
UNIT 4 SPEAKING

STRUCTURE

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

As teachers of a second language, our main concern is not to impart knowledge and information to the children about the language, but to develop their ability to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes. In this unit we shall look at how we can help young primary school children to develop their oral skills, namely those of understanding and speaking in English, as a second language.

After you have been through this unit, you should be able to:

1. Appreciate the specific needs of your learners.
2. Plan a variety of suitable oral activities in English (as a second language) based on the needs of your learners, while taking into account the constraints of the existing classroom situation.
3. Monitor and modify these activities to ensure that they are effective.
4. Understand your role as a classroom manager/facilitator, in enhancing your students' oral skills in English.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Speaking is more than merely talking. It involves thinking, imagination, sensitiveness in listening, and understanding. Speaking may include only one person — the one involved in speaking. A listener is not necessary, but is highly desirable. But the communication process is completed only when the speaker gets a response by word, look, gesture, or even silence, which enables her to judge the attitude of the listener and the degree of success or failure of the communication. To complete the circular response both speaker and listener are needed.

The entire body is used in speaking. It uses the 'audible code' — the sounds used by the speaker, and the 'visible code'— the movements or gestures of the face, arms, and other parts of the body that are used for emphasis. The primary function of speech is to influence the behaviour of others.

The importance of developing oral skills in a language classroom cannot be undervalued. Speech allows the user to express ideas without getting bogged down by the mechanics of their usage. It is therefore much more accessible to a second language learner than writing. Errors in language usage are overcome with greater ease in spoken language. However it may be more threatening to a new learner than written language, as the learner may feel exposed and vulnerable, particularly if faced with a large group. To develop fluency in oral expression it is essential to ensure a non-threatening environment. Children are very sensitive to ridicule or being laughed at by their peers. It is important to spend time in the beginning to discuss and generate suitable rules with the class children, to ensure a suitable classroom climate in which children are not afraid to make mistakes. Children need to know how to learn from their mistakes, and treat mistakes as a natural part of the learning process.

Learning a second language to the point at which it can be used effectively is a difficult process unless it is learned in ordinary social contact as the first language was learned. In general, the difficulty increases with the degree of isolation of the learners from natural contacts with those who use the language well. When the English-speaking child first comes to school, she has a mastery of the language structure in English that sometimes proves to be difficult for the child who speaks another language to attain for years to come. Learning a second language does not mean that the child must give up her own language and culture, but rather that she must be so educated that she will be able to operate in English when the situation demands English, and in her own language when the situation demands the use of her own language. This is the real challenge for the teacher. It is a well known fact that the closer one comes to teaching young children a second language in the manner in which they acquired their first language, the faster and more permanent the learning will be.

Any teaching of a second language must allow for ample opportunities for using the spoken language. Linguists consider the spoken form primary, for various reasons:

1. Children learn to understand and speak their native language for several years before they learn to read or write it - if they learn to read or write it at all.
2. Although all normal humans can understand and speak, many cannot read and write.
3. Writing is a secondary system derived only from what people say. Writing is often called "symbolisation" since the symbols (letters in the alphabet in English, for example) used in writing "represent" the words of the language.

In this unit we shall first look at how children acquire oral competence in their native language. Based on this, we shall look at some ways of creating learning situations for developing and enhancing oral skills in the second language within the context of the classroom.

Check Your Progress 1

Why is it important to focus on the spoken form of a language being taught in the primary school ?

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4.2 A CHILD'S ACQUISITION AND USE OF THE NATIVE SPOKEN LANGUAGE

There is a good deal of evidence which suggests that language may fulfil important functions besides that of enabling communication. Research has indicated that the development of language may play an important part in the child's intellectual or cognitive development. As a child hears and uses words she is helped to see some kind of order in what she is experiencing, and is able to recognise those instances which have some basic qualities in common. In this way language helps the child to begin to classify objects, actions and situations which make up her experience. It also becomes a way to fix experiences in memory, and to think about similarities, differences and relationships, and through this process create an order in the world that the child experiences.

Another important use of language is concerned with the speaker's own actions. As a young child talks to herself it is almost as though it helps to bring her actions under control, so that the action is learned and becomes familiar, until the point when the actions are so well rehearsed and automatic that the use of directive language is no longer needed.

While the child's experiences provide the basis from which meaning, and therefore language can develop, at the same time what other people around the child say to the child also plays an important part in stimulating the child's actions and setting value on them. The child's language is extended by the parent's responses to her statements and questions. Adults tend to use words so freely and easily that they teach them to the child at almost every opportunity. They encourage the child to say the word aloud, correcting her when she says it incorrectly or applies it to the wrong object, and rewarding her when she uses the word or symbol correctly.

What is shown to be worthwhile by others is likely to become worthwhile to the child. During recent years a body of evidence has grown which seems to indicate that the way in which the child learns to use language is dependent upon early experiences in the home. We can assume that while all children hold some experiences in common from which everyday concepts can be built, there will be differences between children, in the specific knowledge they have built up from living in particular environments. All children learn to get along with others around them, and adjust to some extent to what is expected of them, in order to fulfil their need for acceptance and to gain love

and recognition. But what is expected of them may be very different and so what they learn is very different. Differences in the way children use language, thus stem from the experiences in the social environment of their homes. Although the ability to imitate sounds plays a tremendous part in the child's ability to acquire vocabulary and structure for her utterances, learning to use language is clearly much more complex than being able to imitate sounds. Imitation is not enough to explain how a child gains meaning and gains the adult's way of using language. Most adult's seem to help the child quite intuitively as they talk, sometimes simplifying what they say to accommodate the child's immaturity, and sometimes speaking almost as they would to an adult or older child. Often they take what the child has said and repeat a corrected version, which sometimes the child will repeat immediately. In this way it seems the child gains the experience she needs for distinguishing the more ambiguous aspects of structure in talk, and gradually more and more talk gains the character of the adult's.

The young child goes through two phases in learning to speak: The first stage is the **passive stage** in which the child comes to understand much of what is said to her but makes little use of the language herself; the second stage is an **active stage** in which the child begins to use words and word groups. So by listening to language the toddler learns language and through language, about the world she lives in. By the time the child comes to school her language patterns are largely set in her native or first language. She has already learned to use the sound system, grammar, and vocabulary which is characteristic of her home and neighbourhood. In general, research in language development indicates that that a supportive, non- threatening environment, which provides for vocabulary growth and a variety of experiences in the formative years, may make the difference between a child who is able to do school work and one who is unable to do so. The early years are the root years during which children meet the challenge of knowing who they are in relation to people outside the confines of the home and family. They build their strategies of rejection, of acceptance, of domination, of submission, and of leading , of following, of compromising.

Check Your Progress 2.

a) What role does language acquisition play in the child's development?

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b) What conditions enhance a child's language acquisition?

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4.4 TYPES OF ORAL EXPRESSION.

Let us ask ourselves the question - What is speaking? Speaking is many things. It is:

- talking with others.
- giving information to others.
- telling others how you feel.
- persuading others.
- dealing through words with special situations.
- telling things that interest others such as poems, stories, shared experiences.
- making formal or impromptu speeches.
- getting ideas across, out aloud.
- expressive language whereas listening is receptive language.

Oral communication is used more extensively in daily life than written expression. In school and out of it children of all ages converse, discuss, explain, share experiences and report their progress or findings in some personal enterprise. Thus oral communication takes many different forms. It is important to expose children to these various forms, since the type of language used varies. The kind of language used in an informal conversation will greatly vary from that used for making a speech. For second language learners these variances have to be learnt, therefore, the more the variety in the exposure to spoken language forms, the better will the children learn. Classroom opportunities for oral expression help second language learners to:

- increase their vocabulary and the ability to use the language.
- be articulate when speaking, i.e. speaking coherently and in complete sentences.
- become fluent in expressing their feelings and opinions.
- improve listening skills.
- listen to different points of view and value the opinion of others.
- develop confidence in the use of the language.
- learn the social skills needed for group interaction.
- enhance their ability to communicate with a variety of audiences.
- reinforce grammatical structures, intonation, pronunciation, through actual usage.

4.5 CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR USING THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE WITHIN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM.

The possibilities for using spoken language in the classroom are immense. There are opportunities for spontaneous, unplanned discussions, debates, verbal sharing, recitation. Often informal talk between students is very constructive if it can be given a focus. We are looking at a few as an illustration of the kind of activities that can be taken up. What is exceedingly important is that a child should feel completely free and relaxed. The classroom atmosphere must be completely non-threatening. Individual differences in children must be respected. Children should not be compared with each other. Shy

children should not be forced to speak in front of the whole class. They should be gently helped to participate. Teachers need to say, "no talking", a little discretely. Talk is the vehicle for a lot of learning in the classroom, and blocking it can take away great opportunities for developing fluency in ideas, speech and expression. To maintain a harmonious level of 'meaningful noise' the answer is not the over used "no talking", but rather talking within very clearly defined rules, developed with the children.

We shall now look at some ways in which activities for reinforcing the spoken language skills can be taken up in the classroom.

a) Opportunities for vocabulary development.

Through sharing experiences children become acquainted with the art of talking in front of a group. Spontaneous sharing brings to light the stage of the child's speech and the areas where the child's vocabulary needs strengthening. Some specific activities for vocabulary development are:

- through games, which help the child to acquire new concepts for commonly used words. For example games which emphasise different parts of speech, such as adjectives, prepositions or adverbs. (put the ball into the bag, under the bag and so on). Also playing games like word building, categories, spotting the odd one, guessing games, miming and so on.
- using synonyms for tired or overused words, as well as, for the purpose of using more precise words.
- using synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, homographs, prefixes and suffixes, to change the meanings of words.
- using word games such as "I spy with my little eye something beginning with..." or making riddles.
- learning to figure out the meanings of words from the context.
- making friends with new words by locating their meanings and using them whenever the opportunity arises. (Learning the skill of using a dictionary).
- becoming aware of idiomatic expressions in common use, as well as, figurative language such as similes, analogies and metaphors.
- using sense perception to create words. After a picnic or an outdoor experience, sense perception can be highlighted by having children describe how they felt when they touched the grass or trees, what were the different smells they got, how the sound of the wind was different to that of the water, the different things they saw. The teacher provides a verbal prompt for the children to respond to.

b) Opportunity for creative speech

- Through using literature for releasing children from the pressures of colourless speech, as well as, for evoking creative responses. This could include choral recitation, read aloud sessions, as well as, creative drama.
- Through poetry. Poems evoke in children words and feelings that no other language expression can. Nonsense rhymes, picturesque poems, story poems provide plenty of opportunity for word play and improvisation. Children enjoy reciting as well as improvising new poems based on existing patterns or structures.

- Sentence building games work well, each child adds on a word till the sentence is complete. Then a new sentence is started. Expanding sentences or changing sentences by using opposites, are some variations.

-Providing familiar materials for descriptive words. Provide situations for children to use exact and concrete words to express an experience or feeling. For example bring different kinds of material to the classroom, such as wood, a bottle top , a piece of silk, a brush, a cork. Pass the objects around so that each child can see, touch and smell them. Encourage the children to describe them in new and imaginative ways.

-Build stories. Provide a starting sentence. Let each child in turn add on a sentence, to make a whole story. Encourage children to be imaginative.

- Help children to create images with words. Use phrases such as “dancing leaves”, “slinky crocodile”, “squirmy worm” to illustrate how words can create images, and make meanings clear and interesting. Let each child pick any noun and use colourful descriptive words to create images.

- Children enjoy creating sound words and nonsense words, such as SWISH SWASH went the tail of the donkey, or SNIGGELDY SNAG went the tired crocodile. This can be turned into a game. One child names an animal, and the other one give a suitable sound word.

c) Opportunities for verbal communication and sharing

- Encourage co-operative learning through planned group work or pair work. Structure some activities so that children are required to discuss and share their perceptions or views to be able to do an activity. It is much less threatening for shy children to participate and speak up in small groups. Such activities help children to express their ideas verbally. They also help children to learn to listen to, and respect the views of other children. It is important to use authentic, and real life situations preferably from the childrens' daily life experiences. Children identify with such activities and enter into real discussions. This greatly helps a spontaneous flow of speech. For instance, the children may be asked to form pairs and come up with three ideas for making their classroom interesting.

Later the ideas could be pooled together and some of these ideas may actually be taken up. A few more examples of the kind of activities that could be taken in groups or pairs are:

- problem solving or working on puzzles, which requires the children to discuss with each other.
- finding each others preferences on some particular topic.
- discussing likes and dislikes and coming to a consensus on some topic.
- Teaching each other.
- Finding information about each other, based on a format.
- Working together on creating a story, poem or play.
- Group recitation.
- Memorising.
- Giving and following directions.
- Improvisations and role plays based on some clues or stimulus.

- Question/ answer sessions based on a reading text, a project or group experience.
- Talk sessions based on sharing a book or an experience.
- Show and tell sessions - the children in turn bring something to show and talk about.
- informal talk sessions.

- Schedule some time each day or each week as 'informal talk time'. Throughout the week build up possible topics, keep track of questions or problems that arise during the school day. Use these to generate discussions.

- Encourage children to talk about their experiences. Encourage others to listen and ask questions.

d) Opportunity for improving articulation

Exposure to the spoken language helps children to improve their articulation. Some areas that need special focus are listed below.

- Hearing the difference between a consonant sound made correctly and incorrectly. Use jingles, stories and rhymes to illustrate the sounds made correctly and incorrectly.

- Identifying particular consonants in words and in isolation. Give the children many chances to hear the sounds of letters that are being mispronounced - in isolation and in words. The most frequently defective sounds are - th, s, sh, r, l.

- Identifying letter sounds in initial, medial and final positions. Test whether the child can use consonants and vowels in the three positions. Let each child select an object for consonants in the initial, medial and final positions.

- Distinguishing between sounds often confused. For example s-z, th-s, th-f, w-r, l- r, m-n, p-b. Use games, rhymes and songs for practising these, and reinforcing their correct forms.

- Developing rhythm. Use choral speaking and group recitation of poetry as rhythm setting in speaking and in helping children to learn timing and coordination. To aid in improving enunciation and voice, tie speech into rhythm and dramatic play.

- Finding methods which increase speech fluency. See if different ways of delivery, particularly with formal speech, increase the level of fluency. Experiment with different methods of reporting such as a speech, informal chat sessions, interview, etc.

- Using intonations to suit characterisations. Locate in the dialogue of a story a short speech by one of the characters which could be misunderstood unless correct voice intonations were used. Ask the children to listen to and choose which one of the three ways fit the character: a monotone, intonations which suit the character, an unsuitable way.

- Using intonations to suit meaning. Find out if the children can show varied meanings of the same word by changing the intonation, posture and gesture.

Check Your Progress 4

List a few ways in which spoken language skills can be developed in the language classroom.

4.6 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher needs to realise that helping students master oral skills brings the classroom closer to the real world. We use these skills everyday — at home, at work at school. Oral language patterns have been shown by research to be an important base for reading. It is important for the teacher to:

- Realise the relevance and importance of activities which enhance oral skills and translate this realisation into actual classroom practice. Thus every classroom should provide numerous opportunities for oral language practice through discussion, reporting, and question and answer sessions.
- The teacher needs to consciously build in time slots for oral activities. These need to be organised keeping in mind the particular requirements of each class, and the learning styles of most learners.
- The teacher needs to establish a non-threatening and congenial classroom environment. This has been discussed in detail earlier.
- To ensure workable noise levels, it is vital to set very clear rules and limits.
- Help the children to listen to each other and appreciate the views of others even if they are completely contrary to one's own beliefs.
- Be very sensitive to the classroom dynamics and if need be provide extra support to the shy, insecure child. Try and avoid opportunities at which such children can be belittled. Draw them out very gradually, in the beginning letting them participate in small groups, and slowly as their confidence builds up, drawing them into the larger group. At the same time try and ensure active involvement of all the children.
- At the end of each activity discuss (as a class) the experience of working on the activity.
- Always use a positive approach when evaluating students' work . Talk about the good points first. Talk about the child's areas of strengths and areas that require strengthening, rather than areas of weaknesses. This approach shifts the focus from trying to find errors, to finding ways of improving. The thrust becomes more positive. Infact it is a good idea to allow each child to compete with her own earlier performance. Children may actually be asked to keep records of their performances (such as graphs) and see their own progress. The visual impact of such an exercise, helps to motivate children to do better each time. They love to see their graphs move up.
- Never miss an opportunity to praise real improvement or any creative work. Encouragement goes a long way in creating the desire to learn and improve. At the same time be very careful not to compare children. Value each child's work for itself.

- When monitoring individual or group work make specific suggestions for improvement.
- Listen carefully and provide support or reinforcement as and when needed.
- Give the students plenty of opportunity to practise.

4.7 LET US SUM UP.

In today's world more and more communication by speaking is taking the place of written communication. The trends for the future seem to be heading in the direction of even faster and more accurate spoken messages. In schools 'listening' and 'speaking' have been added to the curriculum because of the realisation that students will be confronted with an even greater number and variety of speaking tasks for which they need to be properly prepared. For learners of a second language the acquiring of spoken skills helps provide a greater degree of fluency and functional competency which paves the way for attaining accuracy later on. There are several opportunities, both informal as well as planned, that need to be used for developing oral skills. The teacher needs to be sensitive to the special needs of the class and create a classroom climate that enhances the confidence and self esteem of the learners through specially planned oral activities.

4.8 SUGGESTED READING

1. Boyd, Gertrude A. *Teaching Communication Skills in the Elementary School*. Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. 1970.
2. Byrne, Donn. *Teaching Oral English*. Longman Group. UK Limited. 1991.
3. Morgan, Edith L and Dr. James M Jasper. *Developing Speaking Skills*. Good Apple Inc. 1985.
4. Rivers, W. *Communicating Naturally in a Foreign Language*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press 1983.
5. Williams, Mary Young. *Let 'em Talk*. Dale Seymour Publications. 1987

4.9 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1.

It is important to focus on the spoken form of the language because it is more accessible to the learner than the written form. Almost everyone learns to speak while there are a large number of people who cannot read and write. Writing is based on what we have to say. Linguists consider it the secondary level of language learning, whereas spoken language is considered primary. It is easier to correct speech than writing, since one does not require to master the mechanics, as in writing. Besides in today's world spoken communication is being used more and more widely, therefore, making it essential for children to be well equipped with oral skills.

Check Your Progress 2.

- a) Language acquisition helps the child's intellectual and cognitive development. Language enables a child to create order in the world around, by equipping a

child to classify, categorise, see similarities and differences and relationships between objects as well as in phenomena. It also helps a child to direct her own actions. In addition to this, it allows a child to express ideas, thoughts, feelings and communicate in a variety of ways.

- b). A non-threatening, relaxed environment in which the child hears a lot of the spoken language is the best environment for language acquisition. The child learns by imitating sounds, therefore the greater the exposure to the spoken language, the quicker the child learns. The role that adults play in enabling a child to learn a language is very important. The child is greatly influenced by the way adults respond to the child's language. Thus adult responses play a major role in directing the child's language development.

Check Your Progress 3.

A second language learner has the problem of facing interference from her first or native language. There is a tendency to use the speech patterns and structures of the first language. In addition to this, the child has problems with the speech patterns of spoken English. The child is unfamiliar with the stress patterns, intonations, pauses as well as grammatical structures, and these need to be taught through plenty of intensive listening experiences. The child needs to learn correct pronunciation. The differences in language usage and intonation for formal and informal speech is something the child needs to learn. A second language learner needs exposure to spoken English in as natural and real life situations as possible.

Check your progress 4.

The classroom presents endless opportunities for developing spoken language skills informally or through specially planned activities. Basically it is up to the teacher to realise the importance of giving children the opportunity to listen and to speak in the classroom. Once the teacher realises the importance of this, she needs to use every opportunity that crops up. Some activities would need to be carefully planned and integrated into the curriculum. These could be:

- a) Opportunities for vocabulary development through games, quizzes, follow-up activities after reading, etc.
- b) Opportunities for creative speech such as dramatisation, improvisations, discussions, reporting sessions, debates, story building, creating poems or songs, recitations.
- c) Opportunities for verbal communication through planned group work or pair work. This may include activities such as puzzles, problem solving exercises, discussions, sharing experiences, show and tell, informal conversations, collecting information and so on.
- d) Opportunities for improving articulation, intonation and enunciation. These would mainly be in the form of intensive listening experiences in which the child experiences and hears the speech patterns and stress patterns in English and is given activities for practising these. These activities could include controlled recitations or read aloud sessions, as well as special activities to reinforce correct pronunciation of particular consonants which are being mispronounced.