
UNIT 6 DEVELOPING THE SPEAKING ABILITIES

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit, you will

- be able to differentiate between the language of everyday use and the language of oral discourse;
- understand the link between oral language, reading and writing;
- be able to differentiate between spoken and written discourse;
- be able to appreciate the functions of speaking in different contexts for different purposes and identify and use the different styles of speaking;
- be aware of the features of spoken discourse –e.g. debates, arguments, class discussions and panel discussions;
- engage your students in academic tasks that improve their speaking skills in different subject areas; and
- give your students opportunities to integrate their reading skills with their speaking and listening skills.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Since a long time, educational psychologists and theorists have noted the increased learning that takes place when students interact with one another in cooperative or collaborative learning groups before, during and after learning new information and skills. According to John Dewey, schools are social institutions created to foster education as a social process (1929). As Lev Vygotsky pointed out in his landmark text, *Mind and Society*, “the development of higher mental processes (1978), children’s cultural development occurs first on a social level between people and later on an individual level, or inside the child.” (Vygotsky, 1978).

Oral language acquisition occurs as a natural process and without much effort. The ability to speak grows with age but speaking in more effective ways in the language of school, requires particular attention and practice. As Holbrook suggests, language competence depends on fluency, clarity and sensitivity, which gets honed over time.

There is a difference in the demands that speaking and listening skills make upon the learners. Listening calls for learners to access meaning contained in other people’s utterances, whereas speaking is all about expressing your thoughts and sentiments in order to communicate these to others. During interaction, words act as a means of communication by expressing and comprehending meaning.

6.2 FUNCTIONS OF SPEAKING

Functions of speaking can be distinguished as *interactional* and *transactional* functions. Interactional functions serve to establish and maintain social relations whereas the *transactional* functions focus on exchange of information.

Focusing on learners’ interaction skills usually enhances their fluency. Interaction in class can usually be transferred to situations outside the classrooms, where the learners are able to use the language learnt in the classroom. Interaction skills focus on what to say, how to say and how to establish and maintain contact with the other person. Examples of interaction skill include the ability to greet and say goodbye, make queries, seek answers/ advice / solution, describe things, people, places, communicate on phone, seek and give information, etc.

Speaking activities in subject classrooms can focus on dynamic, context based and meaningful interactions. ***Transactional skills focus on using language to communicate specific information.*** The message is the most important aspect of the transactional speech act. Learners need to comprehend news broadcasts, lectures, debates; description and instructions, speaking tasks centered around such aspects would enable the learners to gradually communicate/express various types of messages.

These distinctions are useful because they enable teachers to identify which major kinds of interactions are important for their students. However, in practice most spoken interaction is a mixture of both interactional and transactional types. In spoken language, the nature of the relationships between speakers has an impact on how the speakers select the language. Language of the speaker is influenced by social power, status or expertise, emotional distance or closeness, and the extent of contact they maintain .

6.3 SPEAKING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO SPEAK

Oral exercises used by the teacher in the classroom help in retaining and understanding of information in different subject areas, helping students to formulate their thoughts clearly. Students present them and evaluate themselves for what they know and do not know by testing their ideas against those of their peers. In the process, students get an opportunity to develop and display skills of organizing, analysis, argument and critical thinking. By getting engaged with oral exercises and assignments of different varieties, students move towards a deeper understanding in different disciplines.

Speaking to learn is an important teaching goal but learning to speak is an equally important teaching objective. It is through speaking that opinions are expressed, arguments made, explanations offered and information transmitted. Being able to speak well is a skill set which equips students well for the rest of their lives :personal lives, workplaces, and social interactions.

Teachers need to incorporate both speaking to learn and learning to speak activities/ assignments in alignment with subject specific goals by reflecting and discussing on language the use of for a range of purposes in their lessons in the context of teaching of their disciplines.

6.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORAL LANGUAGE, READING AND WRITING

Reading and writing are built on the foundation of oral language. The organisation of sounds and their used is developed in the preschool years and this working knowledge, with instruction, develops into a conscious awareness of the phonemic composition of spoken words (or phonemic awareness), which is essential to learning to read. In this sense, oral language is the foundation for learning to identify or pronounce written words.

Oral language is also related to reading comprehension or (reading for meaning) as there are many factors common in oral language and reading comprehension. The way/order in which words are put together to form sentences (syntax) of oral and written language is similar. The semantics (word meaning) for words *heard* and *read* are the same—the words tree, bird, whether read or heard, will evoke similar though varying meanings for any given person. *The prior or background knowledge that a learner brings to the class contributes significantly to understanding and using oral language and to reading comprehension.*

6.5 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPEAKING AND WRITING

Differences between the nature of spoken and written discourses are based on the different purposes for which spoken and written language are used.

A major difference in the speech and writing is that speakers do not usually speak complete sentences. For instance, speech consists of units of ideas which are

phrases and clauses with pauses, unlike written forms where users write complete sentences by joining phrases with conjunctions. The difference occurs because speakers are speaking in real time and focus on communicating ideas to the listeners.

6.5.1 Features of Spoken Discourse

Some features of spoken discourse can be stated as following (Luoma, 2004):

- *It is composed of short phrases and clauses;*
- *May be planned (e.g., a lecture) or unplanned (e.g., a conversation)*
- *Has more generic words as compared to written language*
- *It involves reciprocity;*
- *Shows variation (formal, casual)*

Table: Levels of Formality in Speech

The levels of formality in speech can be characterised as : frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate or informal.		
Explanation	Definition	Style
Wedding vows, sermons, prayers, pledges, religious verses, national anthem	‘Frozen’ languages that never changes, it is fixed and static	Frozen
Business meetings, court-room.	Standard language and fixed vocabulary, more of complex, longer sentences - avoidance of contractions and abbreviations - use of passive voice	Formal
doctor/patient, lawyer/client, employee to employer,	Language to ‘consult’, seek assistance, less formal standard English	Consultative
Loose sentences structure, slangs, vernacular speech	Informal language between friends	Casual
Pet names, terms of endearment, private jokes	Language between people close to each other parents, siblings spouse, and friends, Short words and sentences	Intimate/informal

Activity 1

1. *In what ways is a particular kind of talk likely to change as we change the roles of the participants?*
2. *How is a casual conversation between strangers different from one between friends?*

3. *Does a doctor talk to a patient as a host would talk to a guest?*
4. *What topics occur in conversations between waiter and guests in a hotel? Store owner and customers? Fruit sellers and buyers?*
5. *What connection is there between the kind of talk and the setting in which it occurs?*
6. *How does a lecture differ from a seminar?*
7. *Would you tell the same kinds of jokes in a church and at a cocktail party?*

6.6 DEVELOPING SPEAKING ABILITIES IN ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Development of oral language across the curriculum is not focussed on teaching children to speak but improving their ability to communicate more effectively.

We have discussed earlier that the use of language differs in different contexts in school, students use the language of problem solving in Mathematics, the language of inquiry in Science, and the language of narratives in History, and so on. The language of a discipline does not only mean a list of vocabulary or specialised words with specific meanings but the competence (oral and written) to communicate participate in the discourse practices of the discipline.

Goals of Speaking Across the Curriculum

- Students use (conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively spoken, written, and visual language with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students use language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation) to create, critique, and discuss different texts.
- Students gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources to generate ideas and questions, and by posing problems to communicate their work teacher purpose and audience.
- Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language across cultures and geographic regions.

Speaking activities in the classroom can be organised with the following considerations:

- Use a wide range of core speaking skills
- Develop fluency in expression of meaning
- Use grammar flexibly to produce a wide range of utterances that can express meaning precisely

- Use appropriate vocabulary and accurate language forms relevant to their speaking needs
- Understand and use social and linguistic conventions of speech for various contexts
- Employ appropriate oral communication and discourse strategies
- Manage and self-regulate their own speaking development

(Goh & Burns 2012:151–152)

Using appropriate vocabulary in science

Learning science terms through conceptual networks draws on the interrelatedness of word knowledge to facilitate student learning (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Some researchers indicate morphology and word origins, especially Latin and Greek, are keys to understanding Science vocabulary (Baumann & Graves, 2010; Shanahan, 2009). Shanahan (2009) reports that subfields of Science differ from one another in how knowledge is presented. Specialized vocabulary can cause difficulties for novice readers. For example, biology texts focus more on classification systems indicated through Latin and Greek roots for terminology, while Physics and Chemistry texts include more Mathematical notations.

Unlike Science vocabulary, unfamiliar Social Studies terms may only be encountered once or twice in a text (Hynd, Holschuh, & Hubard, 2004). This makes it harder for students to pick up the meaning of vocabulary incidentally through repeated exposures and multiple sets of context clues.

Source: Ann Marie Hillman. *Disciplinary Literacy: a Case Study on How Secondary Teachers Engage Students in Disciplinary Discourses* University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Activity 2

1. *What are the functions of speaking? Give examples from everyday life to illustrate your answer.*
2. *Give examples of situations which combine the different functions of speech.*

6.7 ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING

In the light of the problems faced by learners mentioned above, what can be done by the teacher to ensure that the learners are able to express themselves?

6.7.1 Selecting a Text

Teacher can select different types of texts; picture books, poetry, non-fiction texts, magazine/newspaper articles, advertisements, graphic novels, photo essays,

film clips, zines, blogs and so on. The criteria for selecting a text should be that the text is rich enough to stimulate a discussion or a conversation. The text needs to be sufficiently challenging so that students can struggle to negotiate meanings and wrestle with the concepts presented. It should allow a variety of interpretations and opinions. Books with detailed descriptions and interesting plots are good choices.

Visual texts such as realm, videos, along with key visuals, tables or diagrams can be selected for independent use and/or to help to make the structure of the text explicit. In developing speaking skills, tasks might include sequencing, predicting, information transfer and various types of information gap activities; written outputs might be supported by such speaking and reading activities.

6.7.2 ‘Information-gap’ Tasks

To help students become more articulate — that is, to help them to express themselves appropriately, we have to give them opportunities in the class to share their thoughts and ideas with their peers. The peer speaking activities, however, have to have a real purpose, because, as teachers, our aim is to teach our students to speak spontaneously, and not simply read out passages. In the class, therefore, we can give them academic tasks that involve sharing ideas to list points, giving reasons for their viewpoint on something, describing something, etc. — tasks that will make them focus on the information to be shared rather than on their (inappropriate) language skills. Such tasks are called **information-gap** tasks, and their purpose is to develop fluency and confidence. These strategies help develop students’ academic skills across the curriculum, as they learn to use subject-specific language and express themselves grammatically.

6.7.3 Discussion

Initially, by taking a “hands-on” approach, teachers can model appropriate discussion skills to enable students to consider the ideas presented in a text, share and defend their own ideas and opinions and build on and question ideas and opinions contributed by others. ‘Context-embedded’ teacher talk, questioning and typical classroom exchanges also play a significant role in student learning. Teacher can link new learning to background knowledge and provide ‘Scaffolding’ by speaking more slowly, emphasizing key words and phrases, using simple vocabulary or grammar, building in redundancy through repeating, restating, paraphrasing the use of synonyms, antonyms, defining through exemplification, body language and so on.

Explicit discussion on language -content connections as students encounter vocabulary and grammar patterns in subject specific disciplines is important. The teachers must decide how far to simplify the language without oversimplifying the concepts or content.

‘Science talk’ or oral discourse in Science conveys meaning for particular purposes. This includes definition, explanation, recount/procedure, and argument, and each serves a particular purpose in conveying scientific information:

- *Description: To define something or tell what it is like*
- *Explanation: To tell how or why something works or is as it is*

- *Recount/procedure: To tell about what happened or what someone did*
- *Argument: To persuade that something should be done*

The pattern of word choice in each of the above, that is, describing something, explaining, etc., is identifiable and helps in deciphering its intent and meaning. Science teachers can construct oral tasks with the purpose of involving learners to ‘describe,’ ‘explain,’ ‘argue’ their thinking and ideas and enabling them to identify the difference between each of these.

6.7.4 ‘Gentle Inquisition’*

One talk pattern, which is used by many teachers, is the “gentle inquisition” – an interaction between teacher and student(s) which is built on a series of questions and answers (Eeds & Wells, 1989). The teacher starts a topic and poses question, asks one or more students to respond, and provides evaluative or responsive feedback (“Yes”; “Good idea, but may be you could focus on X a bit”; “Would you agree with that, Suman?”) and then introducing his/her own ideas, interpretations and opinions. In this talk pattern, exchanges are frequently paced between teacher and student(s) as the teacher moves from child to child and question to question. The teacher is in charge of directing the discussion, and determines who will talk and what will be talked about and bringing the group to the understanding of the text (or problem) that he or she has in mind. In this pattern, the teacher retains authority for determining meaning, leaving little “interpretive space” for students (Serafini, 2008)

6.7.5 ‘Grand Conversation’*

For a higher-level comprehension of text and improve students’ attitudes to reading and speaking, a different technique called “grand conversation” (Eeds & Wells, 1989) can be used.. The grand conversation refers to authentic, lively talk about text. The teacher starts the discussion by asking “big” question or interpretive prompt. The class enters into a conversation – the teacher asks fewer questions, mostly in response to what students are saying. Students engage in the conversation by taking turns for speaking and gradually students ta shape the content and direction of the discussion. Decisions regarding who will talk, when and for how long, come about naturally . The teacher participates in the discussion and facilitates the conversation only when required.

The teacher concludes the conversation by summarizing, drawing conclusions, or establishing goals for the next conversation or by assisting students to do this.

6.7.6 Structured Argument and Debate

Entails discussing contested issues in order to form opinions about them. Discussions, role playing exercises to formal debate are examples of different deliberative

* Eeds & Wells, (1980)

practices. The teacher can organise debates around facts, values, definitions, policies, interpretations, theories, etc. in any subject area.

Rubric for Debate

Grade:	1	2	3	4	Criteria
	Few or no real arguments given, or all arguments given had significant problems	Some decent arguments, but some significant problems	Many good arguments given, with only minor problems	Very strong and persuasive arguments given throughout	1. Use of Argument: Reasons are given to support the resolution
	Poor cross-exam or rebuttals, failure to point out problems in position or failure to defend itself against attack.	Decent cross-exam and/or rebuttals, but with some significant problems	Good cross-exam and rebuttals, with only minor slip-ups	Excellent cross-exam and defense against objections	2. Use of cross-examination and rebuttal: Identification of weakness in arguments and ability to defend itself against attack.
	Very few style features were used, none of them convincingly	Few style features were used convincingly	Most style features were used convincingly	All style features were used convincingly	3. Presentation Style: Tone of voice, clarity of expression, precision of arguments all contribute to keeping audience's attention and persuading them of the team's case.
TOTAL SCORE:					

Source: <http://www.csun.edu>

6.7.7 Say It Right!

Class discussion offers opportunities to students to test their opinions and ideas in the larger group of their peers. As a teacher, it is important to ensure a cordial and pleasant environment in the classroom so that all students feel comfortable and confident to participate. It is also important to generate as many viewpoints or opinions as possible around issues so that students are able to form a perspective with regard to the topics under discussion.

Procedure

1. Choose a passage (six to ten lines) from a text or selected reading for the oral presentation and prepare copies of the material for the class.
2. Announce that the class will be giving oral presentations of the selected text and distribute the copies.
3. Review the text.
4. Distribute the Say It Right! Evaluation Form and go over the criteria for assessment.
5. Give students 10 minutes to prepare their readings. Students may want to: consult you or a dictionary for proper pronunciation
 - mark the passage with a pencil to indicate pauses or words to emphasize
 - practice with another student
 - practice some more!
6. Have students read aloud their passages and discuss the presentations.

What?	Almost	Got it!	
1	2	3	Pronunciation (Saying the words right)
1	2	3	Enunciation (Saying the words clearly)
1	2	3	Inflection (Emphasizing the right words)
1	2	3	Rate (Pausing in the right places)

Source: <http://www.csun.edu/~ds56723/phil338/hout338rubric.html>

‘Saying it right’ in Science classroom!

- *Oral tasks focusing on certain type of sentence constructions can be used in the classroom. One type is the “Comparatives.” These types of sentences can include overt comparatives such as “smaller than” or “fewer than,” .*
- *A second family of grammatical constructions is the “Conditionals.” These are sentences that indicate situations or conditions necessary for a second part of the statement to be true; for example, “Had the plant survived the lack of sunlight and nutrition, it would have been 6 feet long.” According to O’Connor, “ These type of constructions signal logic and purpose, and the relationships between concepts and ideas.*
- *Similarly, Lee explains that in a classroom centered on scientific investigations, language should be precise, explicit, and complex. Just as with text, science talk involves using particular words with particular meanings beyond those used in everyday speech.*
- *Science talk involves detailed reporting and/or explaining one’s thinking about ideas and actions in clear terms. This oral discourse is important to the sense-making process in science*

Activity 3

1. *What considerations would you keep in mind while developing the speaking abilities of your learners in different subjects?*
2. *How would you make your learners more confident about participating in speaking tasks?*
3. *Design some oral tasks for developing the vocabulary of learners in Social Science and Science.*

6.7.8 Some More Activities*

Practising narrative skills: from storytelling in literature to historical events

An important academic activity that students are regularly made to do in class is retelling a passage from a lesson in their own words, or relating an event described in the textbook to their own experience. We expect students to be able to explain some part of the lesson because we want to check how much they have understood. To be able to retell a story or an event is part of the ability to *narrate*; that is, to talk about something logically, in chronological order and in an interesting manner.

This activity should help you familiarise your students with the skills required to present a narrative in an interesting manner. These skills include the ability to rephrase words and ideas and present them in chronological order, and to use discourse markers of listing, introducing and summarising. This activity is meant to improve students' spoken English for academic purposes, so it will also involve the ability to read and understand a passage.

Students could be put in pairs and the discussion should include the following:

- The information is clearly presented.
- The text is rephrased; that is, the narrative is not simply a repetition of the author's words.
- The appropriate vocabulary is used to retell the story as well as comment on it (e.g., *short and touching story...*, *inspired by her uncle... there was a big hurdle...*, etc.).
- There is a clear beginning, middle and end.
- The information is presented chronologically.
- The information is compressed so that only the important parts are narrated.
- Discourse markers are used to make the listener easily understand the passage (e.g., *but, also, even, however, interestingly*).

Once the students are familiar with the features of a good narrative, separate them into pairs and give them another passage. Have each pair prepare a narrative on it. This could be immensely useful in a history class.

Defining with illustrations

While studying subjects other than English, such as Science, Environmental Studies or Geography, students regularly need to learn and define concepts using subject specific vocabulary and illustrations. This academic exercise is relevant not just at the school level, but also at higher levels. Giving a definition requires conceptual knowledge; that is, knowledge of the topic, familiarity with the words and phrases related to the topic and grammatical accuracy. Students frequently complain of understanding concepts but being unable to explain or express themselves in an

articulate manner, especially in front of their teacher and classmates. This might be because they do not have practice in organising the information in their mind before speaking, or are unable to connect ideas logically.

This activity will give your students opportunities to practise giving appropriate definitions. It should make them aware of the importance of understanding how to present an idea logically and to illustrate it with examples.

To prepare them for the activity, show them some definitions for a discussion on what constitutes a good definition. You could choose some concepts from their course books, in which the students have to match a set of concepts in Column 1 with the definitions given in Column 2. After they have completed the exercise, discuss how good definitions contain the following information:

1. the category to which the object/concept belongs.
2. the use made of it.
3. other relevant information.
4. examples and illustrations of the object/concept.

Selecting any one of the given definitions, illustrate each point above. For example, in the definition of **tissue**, the **category** mentioned is *A group of similar or dissimilar cells*; the **use** is *to perform a particular function*; related information is *which are held together by some intercellular substance produced by the cells themselves*; and the **examples** given are *parenchyma, collenchyma and chlorenchyma*. Now ask the students to categorise the other definitions in a similar manner. This will familiarise them with the language of definitions.

For practice in giving a definition, put up one or two terms on the board and ask the class to define them appropriately. Prompt them to remember the points mentioned above. After some practice, put the students in small groups and ask them to define the terms given in the worksheet.

Allow them to refer to a dictionary or their textbooks, but tell them to remember that their definitions should contain the points mentioned above. For more practice, select a few students randomly and give them a few object/concept names to define with illustrations. Ask the class to grade each definition, and later have a discussion on which definitions were good and why. Conclude the activity by telling the students to practise using the skill of appropriate definition when they learn other subjects.

Matching definitions (worksheet)	
In the table below, Column 1 contains the names of some concepts that you study in various subjects, and Column 2 lists their definitions. Discuss these with a partner and match the concepts to their definitions.	
Column 1: Definitions	Column 2: Terms
A process in which original constituents undergo change to form a new substance or compound with entirely changed properties. For example, when coal is burnt, carbon combines with oxygen to produce carbon dioxide.	Fixed capital
An instrument used in the laboratory to observe living or dead things that cannot otherwise be seen by the naked eye or a hand-held lens.	Military coup

A group of similar or dissimilar cells that are held together by some intercellular substance produced by the cells themselves, and that perform a particular function. For example, parenchyma, collenchymas, chlorenchyma.	Microscope
Tools, machines and buildings that can be used in the production of goods over a period of years. For example, generators, warehouses, computers, shredding machines.	Pastoralism
Income below 1 (one) dollar a day; and showing the proportion of people living under poverty in different countries.	Shifting cultivation
A form of government in which the rulers consist of elected representatives of citizens; that is, they are elected by the citizens themselves.	Tissue
A situation in which the armed forces of a country (especially the Army) forcibly take over the administration of a country, usually by arresting the leaders of government.	Chemical change
A system of farming in which parts of a forest are cut and burnt in rotation to plant crops, so that seeds can be in the ashes after the first monsoon rain. For example, <i>chitemene</i> or <i>tavy</i> .	International poverty line
A way of life in which communities rear cattle, camels, goats, sheep and other animals for a living, and sell milk, meat, animal skin, meat and other products obtained from animals for their livelihood.	Democracy

Source : <http://orelt.col.org/modules/unit5speaking>.

Suggestions for Teachers

- Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak by engaging students in collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and sharing knowledge.
- Each student should be involved in every speaking activity.
- Reduce your speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time.
- Ask questions to prompt students to speak more such as “What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?”
- Do not correct students’ pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking.
- Provide the discipline specific vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.

6.8 LET US SUM UP

As language pervades all areas of learning, it is essential for teachers to encourage language skills like reading, writing and speaking in all areas of the curriculum. Development of oral language across the curriculum is not focussed on teaching children to speak but improving their ability to communicate more effectively.

Speech is not merely about speaking-simple and basic communication, but it involves thinking, knowledge and skills. Oral language is an interactive process of speaking and listening for a variety of purposes: to communicate, to learn and to socialize.

The unit explored the different ways in which students can communicate effectively for academic purposes, and how they can use such skills across the curriculum. The unit familiarises the teachers with the appropriate language of narratives, descriptions, reports and definitions. The activities described here are relevant to other subjects and could be used by the subject-teachers.

These skills include the ability to use subject-specific words and sentences, narrate points and ideas logically and interestingly, use discourse markers effectively to help the listener navigate through the discourse (for example, story, definition, explanation, argument). We have also discussed the different types of learners and learning contexts. Teachers, who are aware of the language demands of their subjects, take care of '*content-obligatory*' and '*content-compatible*' teaching of vocabulary and grammar. A variety of language tasks across the curriculum help learners to become better language learners. Small group work to exchange ideas or to bring out some very pertinent points is as important a tool of learning as teacher-led discussions.

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