
UNIT 3 SPOKEN-WORD PROGRAMMES

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1 of this block, you have been familiarized with different formats, which feature in a radio programme schedule. You would have also marked the special attributes and requirements of the audio medium distinct from the other mass media. This unit focuses at the planning, production and presentation of spoken-word programmes i.e. the programmes, which use speech as a vehicle to communicate.

A speech is not just a group or assembly of words; it communicates ideas, feelings and thoughts. Similarly, spoken-word is not simply reading the written word. It requires sophisticated skills on the part of the broadcaster since his/her speech has to convey the spontaneity of the thinking process with required feelings, excitement and reflect the personality as well. Advance scripting of spoken-word programmes, should therefore, bear this important factor in mind that it would **not be read but spoken to**.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying the unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish spoken-word from the written word in terms of treatment and style;
- discuss the distinct features of talks, interviews, discussions and other programme formats using spoken-word as an essential component;
- write the script of a spoken-word programme; and
- present a spoken-word programme.

3.2 THE SPOKEN-WORD FORMAT

The spoken-word in radio comprises diverse formats such as straight talk, interview, discussion, dialogue, talk show, quiz, book review, commentaries, etc. News bulletins are also a spoken-word presentation although news formats are progressively getting featured, implying, that more and more actuality recordings are being used in the news programmes. News, therefore, would be dealt with as a separate category.

There is a substantial spoken-word content in programmes for special audience groups such as programmes for rural areas, children and women listeners, etc. As these are meant for specific audiences, the treatment of the themes is different from the spoken-word programmes targeted at the general audience category.

3.2.1 The Talk

The talk format is one of the basic formats of spoken-word programmes broadcast by radio stations. This format can be effectively used for treating a subject in an absorbing and interesting manner. Sometimes the importance or novelty of a subject may interest the listener, but more often than not, the talk could be effective or ineffective depending on how it is presented. It is the speaker who makes the listener interested through his /her presentation style and manner.

Paradoxically, the radio talk is spoken-word, which is written. Writing and speaking are contradictory in terms, yet radio producers insist upon written talks to ensure that the theme gets properly covered and vetted and conforms to the channel's editorial policy. All the important talking points pertaining to the subject of the talk, the key phrases, quotes, if any, and the substance of introductory and concluding remarks are put down in a proper sequence. Thus scripting facilitates the talker to conform to the scope of the programme. The script also helps to adhere to the time limit imposed by the station's programme schedule.

3.2.2 Talk Shows

The Talk-shows, which attempt to mix information with light entertainment, have emerged as popular formats over Radio and TV.

The selection of a talk show host, celebrity and guests are important factors for the programme's success. A talk-show host has a distinct personality and style of presentation which contributes to the image and popularity of the programme. The versatility of the host enables him/her to quickly establish a rapport with guests participating in the programme from different walks of life. S/he understands and identifies with the interests and tastes of the audience. Needless to say that s/he has to have a pleasant personality and be courteous to the guests appearing in the programme even while cracking jokes or pulling their legs in a lighter vein. An exceptionally popular programme attracts sponsorship and can become a daily feature. Thus a talk show not only brings awareness but also generates interest in the audience.

3.2.3 Interviews

As compared to a speech delivered by a single person, a conversation between two people is more absorbing. You would have noticed that even a passer-by stops for a while to over-hear conversation between two people. Interviews capitalize on this aspect of human interest created through conversation. Another reason for good number of interviews is that the Radio stations often find it difficult to get effective talkers, who besides being subject specialists have excellent broadcasting skills. The interviewer navigates the interview by outlining the topic set out for the talk and by posing intermittent questions and comments. S/he also gives important cues to help the interviewee to follow a certain track. Interviews are classified as of three types; opinion, information and personality interviews.

Opinion Interviews

Opinion interviews are generally undertaken when diverse opinion on a subject is required. The host interviewer asks a similar set of questions to different people and tries to construct a kaleidoscope of opinions on a certain theme. S/he stimulates the discussion by putting up the problem in a proper perspective. These interviews are conducted by the presenter/interviewer while standing on a street corner and picking up people at random for their reactions and opinion. These interviews are also conducted through telephonic conversations as part of a programme.

Information Interviews

Interview format is also undertaken to elicit information from a person, who is a known authority on a particular subject or is intimately connected with an event. Here, the interviewer places the concerns and queries of a lay-listener to get information for the audience. At times, when the matter is controversial and the expert tries to side-track the issue, the interviewer, skillfully brings him/her back on the issue to make a categorical statement.

Personality Interview

Interviews with celebrities from various fields such as politicians, scientists, artists etc. fall into this category. Even lesser known people may qualify for such interviews if any one of them has been a witness to an important happening, or has contributed to it substantially. Such interviews include eyewitness accounts of happenings such as natural disasters, plane crash etc.



A dignitary being interviewed

Attributes of a Good Interviewer

An interviewer needs to keep many factors in mind before embarking upon an interview. The interviewer has to pull out a lot of background information, undertake research, and identify the areas to be covered in the interview. The questions are framed in such a way as to probe the interviewee keeping in view public interest at the same time allowing him/her an opportunity to explain one's stand. A balanced approach with a blend of humour makes the programme interesting. The following are some of the attributes of a good interviewer:

- Adequate research on the subject matter is a prerequisite of a good interview. The interviewer should make a thorough preparation before s/he talks to the interviewee. For example, if the interview is with an author, the interviewer may well acquaint with the works of the author and other aspects of his/her personality.
- The interviewer must chalk out a sequence so that the questions follow a certain track and the information flows in an organized fashion. The questions should serve to facilitate conversation by providing a logical sequence from one point to the other.
- The questions must be short, direct and must be able to elicit information at length. It must not be such that the interviewer trots out the information and the interviewee is left with the option of saying either 'yes' or 'no'.
- The interviewer should constantly try to keep the spotlight on the interviewee rather than projecting his/her own personality and appear as if s/he knows more on the subject than the interviewee.

- S/he should be an attentive listener and give appropriate and participatory responses to what the interviewer is saying. Responses such as, "yes-yes/I see, huh-huh" etc. should be avoided as they sound jarring and distracting.
- Repeating the point made by the interviewee or trying to put them in one's own words, unless recapitulation is necessary, should also be avoided.
- A good interview does not sound like a question-answer session but in the nature of conversation.
- The interviewer should always be conscious of the interest of the audience by asking relevant questions. The information intake has to be commensurate with the interest of the audience in that particular matter. It must be appreciated that the listener is interested in getting the information or views in the words of the interviewee and the interviewer's role is in facilitating the articulation on the part of the interviewee.
- The interviewer's role is that of a host in the programme. S/he must, therefore, sound to be courteous, kind and reasonable even while putting probing questions in order to stimulate or to provoke the interviewee. A mere didactic approach to questioning does not sustain the listeners' interest in the programme. The interviewer must sound interested in the subject to expect the distantly placed listeners to listen to his/her programme.

Some interview programmes have a specialized format of their own e.g. - 'On the Mat' or 'Firing Line', where the interviewer tends to be tough or even abrasive at times in order to provoke the interviewee. In this approach, the objective of the interview is to give an opportunity to defend oneself and not to expose anyone.

Interviews for special audience programmes must keep in view the requirements of a particular audience. The interviewee must be advised to use a language which is simple and select words which the listeners could easily grasp. If the interview is with an agricultural scientist in the programme for farmers, the expert has to be particularly briefed to avoid unfamiliar, technical words. Even if such words are used, the interviewer needs to get the interviewee explain the terms. Very often, the interviewer raises questions to clarify the information provided by the specialist and wherever necessary, interprets the information in the local dialect for the benefit of the farmers. This technique has been found good for special audience programmes. Spot interviews recorded for inclusion in features and documentaries have a specific purpose in relation to the needs of those programmes.

Check Your Progress: I

- Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.
2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) List the qualities of a good talk show host.

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2) State five dos and don'ts for a good interviewer.

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3.2.4. Discussions

Discussions can be categorized into four broad types:

- (a) **Panel Discussion:** which allows informal exchange of views freely even to the extent of frequent interventions by participants.
- (b) **Symposium:** in which every participant is given an exclusive opportunity to present his/her view point with an anchor person presenting it.
- (c) **Debate:** in which arguments and counter arguments between two opposing points of views are presented.
- (d) **Mixed:** which start with a narrative, then intercepted with spot interviews and finally capped with a discussion.

In broadcast parlance, 'discussions' are largely associated with Panel Discussions. The Panel Discussion format is used when a theme has several dimensions and there is scope for wide divergence of opinions. It involves an informal exchange among three or four participants. A panel discussion is anchored by a moderator who balances varied and sometimes diagonally opposing points of views. The moderator plays the host, outlines the subject and introduces the participants. S/he then calls upon each participant to express views and respond to a point made or to counter an argument. S/he, navigates the discussion through interventions on its chartered path and finally synthesizes divergent points to sum up the discussion.

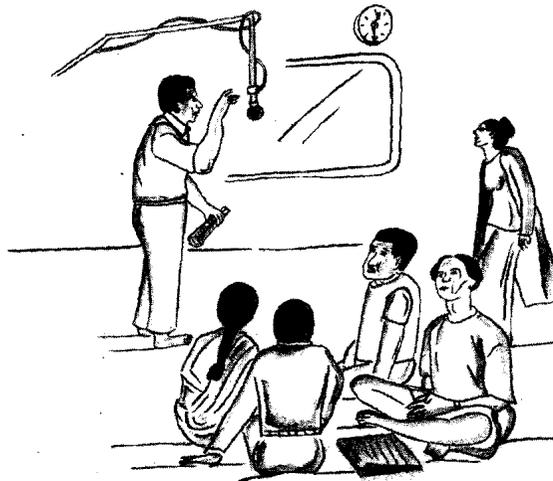
Although the skills of an anchor or moderator are crucial for a smooth flow of discussion, producer of the programme acts as a remote control. The producer asks the moderator to give equal time to all the participants, start or wind up the discussion etc. by passing over slips or through gestures. If the discussion exceeds the allotted time, the producer edits it in post-production to conform to the time limit.

Activity

Organize a mock interview and discussion with your friends or juniors. Identify the target audience for your programme and the duration clearly. Record it on a cassette recorder and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

3.2.5 Poetry Reading

It is a trite criticism that poetry is 'elevated thought in an elevated expression' is not speech. But in broadcasting, no spoken-word schedule is complete without a provision for poetic recitations. Broadcasting reckons poetry as a metrical form of spoken-word while the lyrical poems are taken for light music renditions. It is a truism that poetry is recognised as a powerful format for indicting social evils and arousing the consciousness of people.



Poetic symposium to mark a festival

A radio producer lays equal emphasis on the content as well as the presentation of the poems with due regard to the popularity of the poet. S/he also arranges poetic symposia – *kavi sammelans* on special occasions where the poets present their poems before an invited audience. There are occasions when the producer arranges recitation of poems of poets of yesteryears.

3.3 TALK-BASED FORMATS

Talk as a format aims at 'communicating ideas by spoken-word'. There are several radio formats which use the talk format of communicating ideas through spoken-word but they have established their own identity. Some of these are more popular than straight talks. These include Commentaries, Reviews, Quiz, Lectures and Discourses.

3.3.1 Commentaries

Radio commentaries are of two types; Live running commentaries on cultural or sports events and News commentaries.

Live OB Commentaries

These are un-scripted talks, which enable the listeners to feel the pulse of the event, absorb into that environment and have the emotional satisfaction of imaginary participation. The ethos of the event is built up into the programme by inserting actuality sound effects from the locale of the event, narration by commentators and spot interviews with actual participants in the event. It takes a lot of effort on the part of radio stations to organize such live commentaries on events taking place at near and distant places away from the studios.

Sports commentaries attract large audiences to the broadcast channels. Radio stations and networks compete with each other for obtaining exclusive access to sports fixtures and pay substantial amounts to sports organizing bodies as access fees. Listeners mark out their favourite sports-casters and their comments are referred to or quoted in informal discussions among sports loving audience-groups. A sports-caster is a specialized broadcast professional. Besides, in-depth and practical knowledge of the game, s/he should have fluency and command over the language, must be an alert observer of the game and have presence of mind to grasp and describe developments in the game, almost as they are happening. While the moves in a game can be analysed, criticism, which might expose his/her own bias, should be avoided. With the advent of the TV, sports fans are now much better informed about intricacies and details of the game and the task of a radio commentator has become more challenging.

Radio commentary whether it is on sporting event or the Republic Day Parade or a religious procession; requires the skill of keen observation and quick responses. A commentator should have keen observation skills, attentive mind and good articulation. It is said that the radio commentator has to see through the eyes, think with the mind and speak through the tongue. The advice normally given to a commentator is:

- simplify your description, so that every one can understand;
- use spoken-word in present tense;
- keep your tone soft and friendly; and
- describe the environment, weather, ambience, mood and reaction of the spectators.

News Commentaries

News bulletins and news commentaries both report the happenings. The basic difference lies in terms of the purpose or objective of the programme. While a news bulletin presents news without editorial comment, the news commentary on the other hand tries to present the theme in perspective, take stock of divergent shades of opinions expressed about the happening and finally synthesize them adding editorial comment. Some important elements of the news commentary are:

- narration of factual aspects of the story;
- laying focus on the personalities involved;
- giving a mount to the story by putting it into historical perspective;
- taking stock of diverse opinions expressed and prognosis made about future course of events; and
- finally commentators' own piece of editorializing.

News commentaries which adopt the talk format are broadcast on highly topical subjects. The radio station has to maintain a panel of experienced journalists or experts who can write such commentaries at a very short notice.

3.3.2 Quiz Shows

Quiz shows of various types are becoming a staple diet for radio and television programming. These shows entertain as well as inform and educate the audience. Quizzes can be presented in a variety of ways e.g. a set of questions put to teams of contestants, others involving participation of audience invited in the studios. Excerpts from sound recordings of eminent speakers, leaders, musicians are often played back to the quiz participants for identifying the voices. Excerpts from instrumental or vocal music recordings are also played back to them for identifying the raga. In a game of competition, anxiety is build up. Panels of celebrities are sometimes involved in judging the answers or for responding to questions. A successful quiz programme blends suspense, conflict and humour in ingenious ways. The quiz master is the soul of such programmes and his/her enthusiasm and navigational skills are crucial to the success of the programme.

3.3.3 Book Reviews

Book reviews form an important segment of radio programming. These are primarily targeted at the intellectual minority among its audience, who are keen to acquire knowledge through such reviews. A book review touches upon the broad features of the book under review, and the reviewer's critical comments on the work. With the reading time shrinking, the book review programme serves as a capsule on the latest publications. It usually adopts the talk format, however, interviews with the authors or discussions are also included in reviews.

3.3.4 Lectures and Literary Discourses

Lectures are delivered by well known personalities before an invited audience on some important aspect of human life and thought. These are particularly popular amongst the discerning sections of audience because of the elaborate and analytical treatment of a serious subject by a distinguished person. The duration of a talk programme does not exceed 15 minutes but the lecture format is generally of an hours' duration. BBC broadcasts **Reith Memorial Lecture** every year. All India Radio also organizes yearly memorial lectures - two at the National level and one at the regional level. The literary discourse are particularly popular in the southern parts of the country. For centuries, '**Pravachan**' and '**Harikatha**' have been the effective styles for the spread of ethical and moral education. The literary discourse broadcasts takes up copious excerpts from the literary work chosen. The language used is simple, the presentation lively and the effect dramatic.

3.3 PLANNING AND PRODUCTION OF A TALK

So far we had been discussing the various formats of Spoken-word programmes. Now let us take a close look at their production techniques. Production of a Talk involves the following steps:

- identifying the theme;
- identifying the talker and inviting him/her to script the talk;
- vetting the script received from the talker;
- rehearsing the talker in the studio;
- recording the programme and do post-production, if required; and
- briefing the announcer regarding the presentation announcement.

3.4.1 Selection of Theme

A Spoken-word producer usually prepares a quarterly schedule of programmes in which a wide variety of subjects in different formats such as talks, discussions, interviews and symposia are included. A schedule consists of programmes of utilitarian nature in addition to programmes of artistic, literary and cultural interest. The former includes subjects of current affairs and socio-economic issues. The schedule includes a series of talks on a particular subject giving scope for exhaustive analysis of the various aspects of the subject. It also includes individual talks, Science reviews, Sports reviews etc. The producer writes out the scope of the talk/series of talk to make the talkers conform to the scope avoiding overemphasis or exclusion of certain aspects of the topic.

3.4.2 Identification of Talker

The producers maintain a directory of talkers keeping in view the expertise required. In addition to the expertise, communication skills of the talker are also kept in mind. Once the schedule is finalized and the talker identified, the producer sends letters of invitation requesting him/her to prepare the script with specific reference to the scope outlined. The scope of the talk and of the series as a whole is sent to the talker indicating the duration and the number of words the script may contain.

3.4.3 Vetting the Script

The producer then ensures that the script received from the talker is in accordance with the scope specified. S/he also ensures that;

- the language is comprehensible to a lay listener;
- the sentences are simple, free from tongue twisters, feeble, tinged and unpleasant expressions;
- the script is in conformity with the broadcast code and conventions;
- the script is well-structured and the treatment of the subject is neither too elementary nor too technical; and
- the script does not contain too much of data in too great a detail.

3.4.4 Rehearsing

The producer then explains the points s/he has noted while vetting the script for suitable modifications to the talker. While doing this s/he convinces that the modifications will improve the talk. If there is an unfamiliar technical expression, the producer should ask the talker to substitute the word. However, in this process, the producer should not shake the confidence of the talker or convey the impression that s/he is foisting his/her ideas. If the script contains an expression: "all the parliamentarians in India sadly neglect their duties," the producer could point out that the expression could be 'some parliamentarians sadly neglect their duties' to tone down the matter and avoid the charge of contempt of Parliament.

It would be desirable, particularly in the case of new talkers, to read their scripts in front of the microphone. This helps the producer to time the programme, check the pace of the delivery and mark out the places where there are wrong stresses. If time permits; the rehearsal could be recorded and played back to the talker so that s/he could make necessary corrections in the final recording. Rehearsal helps to make the presentation of the talk personal and conversational. The talker will then refrain from 'talking at' and speak as if s/he is in conversation with someone explaining a particular topic.

3.4.5 Recording the Talk

Once the recording levels have been fixed by the engineer, the recording of talks is normally done by the programme producer. If enough attention is paid at the time of rehearsals and recording then post-production effort can be minimised.

3.4.6 Briefing the Announcer

We have already stated that presentation constitutes an important aspect of broadcasting. The producer provides the announcer the details of the series, the subject of the talk and the talker. Very often, the producer writes out the presentation announcement and keeps it along with the recorded tape. If the announcer is properly briefed, many of the mistakes occurring in live announcements can be avoided.

3.5 PRESENTATION OF SPOKEN-WORD

In the preceding unit you have read that broadcasting is an intimate medium which aims to establish direct communication with its audience. Spoken-word programmes on radio, therefore, must reflect freshness, spontaneity and emotion behind the words that are spoken. The following care needs to be taken while presenting spoken-word programmes:

- The talker must reflect poise in his/her delivery and sound confident in what s/he is talking about. The audience quickly detects nervousness of the talker. Once a listener notices these flaws s/he is likely to get distracted from the content.
- Unlike a written or printed text, if the radio listener misses a point, s/he does not get a chance to refer back to the text. The delivery of the talk should, therefore, follow a smooth and easy pace to facilitate the listener to keep pace with the exposition.
- Flowery sentences and phrases, which beautify a written text, sound like word - blocks on radio. They jitter the smooth pace of exposition and the flow of communication, hence need to be avoided.
- It is always advisable for the talker to mark points of punctuation and emphasis. Repetition of words and phrases sound odd phonetically hence need to be deleted.
- A radio talker has to overcome the psychological limitation that s/he is not able to look into the eyes of the audience and get their response, which is a crucial factor in a person-to-person communication.
- As regards the speed of the delivery, the golden mean is 120 words per minute - marginally plus or minus.
- While delivering a radio talk, the talker should not distort the natural breathing pattern. A bit of histrionics and good articulation add to the impact of the delivery.

The microphone reveals much more than the literal meaning of the speech. It reflects the personality of the talker, although s/he is not physically present before the audience. It magnifies even minor faults and flaws, that are not noticeable in normal hearing-situations. The mike is placed only a few inches away from the speaker's mouth, a situation that pertains in actual life only when one speaks intimately to a close friend or is in a small family group. Listeners of radio programmes, though they are physically located at great distances are able to get the same kind of feeling. The modulation of electrical impulses highlights faults such as roughness in texture of the voice, in-distinctiveness, nasality or slowness in the speech of a talker. Often a good exposition of the subject matter is messed up in its effect on account of faulty delivery.

Thus, you would have noticed that the Radio talks require excellent broadcasting skills on the part of the talker. This could be cultivated by training, preparation, and practice to a great extent. It is quite a painstaking duty for the radio producers, who have to constantly look out for suitable talents who can be groomed as successful broadcasters.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Use the words below to complete the sentences.
- 2) Complete the passage using the words given in the box.

Words to use: poise, confident, nervousness, distraction, poise, confident, nervousness, distraction, poise, confident, nervousness, distraction.

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Check Your Progress: 1

1) The talk show host needs to be polite, courteous as well as witty. S/he needs to establish quick rapport with the guests participating in the programme. S/he thoroughly understands the interests and tastes of the audience. Through his/her distinct style and presentation s/he contributes to the popularity of the programme.

2) Do's and don'ts for an interviewer:

Do:

- Thorough preparation.
- Ask relevant questions.
- Sound courteous, kind and reasonable.
- Be an attentive listener.
- Keep the spotlight on the interviewee.

Don't:

- Ask questions which would elicit 'yes' or 'no' response.
- Project your own personality.
- Give responses such as, "yes-yes/I see, huh-huh" etc.
- Repeat the point made by the interviewee.
- Sound didactic.

Check Your Progress: 2

1) The producer selects appropriate participants and moderator in a discussion. S/he ensures that the moderator gives equal time to all the participants, introduces and sums up the discussion properly. Messages to these effects are conveyed to the moderator through verbal or non-verbal gestures. If the discussion exceeds the allotted time, the producer edits it in post-production to conform to the time limit.

2) While identifying a talker, his/her expertise in the subject selected for the talk and good communication skills should be kept in mind.

3) It is important to take a written script from the talker to ensure that the script is in accordance with the scope specified. The theme gets properly covered and vetted and conforms to the channel's editorial policy. All the important talking points pertaining to the subject of the talk, the key phrases etc. are put down in a proper sequence. The language is comprehensible, the sentences are simple. The script adheres to the specified time limit and is in conformity with the broadcast code and conventions.

4) Rehearsing a talk in front of the microphone helps the producer to time the programme, check the pace of delivery and mark out the places with wrong stresses. It helps to make the presentation of the talk personal and conversational.

Check Your Progress: 3

1) Do's and don'ts while presenting a talk:

Do:

- Reflect poise in your delivery and sound confident.
- Mark your points of punctuation and emphasis.
- Deliver a talk around 120 words per minute for a smooth and easy pace.

Don't:

- Write flowery sentences and phrases as they affect the flow of communication.
- Repeat words and phrases.
- Distort natural breathing pattern while delivering a radio talk.