sentences. There is adequate chunking. Intonation patterns are more or less correct.

Level Four: Fairly fluent in familiar topics but may have some difficulty in unfamiliar topics. There may be some lapses in fluency but this will not affect communication. Fully active concrete vocabulary and a large passive vocabulary. Simple sentences are mostly correct but there might be some inaccuracy in complex sentences. Pronunciation of some words may be faulty as would be stress and intonation but this does not affect over all comprehension.

Level Three: Communicates adequately in most every day contexts; has sufficient range of vocabulary; basic structures are more or less correct but there is considerable inaccuracy in complex structure. There are places where it is difficult to comprehend the speech of the learners. Some words may be difficult to understand due to mispronunciation. Stress and intonation may be faulty.

Level two: Can communicate on personal matters. Has limited social conversation. Can answer simple questions about personal topics correctly in present and past tenses. Has difficulty with question formation and tenses even in simple sentences. Complex sentences attempted but are always wrong. Vocabulary very limited. Due to mispronunciation, there are stretches of conversation which are incomprehensible. Speech too slow.

Level one: Limited communication even about personal matters. May know formulaic greetings such as good morning, how are you?, etc. Vocabulary inadequate. Cannot construct correct simple sentences. Complex sentences totally missing. Due to mispronunciation, large stretches are incomprehensible.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

Evaluation is a complex process, more so when we have to assess listening and speaking skills in the second language. In the Indian formal educational system there are not many tried and tested procedures to assess listening and speaking. This Unit suggests a few possible ways which will help the teacher to evaluate these skills. We have provided you with detailed inventories which you could adopt to suit your context and type of students. Always remember, any assessment must be sensitive to your students and must not add to their anxiety.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING


5.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

When preparing listening tasks for assessment which sometimes resemble reading comprehension tests some important elements to be kept in mind are:

The listening stimuli: This should represent typical oral language and not the written language read out to learners. The language should resemble language heard in the classroom in various media or in conversations. These should be interesting and short, they should relate to learners’ experiences and should not be coloured by gender, socioeconomic or racial ethnic background.

The questions: Multiple choice questions are preferred; these should focus on important aspects of the passage and not on trivial details. Answers must relate to the passage and not be based on the learners’ prior knowledge.

Performance tests are also acceptable where the learner selects a picture or performs a task based on oral instruction. Learners may have to select a picture after listening to the description. They could be given a map and asked to trace a route.

The test environment: The environment should be free of external distractions. If a voice recorder is used it should be of good sound quality. If the test administrator is presenting material it should be presented clearly and with appropriate volume.

Authentic materials: It is good to use authentic materials like radio and television programmes, public address announcements, speeches and lectures, telephone recordings, movie recordings etc.

Check Your Progress 2

Designing listening tasks involve three stages:

Pre listening: when planning for the task decide:

- what to listen for
- if more linguistic or background knowledge is needed
- whether to address the overall meaning or only words and phrases.

While listening tasks: When monitoring comprehension

- verify predictions
- decide what is important and what is not
- listen again to check
- ask for help

After listening: Assessing comprehension and strategy

- assess understanding of a particular area
- assess overall progress
•  decide if the appropriate strategies have been used
•  modify strategies if so needed.

Check Your Progress 3

1)  When designing pre-listening activities keep in mind:

  •  Learner’s background knowledge
  •  Clarify any cultural information needed to understand the task
  •  Create an awareness about the text the learners are about to hear and the purpose of listening
  •  Provide for group discussion as a background.

2)  While listening tasks relate directly to the text and learners attempt them during
or immediately after listening. We need to remember:

  •  Allow learners to read the instructions before attempting the task
  •  Keep writing to a minimum while listening
  •  They should be guided through the task
  •  Use questions to help learners focus

Check Your Progress 4

Some of the listening problems found in learners are:

1.  Acuity of hearing

Some learners have physical problems which prevent them from listening effectively.

2.  Discrimination and auditory perception

Some learners have problems with auditory memory (recalling what they have just
heard) and sequential memory (recalling the correct sequences of words or
utterances they have just heard).

3.  Attention and concentration

Many learners have difficulty in following instruction because of a low attention span
and an inability to concentrate for more than very short intervals.

4.  Comprehension

Many learners have difficulties with different aspects of listening comprehension. Some have trouble with factual or literal comprehension (identifying what was said
or what facts were stated); others have trouble with interpretation such as being able to see cause and effect relationships between facts.

Check Your Progress 5

1.  Speaking tests have to be planned carefully keeping in mind numbers as they
are tests that have to be conducted at a personal level. In case there is pair
work/group work involved, it is important to plan the total time to be taken, ensure attendance and also levels of proficiency. This could mean really long
hours of work for the examiner if the numbers are large.
2. It is necessary in any speaking test to clearly define the test taker. Teacher must take into account:

- Expected linguistic output
- Age appropriate task
- Background of the test taker in terms of exposure to the language outside the classroom.
- Long term disabilities like speaking, hearing, vision etc.
- Cognitive style. This refers to the way an individual perceives information. Some test takers may not be able to interpret a graph so if the task is related to answering questions based on the graph the candidate may not be able to do so.
- Motivation, concentration, emotional state, test preparedness

3. When reviewing a test these are some of the criteria that should be kept in mind.

- Purpose. What is the strategy the task is looking at?
- Information. What is the information expected from the speaker? The nature of the information expected is important. If it is too abstract, it may not be as forthcoming as information that is more concrete.
- Response format. What is the expected format of the response?
- Criteria for assessment. Is the candidate aware of the criteria for assessment?
- Time constraints. Is the time clearly specified?
- Examiner and speaker relationship is very important as it sets the tone of the test.
- Topic familiarity leads to superior performance.