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Chapter **One**

What is speaking?

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

Goals

✔ **provide** your own definitions of *speaking* and *pronunciation*.

✔ **describe** different approaches to teaching speaking.

✔ **understand** the relationship between the various components of spoken language.

✔ **explain** what *speech acts* are and give examples of various speech acts.

✔ **describe** how speaking is taught in three prominent language teaching methods used over the past several years.

✔ **identify** communication strategies that language learners can use when they encounter difficulties.

✔ **distinguish** between direct, indirect, and semi-direct tests of speaking.

✔ **explain** the differences between objective, analytic, and holistic scoring of speaking tests.

✔ **appreciate** the important role of pronunciation in helping learners increase their comprehensibility when they speak English.

1. Introduction

This chapter will explore the fundamental concept of speaking and its components, including the important subtopic of pronunciation. In the first part of the chapter, we will answer the question, "What is speaking?" Next, in Section 3, we will examine different approaches to teaching speaking. Then, in Section 4, we will study a model of the various components that must come into play when we are speaking in a new language. In the process we will review some differences between spoken and written language. In Section 5, we will look at some important issues about teaching speaking, including a quick overview of the main teaching methods that have been used over the years. Finally, we will consider the vexing question of how learners' speaking skills should be assessed.

2. What is speaking?

In this section, we will consider what we mean by "speaking." In language teaching we often talk about the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in terms of their direction and modality. Language generated by the learners (in either speech or writing) is considered **productive**, and language directed at the learners (in reading or listening) is known as **receptive** language (Savignon, 1991). **Modality** refers to the medium of the language (whether it is aural/oral or written). Thus, **speaking** is the productive, oral skill.

Speaking consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. (**Utterances** are simply things people say.) Speaking is "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (Florez, 1999, p. 1). It is "often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving" (ibid., p. 1), but it is not completely unpredictable.

Speaking is such a fundamental human behavior that we don't stop to analyze it unless there is something noticeable about it. For example, if a person is experiencing a speech pathology (if a person stutters or if his speech is impaired due to a stroke or a head injury), we may realize that the speech is atypical. Likewise, if someone is a particularly effective or lucid speaker, we may notice that her speech is atypical in a noteworthy sense. What we fail to notice on a daily basis, however, are the myriad physical, mental, psychological, social, and cultural factors that must all work together when we speak. It is even a more impressive feat when we hear someone speaking effectively in a second or foreign language.

3. Approaches to speaking

For many years, language teaching was seen as helping learners develop **linguistic competence**—that is, helping students master the sounds, words, and grammar patterns of English. The idea was that by studying the bits and pieces of a language, students could eventually put them all together and communicate.

In the 1970s and 1980s, however, our understanding of language learning experienced a significant shift in focus. This shift was influenced by international developments in linguistics, curricula, and pedagogy, as well as by sociolinguistic research (primarily in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.). In addition, the numbers of refugees and immigrants resettling in English-speaking countries made linguists and language teachers realize that developing linguistic competence alone was not enough to be able to speak English well and get along in society.

In the mid-1970s the notion of linguistic competence came to be viewed as a component of the broader idea of **communicative competence** "the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge" (Savignon, 1991, p. 264). Being communicatively competent "requires an understanding of sociocultural contexts of language use" (ibid., p. 267).

There are several important models of communicative competence (see especially Bachman, 1990, and Canale and Swain, 1980), all of which include some form of **sociolinguistic competence**, or the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. Sociolinguistic competence involves **register** (degrees of formality and informality), appropriate word choice, **style shifting**, and politeness strategies.

Another important element of communicative competence is **strategic competence**. In terms of speaking, this is the learner's ability to use language strategies to compensate for gaps in skills and knowledge. For example, if you don't know a word you need to express your meaning, what strategies can you use to make your point?

A fourth component of communicative competence is **discourse competence**, "how sentence elements are tied together," which includes both cohesion and coherence (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 104). **Cohesion** is "the grammatical and/or lexical relationship between the different parts of a sentence" (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985, p. 45). Cohesion includes reference, repetition, synonyms, and so on. In contrast, **coherence** involves "how texts are constructed" (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 104; see also Bachman, 1990, pp. 84–102, and Douglas, 2000, pp. 25—29). Let's consider the following conversation as an illustration.

> *Jeff:* Hey, Lindsey, how's it going?
>
> *Lindsey:* Wow! I just had a test and it was really hard!
>
> *Jeff:* Oh, what was the test about?
>
> *Lindsey:* Statistics! All those formulas are so confusing!
>
> *Jeff:* Yeah, I don't like that stuff either.

In this brief conversation, there are several examples of cohesion. In Lindsey's first turn the pronoun *it* refers to the test she has just mentioned. In Jeff's second turn, he repeats the word *test.* In Lindsey's second turn, the words *statistics* and *formulas* are synonymous. Finally, in Jeff's last turn "that stuff" refers to *statistics* and *formulas.* All these devices make the conversation cohesive.

Coherence also has to do with "the relationships which link the meanings of utterance in a discourse" (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985, p. 45). However, coherence often involves the speakers' background knowledge. For example, the following exchange is coherent because the two people know that the two events are scheduled at the same time:

Extract 2

> *Person 1:* Going to the review session?
>
> *Person 2:* Rugby practice.

Both cohesion and coherence contribute to discourse competence. For people speaking in a new language, the specific linguistic elements that make speech cohesive can be especially demanding to produce during the pressure of a conversation.

Reflection

Think about someone you know who is truly bilingual or multilingual who can function effectively and apparently effortlessly in two or more languages. Can you think of examples of the four components of communicative competence in that person's speech?

I have a friend named Lillian, who is a native speaker of Cantonese. She is a fully-competent bilingual who regularly demonstrates all four components of communicative competence when she speaks. In terms of her linguistic competence, she has very good pronunciation, a wide vocabulary, and

excellent mastery of English grammar rules. She also can appropriately engage in many different types of speaking, from a casual conversation to giving a formal conference presentation to a large audience of strangers. Her speech displays both cohesion and coherence, so she demonstrates her discourse competence as well. If she needs to use an unfamiliar word or structure, she uses her strategic competence and finds a way to convey her meaning.

These four components of communicative competence have several practical implications for EFL and ESL teachers. Since communicative competence is a multifaceted construct, it is important for teachers to understand the complexities learners face when they are speaking English.

One of those complexities is balancing fluency and accuracy. A proficient speaker is both fluent and accurate. **Accuracy** in this context refers to the ability to speak properly—that is, selecting the correct words and expressions to convey the intended meaning, as well as using the grammatical patterns of English. **Fluency**, on the other hand, is the capacity to speak fluidly, confidently, and at a rate consistent with the norms of the relevant native speech community. (We will revisit the concepts of fluency and accuracy in Chapter 4.)

An important concept for teachers to understand is that while students are at the beginning and intermediate levels of language learning, that is, while they are still developing their proficiency, fluency and accuracy often work against each other. Before grammar rules become automatic and while learners are still acquiring essential vocabulary items, applying the rules and searching one's memory for the right words can be laborious mental processes, which slow the learners' speech and make them seem dysfluent. Likewise, language learners can sometimes speak quickly, without hesitating to apply the rules they have learned, but doing so may decrease their accuracy (that is, the number of errors they make in speaking may increase).

Reflection

Think about a time when you yourself were studying a new language. What was more important to you—fluency or accuracy? Did you consistently try to combine the two? Or did your focus at the time depend on the context in which you were speaking?

An important concept to keep in mind is that people use language in recognizable ways to get things done. There are many, many **"speech acts"** (or **functions**) in any language, and it is important that students learn the appropriate ways to accomplish their goals when they are speaking.

Some important speech acts in English include thanking, requesting information, apologizing, refusing, warning, complimenting, directing, complaining, and so on.

One interesting issue in teaching and learning speech acts is that there is no one-to-one form/meaning correspondence. The same utterance can be used to mean more than one thing, and this duality can be the source of some confusion. For example, many years ago, my husband and I were packing our gear for a camping trip. He asked me, "Did you pack the silverware?" and I said no. That evening, after driving for several hours, we set up camp, and cooked a meal. When we sat down to eat, we discovered that we had no eating utensils. I had interpreted his question as a request for information, and assumed that he would pack the silverware. He had intended his question as a directive, reminding me that I should pack the silverware.

Likewise, there are many ways to accomplish the same goal in speaking English—in other words, different forms can be used to accomplish the same speech act. Think about the following utterances:

1. It's cold in here!
2. Aren't you forgetting something?
3. Hey, how about closing the door?

All of these utterances are directives used to try to get someone to close a door to a room. These sentences would be spoken by someone inside the room to the person who had left the door open. Understanding these utterances and acting on them appropriately, however, depends on the context in which they are spoken. The context apparently involves two (or more) people, a room with an open door, and a cold day. But would a low-level employee make any of these statements to a company president? Almost certainly not. These directives are all very casual—in fact, quite informal—and would probably only be said by social equals who know one another quite well (or by someone who has no concern for politeness constraints, or who has different expectations about politeness).

There are many ways of making spoken utterances more or less polite. The various linguistic means of softening a message are known as **mitigation**. This "softening" can be accomplished through pronunciation of words, phrases, clauses, or entire utterances.

As you can see, these utterances get increasingly longer as words are added. The basic proposition remains the same: the speaker wants the listener to pack the silverware. What changes then?

In the first utterance, we have just the bare imperative, or command. Syntactically it consists of the verb *(pack)* and the direct object *(the silverware)*. In the second utterance, only the politeness marker, *please*, has been added. In the third, the basic proposition (the speaker wants the hearer to pack the silverware) and the politeness markers are embedded in a question form: "Would you…?" Finally, in the fourth utterance, that entire question has been embedded in the additional statement, "I'd appreciate it if…." Each of these changes has the effect of softening, or mitigating, the directness of the request.

This exercise reminds us that the same basic proposition can be conveyed in many different ways. As people learn to speak English, they must develop their repertoires for expressing themselves appropriately in various situations.

4. Speaking in action

Figure 1 on page 8, which I think of as van Lier's (1995) pyramid, is a "picture" of the components of spoken language. The left column lists four traditional areas of linguistic analysis (which teachers must understand), and the center column labels the units of spoken language (which learners must master). These units are often referred to as the "levels" of language. They must all work together, simultaneously, when learners speak English. We will use this pyramid as a tool for exploring the components of spoken English that we, as teachers, must understand in order to help our learners.

Study the labels in Figure 1 and circle any that are unfamiliar to you. Try to guess at their meanings and see if your predictions are supported in the paragraphs explaining the figure.
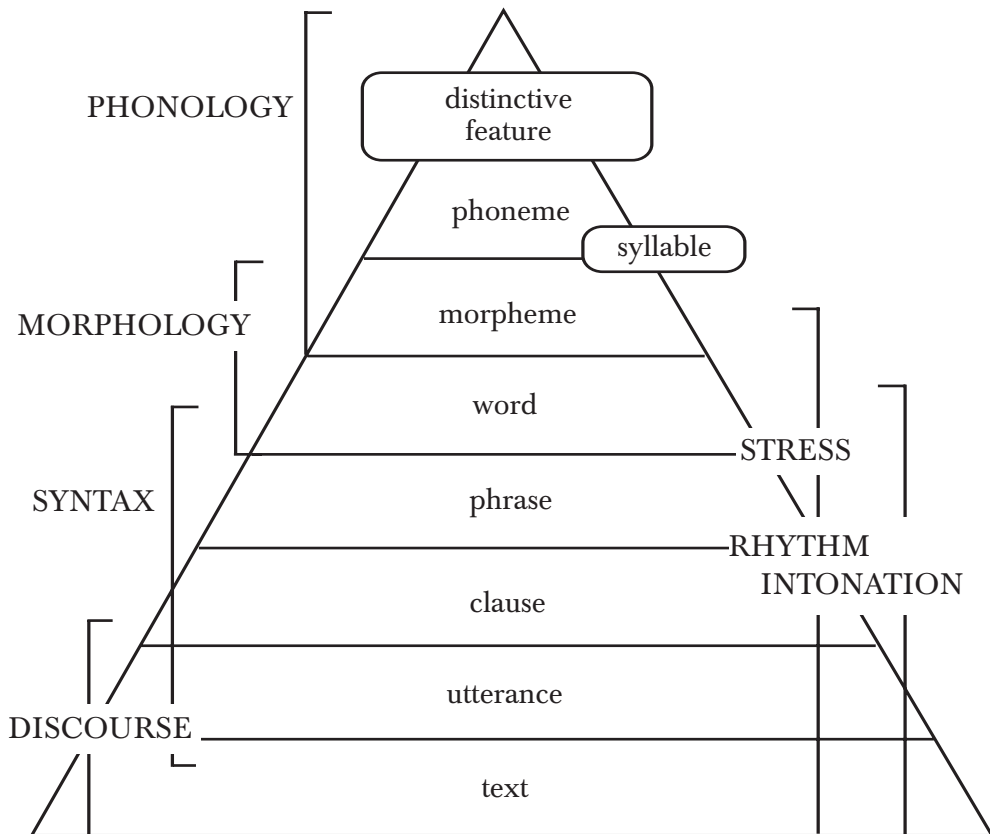
Figure 1 Units of Language (van Lier, 1995, p. 15)

Let's start with the pyramid's base. Although the word **text** is often associated in the layperson's mind with written language, texts can be either written or spoken. Here the term refers to stretches of language of an undetermined length. Spoken texts consist of utterances: things that people say. In speech, an utterance is not always a complete grammatical sentence, as sentences are used in writing. For example, if two close friends are talking about what to eat, we might hear a conversation that goes something like this:

None of these utterances is a complete sentence, but the conversation is typical of casual spoken language and it makes sense to us. It is a text consisting of utterances that are not sentences. (You can use such a conversation as speaking practice in class: have students see how long they can sustain a conversation that consists of only one-word utterances.)

Reflection

Listen to people speaking English on a bus or a train, in a restaurant, in a store—in any public place where people are talking normally and where it is not inappropriate for you to listen to them. Do they speak in complete grammatical sentences, or do they use utterances that are not complete sentences?

To continue our exploration of the next level in van Lier's pyramid (page 8), a **clause** consists of at least two words (usually more) that contain a grammatical subject and a verb marked for tense (that is, a verb that is not in its infinitive or "bare" form). **Independent clauses** are full sentences that can stand alone in written discourse ("Anna was cooking dinner"), while **dependent clauses** cannot ("While Anna was cooking dinner..."). A dependent clause must be attached to an independent clause to be complete. ("While Anna was cooking dinner, the telephone rang.")

The next level, a **phrase**, consists of two or more words that function as a unit, but unlike clauses, they do not have a subject or a verb marked for tense. There are several kinds of phrases, including prepositional phrases ("in the hospital" or "after school"), noun phrases ("a big black cat" or "the

five-story building"), and infinitive phrases ("to drive" or "to move up"). Clauses and phrases are quite commonly used as utterances when we are speaking, but they do not typically appear alone in formal writing (unless the author is representing speech). Thus, both clauses and phrases can be utterances.

As we saw in the conversation about what to eat, individual words, the next level in the pyramid, can also function as utterances. Words are called **free morphemes**. These are units of language that can stand on their own and convey meaning *(baby, application, seldom)*. In contrast, **bound morphemes** do not appear alone. They are always connected to words. Both prefixes, such as *inter-* or *pre-,* and suffixes, such as —*ing* or —*s* or *-ed* are bound morphemes. You may have noticed that during the pressure of speaking, it can be difficult for English learners to use bound morphemes—especially suffixes—consistently. This problem is particularly true if the learner's native language doesn't use these kinds of morphemes as markers that convey grammatical meaning (for instance Cantonese or Mandarin).

The top most levels of the pyramid are very important in speaking—especially in developing intelligible pronunciation. A **phoneme** is a divisible unit of sound that distinguishes meaning. In writing about phonemes, we usually set them off with slashes to distinguish phonemes from letters. Phonemes can be either consonants (like /p/ or /b/ in the words *pear* and *bear*) or vowels (like /I/ and /æ/ in *hit* and *hat*). The sounds that function as phonemes differ somewhat from one language to another. Some of the sounds that are common in English are unusual in other languages, and can be quite challenging for learners to pronounce. For example, the two English "th" sounds (as in *think* and *the*) are not very common in the phonemic inventory of the world's languages, but they are pervasive in English. Students may replace or approximate these "th" sounds with /s/ or /z/ or /d/ or /t/ instead. This kind of substitution is part of what creates a foreign accent.

Figure 1 is helpful but in real conversations, of course, these divisions of discourse are not as neat as the diagram makes them seem. Consider the command, "Stop!" This is a single word (in fact, a single free morpheme) consisting of four segmental phonemes. It serves as a warning (a particular speech act). It is an utterance, and therefore, a type of spoken text. (It can also be a complete written text, for example on a traffic sign.) So keep in mind that a discourse can consist of texts of any length.

You can see that in the top levels of Figure 1 (page 8), **syllable** overlaps the levels of morphemes and phonemes. This image represents the fact that a syllable can consist of a morpheme or simply one or more phonemes. Many words, such as *stop,* consist of only one syllable.

The syllable structure of a language is either **open** (ending with a vowel) or **closed** (ending with a consonant). Many languages use the open

syllable structure, in which a syllable consists of just a vowel (V), or of a consonant (C) followed by a vowel (V). Spoken English, in contrast, allows both open syllables (C-V or just V) and closed syllables (C-V-C, or simply V-C), as well as consonant clusters, where two or more consonants occur in sequence (as in the words *stretched* or *jumped*). For this reason, learners' spoken English often sounds ungrammatical to native speakers. For instance, learners whose native language is Vietnamese may omit word-final consonants when speaking English. Doing so eliminates sounds that convey important linguistic information, such as plurality, possession, or tense.

Reflection

Think about a second or foreign language you have studied. (Of course, that could be English if it is not your native language. If you have not learned a new language, think about one that you have often heard spoken.) Does that language use primarily open syllables or closed syllables? Or does it permit both open and closed syllables? Think particularly about the last syllable of many common words.

Action

Now test your hypothesis about the syllable structure of this particular language. Ask someone you know well, who is a native speaker or a very advanced speaker of that language, whether the following are syllables that appear (or are even possible) in speaking that language. Circle those that are possible or actual syllables in that language.

-tion	-sa	-stand	-fe
-ding	-po	-tent	-ti
-tles	-ly	-cal	-ku

What patterns do you notice in your data? Does this language permit open syllables, closed syllables, or both?

Consonants and vowels are called **segmental phonemes**, because they can be segmented and moved around. Have you ever produced a "slip of the tongue," because you had switched two phonemes? One typical speaking glitch is called a **spoonerism**, after Dr. Spooner, a famous British orator who taught at Oxford University in the Victorian era. Unfortunately, Dr. Spooner would sometimes switch his segmental phonemes and say things like "the queer old dean" when he meant to say "the dear old queen." He did this so often that the phenomenon came to be called "spoonerisms." The fact that sounds can be switched in this way provides linguistic evidence that phonemes are in fact segmented, independent units.

How do the segmental phonemes relate to the syllable structure of English? Sometimes a spoken syllable is just one phoneme (/o/ in *okay*). But syllables are also made up of combined sounds (the second syllable of *okay*), and of both free and bound morphemes. For instance, the free morpheme *hit* consists of three phonemes but only one syllable. The dictionary shows that the word *disheartened* is pronounced as /dis_hár-tnd/. But if we analyze it further, we find that it has three syllables, four morphemes (*dis* + *heart* + *en* + *ed*), and nine phonemes (/d/ /I/ /s/ /h/ /a/ /r/ /t/ /n/ /d/). To add to the difficulty, English has what is called a "low phoneme-grapheme correspondence." (A **grapheme** is a written unit of language.) In other words, the way English is written doesn't always match the way words are pronounced in modern English. The last two E's of *disheartened,* for instance, are not spoken aloud as we say the word. If they were, *disheartened* would have four syllables.

The **distinctive feature** is an even smaller unit of spoken language. This concept is extremely important in teaching pronunciation. It relates to how and where in the mouth a sound is produced. These minute contrasts contribute to learners' accents. For example, the distinctive feature that makes /b/ and /p/ separate phonemes in English is **voicing**. When /b/ is pronounced the vocal cords are vibrating, but when /p/ is pronounced, they are not. For learners whose language does not have this contrast (Arabic, for example), failure to master this distinction can lead to misunderstandings. (One of my Egyptian students once told me that he had had "green bee soup" for lunch!)

Sometimes we can see evidence of the distinctive features of a learner's first language in his writing. One of my advanced writing students, a native speaker of Chinese, was writing a composition about a beautiful photograph. He wrote, "The scene is so lovely it reaches out and craps your eyes." This student was not trying to be offensive. He was unknowingly processing English spelling through the sound system of his native language. The /g/, /b/ and /z/ in the word *grabs* /græbz/ had all been changed from voiced segmental phonemes to their voiceless counterparts as he wrote.

Reflection

Think about learners you have taught, or about the students you hope to teach in the future (for instance, speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Thai, or Russian). What are the typical features you associate with their accents as they are speaking English? What are the characteristics of their spoken English that allow you to recognize it as being produced by a Spanish speaker, or a Chinese speaker, or someone whose first language is Thai or Russian?

The three other labels in Figure 1 (page 8)—stress, rhythm, and intonation—represent some **suprasegmental phonemes**. The word *suprasegmental* is used because these phonemes (including pitch and stress) carry meaning differences "above" the segmental phonemes when we speak. For instance, the sentence "I am leaving now" can convey at least four different meanings, depending on where the stress is placed. The differences are related to the context where the utterances occur. Consider these interpretations:

I am leaving now. (You may be staying here, but I choose to go.)
I *am* leaving now. (You may assert that I'm staying, but I insist that I am going.)
I am *leaving* now. (I insist that I am going, rather than staying.)
I am leaving *now.* (I am not waiting any longer.)

Action

Read the four sentences above to two or three friends who are native or proficient speakers of English. First, ask your friends to listen as you read all four sentences. (Be sure to stress the words that are printed in boldface.) Next, read one sentence at a time and have your friends explain the meaning differences that they infer from just the changes in the stress on the four different words. Do their explanations match the interpretations given above? (You can do this activity with your students too.)

Intonation is another very important suprasegmental phoneme. **Intonation** is the relative rise and fall of the pitch in an utterance. Intonation helps us recognize questions ("It's ten o'clock" versus "It's ten o'clock?"). Intonation also helps us detect speaker attitudes, such as surprise, sarcasm, or disbelief.

Action

Read the sentence "He's a brain surgeon" aloud to a friend. First, read it simply as a statement of fact. Have your friend repeat this sentence. Next, ask your friend to say this same sentence as if she is surprised. Next, have her say it (using exactly the same words in the same order) as though she doesn't believe the statement—that is, she is incredulous. Finally, have her say, "He's a brain surgeon" very sarcastically—as a way of indicating that a person is not particularly intelligent. How do the intonation contours change as the speaker changes her intended meaning?

The suprasegmental and segmental phonemes are very important in speaking English. First of all, since these phonemes carry meaning, speakers who mispronounce them can be misunderstood. Second, production

problems can convey unintended meanings. Research has shown that second-language speakers can be misunderstood and even receive poor job evaluations because of their misuse of the English suprasegmentals (Gumperz & Tannen, 1979). We will return to this issue in Chapter 4.

When we teach speaking, it is important to remember that spoken and written English differ in many ways (van Lier, 1995). Speech is received auditorially, whereas writing is received visually. As a result, the spoken message is temporary and its reception by the listener is usually immediate. In contrast, written language is permanent, and reception by the learner typically occurs some time after the text was generated (sometimes even centuries later). Meaning in spoken English is conveyed in part through the suprasegmental phonemes (including rhythm, stress, pitch, and intonation), whereas punctuation marks and type fonts convey such information in writing.

Another feature of spoken language is **reduced speech**—the tendency of sounds to blend together, especially in casual conversation. For instance, the words "going to" may sound like "gonna" when we are speaking quickly. Such reductions are not just "sloppy speech" resulting from the speaker's laziness or carelessness. They are actually systematic, rule-governed variants that are natural in spoken English.

Reflection

Consider the following pairs of sentences and utterances. Which member of each pair seems more like casual speech, and which seems more like written language? What are the specific differences between the two items in each pair?

Set 1
a. Hello. What are you doing?
b. Hey, what're yuh doin'?

Set 2
a. I do not know.
b. I dunno.

Set 3
a. Give me a second, would you?
b. Gimme a sec, wouldja?

Most people agree that in the three different pairs of utterances in the Reflection box above, the first member of each pair seems more formal and may be a written version of speech. The second member of each pair seems more like casual speech. What characteristics do you recognize as "speech-like" here (realizing, of course, that these are written renditions of speech)? Ask a classmate or colleague these same questions and compare your ideas.

Reflection

Consider the following pairs of utterances. Which member of each pair seems more like natural, casual speech, and which seems more like written language? What are the specific differences between the two items in each pair?

Set 1
a. I'm going to the store. (Grammatical)
b. I'm gonna the store. (Ungrammatical)

Set 2
a. I'm going to go swimming. (Grammatical)
b. I'm gonna go swimming. (Grammatical)

Set 3
a. Going to the game tonight? (Grammatical)
b. Gonna the game tonight? (Ungrammatical)

Set 4
a. I'm going to go dancing tonight. (Grammatical)
b. I'm gonna go dancing tonight. (Grammatical)

Why are items 1-b and 3-b ungrammatical while items 2-b and 4-b are grammatical (although casual)? (Hint: Look at the two different uses of "to" in the phrase "going to" in these utterances. The key is in what follows the "to" in each case.)

Do you see the pattern? If you carefully consider sentences 2-a and 4-a where *going to* is still pronounced quickly, *going* and *to* blend together to form *gonna*. In contrast, in sentences 1-a and 3-a, *to* is used in the prepositional phrases *to the store* and *to the game*. In these contexts, the /t/ is not reduced. This example illustrates that the sounds system of English sometimes interacts with its grammatical features.

Speaking English (or any other new language) can be particularly difficult, because unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in "real time." In other words, the **interlocutor** (the person we are talking to) is listening and waiting to take his or her own turn to speak right then. "This means that a variety of demands are in place at once: monitoring and understanding the other speaker(s), thinking about one's own contribution, producing its effect, and so on" (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 103). In addition, except in recorded speech, verbal interaction typically involves immediate feedback from one's interlocutor, while feedback to the authors of written texts may be delayed or nonexistent. Finally, because spoken communication occurs in real time, the opportunities for planning and editing output are limited, while in most written communication, the message originator has time for planning, editing, and revision.

5. Teaching speaking

In this section, we look briefly at some different approaches that have been used over the years to teach languages. Although there are many different methods of language teaching, three methods have dominated language teaching in the past sixty years. In this section, we will first briefly review each method, focusing specifically on how speaking is taught.

The Grammar-translation Method

In the **Grammar-translation Method**, students are taught to analyze grammar and to translate (usually in writing) from one language to another. Historically, the main goal of this method has been for students to read the literature of a particular culture. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986, pp. 3—4), the characteristics of the Grammar-translation Method are that (1) it focuses on reading and writing; (2) the vocabulary studied is determined by the reading texts; (3) "the sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice" (ibid., p. 4); (4) the primary emphasis is on accuracy; (5) teaching is deductive (i.e., grammar rules are presented and then practiced through translating); and (6) the medium of instruction is typically the students' native language.

The Grammar-translation Method does not really prepare students to speak English, so it is not entirely appropriate for students who want to improve their speaking skills. In fact, in the Grammar-translation Method, students "developed an intellectual understanding of language structure and maybe the ability to read, but instead of gaining oral fluency they suffered from what could be described as second language mutism" (Hammerly, 1991, p. 1). The method is not consistent with the goals of

increasing English learners' fluency, oral production, or communicative competence. In grammar-translation lessons, speaking consists largely of reading translations aloud or doing grammar exercises orally. There are few opportunities for expressing original thoughts or personal needs and feelings in English.

The Direct Method and Audiolingualism

Unlike the Grammar-translation Method's emphasis on written text, the **Direct Method** focused on "everyday vocabulary and sentences" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 9), and lessons were conducted entirely in the **target language**—the language the students are trying to learn. The Direct Method dominated English language instruction in the United States for many years.

The Direct Method emphasized speaking in that "new teaching points were introduced orally" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 10), rather than in writing. Also, lessons emphasized speaking and listening, which were practiced "in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 10). Many people became familiar with this approach since it was used by the Berlitz language schools.

The Direct Method strongly influenced the development of the **Audiolingual Method**. In audiolingualism, speaking is taught by having students repeat sentences and recite memorized dialogues from the textbook. Repetition drills—a hallmark of the Audiolingual Method—are designed to familiarize students with the sounds and structural patterns of the language. Lessons followed the sequence of presentation, practice, and production (see Nunan, 2003). The assumption underpinning the Audiolingual Method is that students learn to speak by practicing grammatical structures until producing those structures has become automatic. When this happens, it is hoped that the learners will be able to carry on conversations. As a result, "teaching oral language was thought to require no more than engineering the repeated oral production of structures…concentrating on the development of grammatical and phonological accuracy combined with fluency" (Bygate, 2001, p. 15).

The behaviorist notion of good habit formation is the theory behind the Audiolingual Method. This theory suggests that for learners to form good habits, language lessons must involve frequent repetition and correction. Teachers treat spoken errors quickly, in hopes of preventing students from forming bad habits. If errors are left untreated, it is thought, both the speaker and the other students in class might internalize those erroneous forms. In audiolingual lessons, intense repetition and practice are used to establish good speaking habits to the point that they are fluent and automatic, so the learners don't have to stop and think about how to form an utterance while they are speaking.

The language laboratory is the main technological component of the Audiolingual Method. Students are expected to spend time in the lab, listening to audiotapes of native speakers talking in scripted, rehearsed dialogues, which embody the structures and vocabulary items the learners are studying in class. The taped speech samples students hear in the lab are carefully articulated and highly sanitized. They are not usually realistic samples of the English learners would hear on the street. Nor are they necessarily good models of how learners themselves should try to speak to sound natural.

In addition, when learners do speak in the lab, it is often to repeat after the tape-recorded voice, with little or no opportunity for constructing their ideas in English or expressing their own intended meaning. The Audiolingual Method stressed oral skills but "speech production was tightly controlled in order to reinforce correct habit formation of linguistic rules" (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 103). This sort of rigidly controlled practice does not necessarily prepare learners for the spontaneous, fluid interaction that occurs outside the English classroom.

Audiolingualism eventually decreased in popularity because "the results obtained from classroom practice were disappointing" in several ways (Ellis, 1990, p. 29). Many learners thought the pattern practice and audiolingual drills were boring and lost interest in language learning. Students, perhaps especially adult learners, often felt hampered because the method down-played the explicit teaching of grammar rules. In addition, memorizing patterns "did not lead to fluent and effective communication in real-life situations" (ibid., p. 30).

Communicative Language Teaching

During the 1970s and 1980s, language acquisition research (and dissatisfaction with the Audiolingual Method) made teachers, materials developers, and curriculum designers reconsider some long-standing beliefs about how people learn languages. Apparently people don't learn the pieces of the language and then put them together to make conversations. Instead, infants acquiring their first language and people acquiring second languages seem to learn the components of language through interaction with other people. (For summaries of research on interaction and language learning, see Ellis, 1990; Gass, 1997; and Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991.) This realization has several interesting implications for us as teachers, the most important being that if people learn languages by interacting, then students should interact during English lessons. As a result, **Communicative Language Teaching** arose.

In some language teaching methods, such as **Total Physical Response** (Asher, Kusodo, and de la Torre, 1993), beginning learners undergo a period of listening to English before they begin to speak it. In such methods, the focus is on input-based activities. For instance, in Total Physical Response, learners initially respond physically to spoken com-

mands from the teacher, rather than speaking themselves. (We will learn more about this method in Chapter 2.)

In contrast, Communicative Language Teaching, particularly from the high beginning to more advanced levels, features more interaction-based activities, such as role-plays and **information gap tasks** (activities in which learners must use English to convey information known to them but not to their speaking partners). Pairwork and groupwork are typical organizational features of interaction-based lessons in Communicative Language Teaching.

Reflection

With a partner, make a list of advantages and disadvantages of learning to speak when the teacher is using the Grammar-translation Method, the Audiolingual Method, or Communicative Language Teaching. As a learner, which method do you prefer? As a teacher, which method do you prefer? Why?

You will recall from our discussion of communicative competence (p. 3) that strategic competence was one of its four components. In Communicative Language Teaching, teachers help learners develop their communicative strategies.

Communication strategies

When we speak, and especially perhaps when we speak in a foreign language, there are times when we wish to say something, but we don't have the words or the grammatical structures to say it. Under these circumstances, people often use **communication strategies**—verbal and/or nonverbal procedures for compensating for gaps in speaking competence.

Reflection

Think about a time when you were trying to make yourself understood in your second language or in a foreign language. What did you do, verbally and nonverbally, to convey your ideas when you lacked the vocabulary and/or the grammatical structures you needed? Were you successful at being understood? Why or why not?

In the early 1980s, applied linguists began systematically studying English learners' uses of communication strategies. A number of important strategies were documented, and soon teachers and syllabus designers began to incorporate the teaching of communication strategies in speaking classes. The box below lists several strategies that were first discussed by Tarone (1981):

I. Paraphrase:

A. Approximation: use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e.g., pipe for waterpipe)

B. Word coinage: the learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (e.g., airball for balloon)

C. Circumlocution: the learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure ("She is, uh, smoking something. I don't know what's its name. That's, uh, Persian, and we use in Turkey, a lot of.")

II. Borrowing:

A. Literal translation: the learner translates word for word from the native language (e.g., "He invites him to drink," for "They toast one another.")

B. Language switch: the learner uses the native language term without bothering to translate (e.g., balon for balloon, tirtil for caterpillar)

III. Appeal for assistance: the learner asks for the correct term (e.g., "What is this? What called?")

IV. Mime: the learner uses nonverbal strategies in place of a lexical item or action (e.g., clapping one's hands to illustrate applause)

V. Avoidance:

A. Topic avoidance: the learner simply tries not to talk about concepts for which the target language item or structure is not known

B. Message abandonment: the learner begins to talk about a concept but is unable to continue and stops in mid-utterance

(Adapted from Tarone, 1981, pp. 286—287)