

BEGLA-138 READING & SPEAKING SKILLS



Conversations



Speaking



Comprehension



Pronunciation



Narrative Text



Expository Text



Reading



Writing

Block**3****SPEAKING SKILLS**

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Mere utterance of words and sentences does not make you a good speaker or a good communicator. Effective speaking has a lot of finer aspects that need elaboration and practice. This Block addresses the various kinds of conversational situations you find yourselves in as you go through a normal day in your lives – you engage in informal conversations, formal conversations, telephone conversations with several people as the clock keeps ticking till the point, you retire to your beds exhausted by the end of the day.

Your social impression, your relationships, your professional networks, the success of your efforts and initiatives, your career advancement are intricately linked to what, how and how well you converse, i.e., what, how and how well you speak, making speaking the most significant of all the four language skills.

Moreover, you don't just converse in vacuum, you converse in a certain setting, in the company of certain people. For various reasons, you participate in formal conversations, informal conversations, telephonic conversations and, the most frequent of all today, social media conversations.

While speaking is the tool, the broader process that you need to succeed in, is communication. Correspondingly, this Block also attempts to give you a brief overview of why communication skills are important, what are the issues that make it difficult in certain situations and what sort of measures you can adopt, to overcome them.

We hope you find the Block useful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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UNIT 1 IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Warm Up
- 1.2 What is communication?
- 1.3 Why are communication skills important?
- 1.4 7 Cs of Communication
- 1.5 Influence of barriers in the process of communication
- 1.6 Importance of cross-cultural awareness in communication
- 1.7 Influence of non-verbal cues in the process of communication
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Suggested Readings
- 1.10 Answers

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through the points covered in this Unit and completing the exercises, you will be able to:

- grasp the indubitable importance of good communication skills;
- understand how communicative needs vary according to situations and how your communication skills must address those needs;
- get an idea about some of the barriers that jeopardise the process of communication and thereby how to tackle these challenges;
- realise the importance of cross-cultural understanding while communicating in multilingual and multicultural spaces; and
- appreciate the significance of non-verbal aspects of communication in accordance with Mehrabian's model.

1.1 WARM UP

- What do you understand when someone tells you that A is trying to communicate with B?
- Tabulate some of the reasons which make it necessary for you to communicate with the people around you, like your parents, your friends, your neighbours, etc.

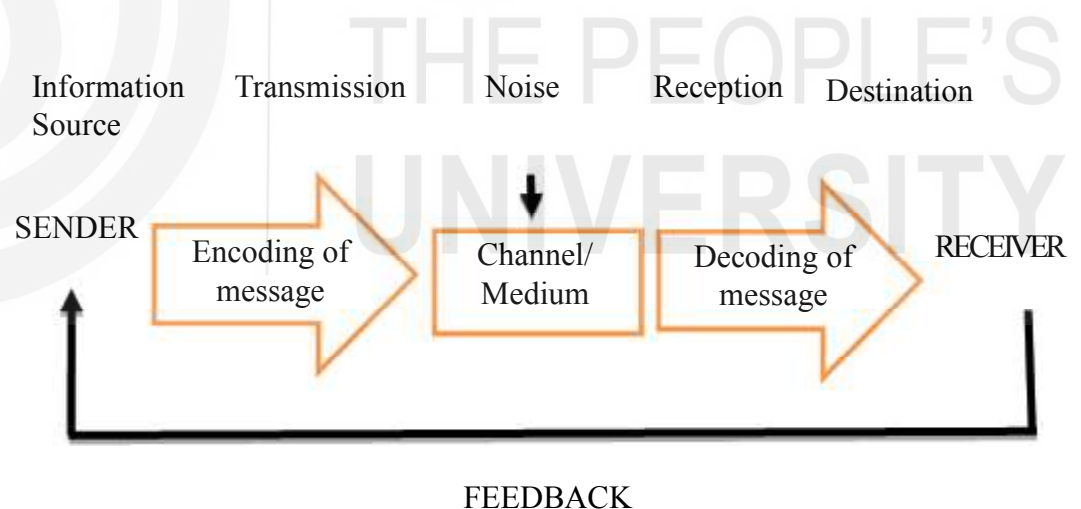
1.2 WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

This is the first Unit of the third Block in your course on Reading & Speaking Skills. We are going to discuss how significant communication skills are in today's world and what are the issues that we need to be aware of, to be successful in the process of communication.

“Communication - the human connection - is the key to personal and career success”, in the words of the legendary Paul J. Meyer.

According to Allen Louis, “Communication is the sum of all the things, a person does when he wants to create an understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding.” As per John Adair, “Communication is essentially the ability of one person to make contact with another and to make himself or herself understood”. Keith Davis describes communication as the “process of passing information and understanding from one person to another. It builds bridges of meaning between people, enabling them to safely cross the rivers of misunderstanding.”

In the process of communication, there is a ‘sender’ (the speaker or the writer) who has a message for an intended ‘receiver’ (the listener or the reader). Now, this message is ‘encoded’ by the sender who puts it in accordance with the rules of the language being used, the capacity of the receiver, the nature of the medium through which the message is being sent and the protocols of the space where the communication is being attempted. When the message reaches the intended ‘receiver’, he/she ‘decodes’ it following the rules of the language used, his/her state of knowledge to interpret the message and the protocols of the space surrounding this exchange while dealing with the problems (termed as ‘noise’), if any, of the medium through which the message is sent. Now, depending on what and how much the ‘receiver’ is able to understand, he/she gives a ‘feedback’ to the ‘sender’. The nature of this ‘feedback’ indicates whether the ‘sender’ has been successful, partially successful or unsuccessful in communicating what he or she wanted to convey to the intended ‘receiver’.



Ineffective modes of communication not only act as barriers to productivity but also hinder our chances of success in personal and professional pursuits. Mastering the nuances of communication in personal and professional spheres has become imperative.

Correspondingly, institutions and universities offer special papers or courses for individuals to improve communication skills with an application and activity-oriented continuous evaluation system in place. There are robust rubrics for the assessment of every activity, designed astutely to check the effectiveness of communication skills in different contexts. For instance, we can gauge someone’s writing prowess through an email writing activity revolving around an expression

of interest against an advertised vacancy. Likewise, speaking proficiency can be tested through a mock interview activity, simulating the possibility of the applicant being called for an interview.

The most important communication skills that you need to focus on, are:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Non-verbal communication
- Writing
- Reading
- Empathizing

1.3 WHY ARE COMMUNICATION SKILLS IMPORTANT?

Human beings, by nature are not sedentary entities, but require social clustering for expression of emotions, exchange of information and to satisfy the need to communicate and bond. From the notion of society, came along the notion of speech community, which Lyons (1970) perceived as a community where all the people use a particular language or dialect. With different stages in the evolution of the human society, there have been consequent revisions in the concept of a speech community. With the advent of the idea of an Information Society (1930 and onwards), virtual speech communities followed a few years later.

Throughout the history of mankind, societies have accorded importance to skilled users of language or skilled communicators, as language perpetuates all domains of human participation, accomplishing the role of a binder. Some people are very skilled at getting what they want through the use of language, and others are not. Skilled language use tends to be respected in many cultures. So, mastering the process of communication attributes special status to people, irrespective of modality.

Improving our communication skills is fundamentally about equipping ourselves as future professionals and as responsible individuals, with the necessary skills and resources to be able to use language powerfully to share as well as receive ideas effectively in personal or professional contexts.

Moving beyond language, the process of communication, the roles of the participants, the barriers and the nature of the message need to be carefully explored while learning about the nuances of effective communication. As future professionals and dutiful citizens, we will always be functioning in objective and outcome-oriented spaces. English, being the lingua franca and the universally-shared common mode of understanding each other, will be the language that we will need to manoeuvre in unique ways to accomplish different things, like,

starting a relationship	negotiating a deal	seeking clarification
expressing concern	persuading an individual	convincing a colleague
congratulating a partner	proposing an initiative	planning a venture
enquiring about an issue	addressing a grievance	motivating a friend
requesting for a favour	solving a conflict	applying for an opportunity

and many others. How efficiently we speak as well as how convincingly we put across our perspectives, will determine how successful we are in the process of communication. While speaking is about how and what we utter, we often forget that there needs to be significant emphasis on the non-verbal aspects of communication as well, for instance, gaze, eye contact, hand gestures, facial expressions, body posture, etc.

The contemporary thrust on improving our communication skills is also intertwined with our employability, whereby the onus is on how humanely translatable is the technical or non-technical training, imparted to resolve, manage and deal with real-world issues in the field. Last but not the least, is our temperament to tackle cross-cultural differences while communicating in a heterogeneous space and to understand, without being judgmental, how people belonging to diverse backgrounds, communicate with an acceptable level of clarity.

We will next look at the 7 Cs of communication. But before we do that, let us answer a few simple questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is the importance of feedback in the process of communication?

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- 2) From your own life experiences, describe five things that you have accomplished by virtue of your communication skills.

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- 3) What are encoding and decoding in the process of communication? Why are they important?

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1.4 7 CS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is beset by a number of impediments. Simple cognizance of these hurdles is not enough, unless the participants stick to certain principles that make communication effective and fruitful. These are the 7 Cs of Communication, namely, Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness, Courtesy, Completeness and Consideration. Here, as we learn about the 7 Cs, we need to move beyond an explanation of the 7 Cs and connect them to their real-world domain-specific implications, firstly, in the Indian context and then, in the global context. Furthermore, we also need practical experience of being in communicative exchanges to be able to implement the 7 Cs as well as strive to improve continuously in our successive interactions.

Principle	Basic Idea	Application
Clarity	The message communicated, needs to be clear, to be effectively understood by the listener (or the recipient), followed by relevant feedback from the listener (or the recipient), that confirms the success of the process.	The important language-related factors that speakers need to be careful about, to preserve clarity, are: i) Vocabulary: To keep it as simple as possible, without assuming anything about the receiver's competence; vocabulary levels vary and in the Indian context, in rich, multicultural spaces, there are individuals differently trained in English belonging to different sociocultural backgrounds. ii) Ambiguity: The message must also be free from both structural as well as semantic ambiguity, to ensure that unintended interpretations are avoided. In the Indian context, with varying levels of proficiency in English and different ways to understand, an ambiguous message can be catastrophic for the communication process. iii) Excessive jargonisation: Heavy jargonisation is ineffective in the Indian context due to stark differences in level of vocabulary as well as preference for non-technical expressions to improve comprehensibility in an uneven arena.
Conciseness	The message communicated must be precise and to-the-point, without any	The points that we need to stress on in the process of communication, to maintain conciseness, are: i) Economy of expression: The use of words should be cross-checked to

	unnecessary details that do not serve the primary purpose and that can only waste the time of the listener (or the recipient).	eliminate redundancies and paraphrased repetitions of the same message. While speaking, fillers and pet phrases need to be taken out of the picture. Moreover, subconsciously inserted expressions of an annoying frequency, like, “you see”, “kind of”, “definitely”, “I mean”, “for example”, “basically”, need to be limited cautiously. ii) Substituting cluttering phrases with economic alternatives in the context of effective communication: <table><tr><th>To be avoided</th><th>To be used</th></tr><tr><td>due to the fact that</td><td>because</td></tr><tr><td>in view of the fact that</td><td>considering</td></tr><tr><td>is of the opinion that</td><td>believes</td></tr><tr><td>with the exception of</td><td>except</td></tr></table> These are just a handful of examples for putting across the point of concern. iii) Substituting roundabout sentences with direct ones: <table><tr><th>To be avoided</th><th>To be used</th></tr><tr><td>This report has been prepared with the objective of recommending certain retailers for the purpose of expanding business.</td><td>This report recommends certain retailers to expand business.</td></tr><tr><td>It is compulsory for all the people present in the meeting to put their phones in the silent mode.</td><td>All attendees in the meeting must put their phones in the silent mode.</td></tr></table> These are just few examples to highlight the issue.	To be avoided	To be used	due to the fact that	because	in view of the fact that	considering	is of the opinion that	believes	with the exception of	except	To be avoided	To be used	This report has been prepared with the objective of recommending certain retailers for the purpose of expanding business.	This report recommends certain retailers to expand business.	It is compulsory for all the people present in the meeting to put their phones in the silent mode.	All attendees in the meeting must put their phones in the silent mode.
To be avoided	To be used																	
due to the fact that	because																	
in view of the fact that	considering																	
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To be avoided	To be used																	
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It is compulsory for all the people present in the meeting to put their phones in the silent mode.	All attendees in the meeting must put their phones in the silent mode.																	
Concreteness	The idea conveyed must be specific and provide the listener (or the recipient) a straightforward image of the	While engaging in a conversation, the issues that we need to be mindful of, with respect to concreteness, are: i) Not making any vague or fuzzy statements (for instance, in case of a business proposal, invoking historicity without pertinent facts and figures, is not effective.)																

	intended message.	Vague statement: As a company, we have been reliable for a very long time. Correction: Consecutive awards for customer satisfaction in 2016 and 2017 highlight our efforts to retain and satisfy existing clients since the company started functioning in 2012. ii) Replacing abstract expressions with statistical ones: <table><tr><th>To be avoided</th><th>To be used</th></tr><tr><td>unbelievable margin of discount</td><td>25% discount</td></tr><tr><td>very spacious</td><td>4500 square feet</td></tr><tr><td>a minor proportion</td><td>5%</td></tr><tr><td>as early as possible</td><td>by the 2nd of October, 2020.</td></tr></table> These are just few examples to point out the issue.	To be avoided	To be used	unbelievable margin of discount	25% discount	very spacious	4500 square feet	a minor proportion	5%	as early as possible	by the 2nd of October, 2020.
To be avoided	To be used											
unbelievable margin of discount	25% discount											
very spacious	4500 square feet											
a minor proportion	5%											
as early as possible	by the 2nd of October, 2020.											
Correctness	The message relayed must be free from grammatical mistakes and errors of pronunciation.	The points that we need to be cautious about, while addressing the issue of correctness, are: i) For Indian English speakers, grammatical concerns like appropriate prepositions, omission and commission of articles, conjugation of verbs and sentence schema are quite troublesome. ii) While conversing, incorrect pronunciations can create a bad first impression in the recipient’s mind.										
Courtesy	The message communicated must maintain a desirable level of courtesy and decorum with respect to the use of words, expressions and tone.	The nuances that we need to adhere to, while dealing with the issue of courtesy, are: i) Substituting negative messages with their positive versions: <table><tr><th>To be avoided</th><th>To be used</th></tr><tr><td>Your order cannot be delivered in three days.</td><td>We will do our best to deliver your order within four days.</td></tr><tr><td>We had to cancel your request for a replacement for the next week.</td><td>We are extremely sorry for the inconvenience but we can process your request for a</td></tr></table>	To be avoided	To be used	Your order cannot be delivered in three days.	We will do our best to deliver your order within four days.	We had to cancel your request for a replacement for the next week.	We are extremely sorry for the inconvenience but we can process your request for a				
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		<table><tr><td></td><td>replacement after the next week.</td></tr></table> ii) Replacing offensive expressions with euphemistic ones: <table><tr><th>To be avoided</th><th>To be used</th></tr><tr><td>disabled/handicapped</td><td>differently abled</td></tr><tr><td>third-class performance</td><td>below-par performance</td></tr></table> These are a handful of examples to highlight the issue.		replacement after the next week.	To be avoided	To be used	disabled/handicapped	differently abled	third-class performance	below-par performance
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To be avoided	To be used									
disabled/handicapped	differently abled									
third-class performance	below-par performance									
Completeness	The message must contain every relevant detail for the intended purpose and be apt regarding the necessary elements.	As we take part in a conversation, our focus, to address the issue of completeness, is on: i) Rechecking thematically the inclusion of information that is essential for fulfilling the goal; for instance, if it is a conversation about a leisurely get-together, it must contain details of the people to be invited or included, the place of the get-together, the date and time of the get-together and the activities planned. ii) Checking for missed details as per the requirements of the conversation.								
Consideration	The message relayed must take into account the listener's or the recipient's profile (social background, cultural sensibilities, preferences, nature) as well as beliefs to suit the listener's or the recipient's needs while fulfilling the speaker's purpose.	The aspects that we need to prioritise, to address the issue of consideration, are: i) Remembering the cross-cultural intricacies; anything that is coloured with cultural bias has to be removed or remodelled. For instance, in a complex Indian conversational space, any comment praising or stereotyping a particular ethnic group can be disastrous. Statements to be avoided: These Biharis are still so uncouth. If it were not for the intelligence of the Malayalis, this company would be out of business. ii) Steering clear of any religious or social dogmas and avoiding emotionally charged statements.								

1.5 INFLUENCE OF BARRIERS IN THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

The discussion on barriers is perhaps the most critical component of effective communication, considering the frequency of breakdowns in communication that mar productivity and destroy reputation irrevocably. A barrier, simply understood, can be anything or anybody that prevents or hinders or unfavourably changes the intended outcome of a communicative exchange. Barriers can be intrapersonal, interpersonal and organizational.

As all of you are pursuing undergraduation from IGNOU, you are already functioning within the setup of a central university. Moreover, you are at the cusp of being employed or some of you are employed already. Therefore, knowledge of organizational barriers and how to work around them becomes indispensable. The discussion will be fruitful if we focus on organizational barriers as an individual's professional success is linked to his or her communicative efficiency within the organization where he or she is enrolled or employed or is going to be employed very soon. Every organization has its own hierarchy, communication protocols as well as channels via which information flows between the layers. Mere academic substantiation of the types of organizational barriers is futile, if we do not back them with lucid, real-world illustrations. The major organizational barriers are:

- **Distortion of information due to several transfer stations**

Due to the multiple levels in an organization and the protocols of either upward or downward communication, when the message passes through several individuals, there is change of the original message at every level. Information selectivity as well as poor listening amplify this distortion and the intended recipient ultimately gets a mutated version of the message.

In the Indian context, this problem comes with a ghastly twist of exaggeration to sensationalize a piece of information, which becomes the latest gossip in grapevine. For instance, a conversation with the HR manager about availing a leave and the stated reason can be maliciously distorted to the extent of appearing for interviews for changing job on the pretext of personal emergency. This is not only toxic but also counterproductive.

- **Repression or overflow of information due to fear of superiors**

In the Indian context, to please the superiors and not incur their wrath, in many cases we repress issues or grievances. The reverse is also possible, where there is breach of confidentiality and unfiltered sharing of everything with the superiors to display subservience and win their favour.

- **Loss of productivity due to negative tendencies generated through groupism and ingroup-outgroup discrimination**

Even within the same organisation, groups based on interest, ethnicity, age and other factors, may at some point of time experience a clash of beliefs, leading to ingroup-outgroup discrimination, which after a while can become really ugly and affect the decorum of conversations in the organisation.

- **Loss of communicative efficiency due to the selection of unsuitable media**

Selection of medium is dependent on four variables, namely, time required for transmission of message, cost of transmission, nature of the message and the target audience.

In the Indian context, with the digital revolution, internet and smartphone applications have become the preferred media. However, if a recorded speech message is confidential, encrypted services with self-destruct option and a lifespan for the recorded message delivered, need to be appropriate utilised. Most organizations use their own intranet, with no access to the internet, for confidentiality of organizational exchanges.

- **Loss of productivity and communicative efficiency due to information overload and congestion of channels**

When there is a conversational salad of an excessive amount of irrelevant information with relevant details, understanding and processing it decimates efficiency and such a situation of information overload passively frustrates and burns out the listeners. The focus should be on the quality and not the quantity of spoken words.

In the Indian context, such information overload situations are coupled with pass-the-responsibility trend, ultimately leading to a gridlock, with no plausible progress in communication. To deal with information overload, there needs to be someone monitoring the flow of conversation, with some form of penalty (like losing the turn to speak again or credibility as a speaker being compromised, etc.) for those being careless enough to repeat information or include unnecessary details despite warning.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How is communication disrupted when we choose an inferior medium? Exemplify with an instance from your own life.

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- 2) How can we ensure the conciseness of our messages while communicating? Explain with at least two examples.

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3) Consider the following statements:

- i) These north Indians keep spitting everywhere.
- ii) The company is offering me a very good package.

How effective do you think they will be in the process of communication?

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4) What is information overload? How does it affect communication?

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1.6 IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS IN COMMUNICATION

One of the intriguing challenges of the dynamic spaces that we communicate in these days, is the fusion of an incredible number of cultures. Similar to a multicultural classroom, a multilingual and multicultural social setting requires delicate treatment. One of the focal points of critical discussion here is, how prepared are we to accept differences while maintaining a productive and tolerant atmosphere where individualities do not require dilution. Communication, in such contexts, moves beyond the literal and the linguistic, and to make sense of the process, one needs to be aware of the multiple cultural variables at play. In fact, lack of awareness of cultural variations is one of the biggest interpersonal causes leading to communication failure. Cultural and social sensibilities govern perception, expectation and tolerance with respect to any form of communication. Renowned cultural theorist Dr. Geert Hofstede's model on cross-cultural communication is a widely followed, robust theoretical premise for studying how cultural differences impact communication involving participants of unique ethnicities and cultures. There are six dimensions discussed in Hofstede's model, namely, Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Masculinity Versus Femininity, Long Term Orientation Versus Short Term Orientation and Indulgence Versus Restraint.

Power Distance Index (PDI) deals with the societal distribution of power and how different communities function in a particular arrangement. A high degree of Power Distance signifies the acceptance of a hierarchical order by the communities whereby each community has its own position and the situation does not require any intervention. A low degree of Power Distance indicates

ongoing struggle to balance the distribution of power and requires intervention to address the inequalities of power.

In terms of communication, these translate into very different behavioral paradigms as well as linguistic expressions. An individual coming from a background of high Power Distance Index, will not be excessively polite nor excessively subservient, reflected through choice of expressions in the spoken language, as they have been functioning within equitable power structures. On the contrary, someone from a low Power Distance Index background, can be at either of the extremities, i.e., excessively polite and compliant, or excessively defensive and resistant, reflected through their choice of expressions in the spoken language.

Individualism versus Collectivism addresses the cultural difference whereby certain groups prefer a narrower domain of responsibility (being responsible only for themselves and their immediate families) with a high degree of independent existence in a liberal social matrix and certain other groups prefer a wider domain of responsibility (extended to relatives and members of one's own community) with a high degree of collaborative growth in a structured social matrix based on communal loyalty.

In a diversified conversational space, participants with a collectivist background, prove to be better listeners, better collaborators and their linguistic choices reiterate inclusiveness ('We'-oriented sentence constructions), whereas participants with an individualist background, although more creative, do not function as efficiently in groups and their linguistic choices underline exclusiveness ('I'-oriented sentence constructions).

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) helps in understanding to what extent members of a particular social group feel distressed when faced with uncertainty and indefiniteness, around the central concern of an unseen future. The differences in mindset arise regarding whether efforts should be undertaken to control the future or just let the future unfold naturally in due course of time.

Individuals belonging to backgrounds with strong UAI, are structured, inflexible, action-oriented and their choice of expressions in the spoken language reflect precision and economy. In a dynamic conversational space, these translate into highly focused, punctual, problem-solving individuals with a greater proportion of affirmative sentences while communicating. On the contrary, individuals from a weak UAI background, are relaxed and flexible. In a dynamic conversational space, these translate into creative and unpredictable individuals who do not function effectively under stress and their choice of expressions in the spoken language reflect elaboration, depth and liberality.

Masculinity Versus Femininity highlights the more-frequent societal preference for 'masculine' behavioural and aspirational matrices like accomplishment, chivalry and recognition, assertiveness as well as material fulfilment through success. The less-frequent societal preference for 'feminine' behavioural and aspirational matrices like assistance and partnership, decency and politeness, caring for the vulnerable, bring to the fore, a distinct tough versus tender cultural gap in the context of a fiercely competitive conversational space. Masculinity is predominant in the cultures of India and China, contrary to the UK and Canada.

Long Term Orientation Versus Short Term Orientation focuses on a group or a society's connectedness with its own past to tackle the complex issues of the present and the future. There are societies that rely on time-tested traditions and beliefs and therefore are not readily open to ideas of change. Then there are others that do not irrationally cling to traditions and explore changes and revisions with an open mindset. In the conversational context, this distinction is also referred to as normative (short term) versus pragmatic (long term) approach. For instance, Indians while being part of a conversation, are quite sensitive about their heritage and prefer abiding by proven traditions. On the contrary, Germans and Swedish are very open to any change for the positive.

Indulgence Versus Restraint outlines the societal scope for unrestricted fulfilment and gratification of fundamental and natural human drives, that in turn influences happiness index and satisfaction. There are societies (restraint oriented) that suppress gratification along with the imposition of stringent regulations on expression of these drives or urges. But there are also others (indulgence oriented) that permit it quite openly. Considering the Indian context, such open gratification is tabooed and therefore a Mexican worker stationed in India might find things to be repressive, whereas certain Indians working in Berlin might be initially surprised by the liberal approval of these pursuits and their expression through spoken language.

Moving beyond Hofstede's model, there are certain factors pointed out by Prof. Laray M. Barna as "[s]tumbling blocks in intercultural communication" (1994). The six reasons that imperil intercultural communication, as propounded by Prof. Barna, are as follows:

- Assumption of Similarities
- Language Differences
- Non-verbal misinterpretations
- Preconceptions and Stereotypes
- Tendency to Evaluate
- High Anxiety

1.7 INFLUENCE OF NON-VERBAL CUES IN THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

Many of us, at some point of time, have experienced that what we expressed verbally in a conversation, failed to elicit a desired response even though we used apt expressions in grammatically correct sentences and articulated them in a manner that was perfectly understandable to the listener.

Beyond possible occasional factors like being known to the listener, or having a strained personal or professional relationship with the listener, or the listener being in an emotionally unstable situation at the time of the conversation, there is more to such experiences and therefore simply holding the mentioned occasional factors or similar ones responsible, cannot always justify how and why the conversation transpired the way it did.

In those startling experiences, our verbal messages were not considered as legitimate or serious or actionable. The listener did not directly state that he or

she found the relayed information questionable or unreliable. However, the nature of the listener's response clearly revealed the manner in which our messages were treated and we felt we were not being believed or taken seriously. For instance, it could have been a request for some monetary help or a message being relayed on behalf of somebody else or some previously inaccessible information being disclosed now in a changed circumstance, etc. In all such situations that we lived through, we are still pretty sure that our choice of meaningful words and construction of sentences were appropriate as well as adequate to convey the intended message in an intelligible manner. Yet, from all such episodes we realised that somehow it was not sufficient to be perfect with our words, sentences and grammatical sense. Then, what more is there to the process of verbally conveying meaningful messages and being able to get a desired response, and, so to speak, to the process of any positive, productive conversation? Well, the answer is the appropriateness of the non-verbal cues that accompany the verbal message.

You will be surprised to know that it is these very non-verbal cues that influence the interpretation and the subsequent response to our verbal messages, i.e., in all of those experiences that we were mulling over, the non-verbal cues, that our interlocutors picked up from the way we conveyed the messages, were not powerful enough to support the verbal part of the messages, to be taken seriously, or to be found credible. Now, how exactly can we understand what is 'non-verbal'? Well, for this, we need to approach the expression from two perspectives. The first is when we consider the aspects of communication (i.e., the process), non-verbal cues are essentially those whose production or relay does not involve the vocal tract and the speech apparatus. So, from the point of view of communication, non-verbal cues include, for example, facial expressions, eye contact, hand movements, physical posture, etc. The second perspective is when we deal with the features of speech (i.e., the medium), non-verbal cues are essentially those which have nothing to do with the recognition of individual words in the speech stream. So, from the point of view of speech, non-verbal cues include, for example, accent, intonation, loudness, etc.

Now, all these non-verbal cues (from both the perspectives of aspects of communication and speech) constitute that aspect of human language, which lies beyond the articulation of words and sentences, but still significantly influences the interpretation of verbal messages and therefore has an undeniable impact on the overall communicative effect. The term *paralanguage* is broadly and simply used to refer to this. Abercrombie in his paper "Paralanguage" (1968) writes:

"We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies; conversation consists of much more than a simple interchange of spoken words. The term *paralanguage* is increasingly commonly used to refer to non-verbal communicating activities which accompany verbal behaviour in conversation" (55).

But Abercrombie at the same time warns of the potential danger of considering *paralanguage* as an independent "homogeneous entity" parallel to that of *language*. He also finds the expression *paralanguage* problematic as it is not something parallel to *language* or capable of being separately investigated, rather it is deeply intertwined and hence needs to be explored in relation to *language* and in relation to the conversations that we engage in, through the use of *language*.

So, instead of *paralanguage*, Abercrombie prefers the use of the expression *paralinguistic phenomena* to broadly account for all the non-verbal cues that underlie the words and sentences which we articulate while conversing:

“Paralinguistic phenomena are non-linguistic elements in conversation. They occur alongside spoken language, interact with it, and produce together with it a total system of communication. They are not necessarily continuously simultaneous with spoken words. They may also be interspersed among them, or precede them, or follow them; but they are always integrated into a conversation considered as a complete linguistic interaction. The study of paralinguistic behaviour is part of the study of conversation: the conversational use of spoken language cannot be properly understood unless paralinguistic elements are taken into account” (ibid).

Now, that we have an idea about the different aspects of communication and why communication skills are indispensable, we will move to the next Unit to discuss the various aspects of a formal conversation.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What does a high degree of Power Distance indicate?
 - a) Justified distribution of power and unique position of each community
 - b) Struggle for power and disadvantaged state of certain communities
 - c) Inequal distribution of power and exploitation of all communities
 - d) Inverted distribution of power and questionable position of the minority communities
- 2) Which of the following is not a dimension in Hofstede’s model?
 - a) Individualism versus Collectivism
 - b) Masculinity versus Femininity
 - c) Indulgence versus Restraint
 - d) Spiritualism versus Materialism
- 3) In a communicative exchange, collaboration and teamwork-oriented people can be predicted to be from which type of culture?
 - a) Individualist
 - b) Indulgent
 - c) Collectivist
 - d) Masculine
- 4) Differentiate between paralanguage and paralinguistic phenomena.

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have provided a brief overview of the process of communication as well as how important it is to understand its complex aspects to be successful in our personal and professional lives. We have given you:

- an idea of all that we can accomplish through communication and how crucial it is to excel in communication skills.
- a summary of the 7 Cs of communication.
- an understanding of the sort of barriers we face in the professional and organizational domain.
- a perception of how vital it is to possess cross-cultural awareness in dynamic multicultural spaces while communicating with groups having unique cultural backgrounds.
- a rundown of how essential non-verbal cues are in the process of communication.

Before heading over to the next Unit, please ensure that you have completed all the 'Check Your Progress' sections. This will help you revise the ideas that we have discussed and put you through some much-needed practice in expressing yourself in your own words. We hope that you have enjoyed learning about the importance of communication skills.

1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to read more about communication skills and why they are so critical, you may consult:

Owen Hargie, *The Handbook of Communication Skills 3rd Edition* (Sussex: Routledge, 2006)

Richard Ellis, *Communication Skills: Stepladders to success for the professional* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

1.10 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

For answers to 1 and 3, refer to 1.2.

For answering 2, refer to 1.3.

Check Your Progress 2

For answers to 1 and 4, refer to 1.5.

For the answer to 2, refer to 1.4

3) The sentences will not be effective.

Sentence	Issue	Revision
These north Indians keep spitting everywhere.	Goes against the norm of Consideration	Not applicable; statement should be totally avoided.
The company is offering me a very good package.	Goes against the norm of Concreteness	The company is offering me an annual package of Rs. 6,00,000 with additional health and housing benefits.

Check Your Progress 3

1) (a), 2. (d), 3 (c)

For the answer to 4, refer to 1.7



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UNIT 2 FORMAL CONVERSATION

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Warm Up
- 2.2 Domain & Register
- 2.3 Formality
- 2.4 Formal conversation & formal use of language
- 2.5 Intricacies of speaking with reference to a formal conversation
- 2.6 7 Cs with reference to a formal conversation
- 2.7 Examples of formal conversation
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Suggested Readings
- 2.10 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this particular Unit and the given exercises, is to prepare you to be able to:

- understand the demands of a formal conversation;
- grasp the finer aspects of speaking with reference to a formal conversation;
- distinguish the formal use of language from its informal use; and
- appreciate how the 7 Cs of communication influence formal conversations.

2.1 WARM UP

Think of two situations, as you found yourself in them, the last time.

Situation 1: A conversation with your teacher about the unsatisfactory state of your home assignment or your performance in the examination.

Situation 2: A conversation with your mother about your unacceptable demand for a different dish as you crib about what she has prepared for the day.

Think and describe how you spoke in the first situation versus the second one. Do you see the differences?

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2.2 DOMAIN & REGISTER

This is the second Unit of the third Block in your course on Reading & Speaking Skills. We are going to learn about the various features of a formal conversation and its subtleties.

English is not just used in one particular way across all sorts of conversations. There are different functionalities of English and thereby such functional changes are reflected in its linguistic manifestation. In this respect, we need to know about the notion of a register, a domain and how registers change with domains.

A register is the form of the language that is used in a particular domain. So, a register is a domain-governed phenomenon reflecting a domain-governed change in our choice of expressions. Domain is the social space of interaction or the space where the action takes place.

As social spaces of interaction, domains are defined by the types of interactions and the contexts of these interactions. Each domain is a functional space of language. Each domain requires some restrictions on the structural features of language to be used, for the speech to be congruent.

According to Hudson (1980), “each domain is a congruent combination of speaker(s), addressee(s), context of the conversation, and the topic”. A register is the manner of using a language or a linguistic code, which is applicable in a particular domain, defined for a particular purpose. Therefore, register is a variety determined by the purpose.

Examples of domains: Office space (formal domain)

Classroom (formal domain)

Dining room in own house (informal domain)

Coffee-shop (informal domain)

After going through the examples, you must be wondering about the labels of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’. Well, let us clear the curiosity by putting it directly: ‘formality’ and ‘informality’ are domain-specific properties; these properties in turn influence the register and correspondingly we have the formal and the informal register, or simply the formal and the informal way of using a language.

The way we speak varies, depending on the setting and the interlocutor, i.e., where, when and with whom a conversation occurs. This is understood as **register variation**. Register, in this case, indicates language appropriate for a specific occasion. This is generally a complex area to delineate in any language, but a fairly clear idea can be developed by looking at the type of sentences and expressions used in *informal* and *formal* settings.

Now, that we have discussed the ideas of domain and register, let us address the notion of formality.

2.3 FORMALITY

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, ‘formality’ is defined as ‘rigid observance of convention or etiquette’. Another pertinent definition

would be ‘strictly conventional behaviour’. So, *formality* comes with a set of codes, or a set of distinctive features, that sets it apart from *informality*.

Domains are categorised as ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ on the basis of *formality*. How do we understand *formality*? Well, there are a few approaches to understanding it. A number of linguists have interestingly explored the idea of *formality* by looking at different communities.

As Judith Irvine attempts to summarise the tenets of these approaches comprehensively in her paper “Formality and Informality in Speech Events” (1978), she describes how *formality* can be deciphered “in the sense of an increased structuring and predictability” of our use of language, and also “as a way of describing characteristics of a social situation...so that a “formal” situation requires a display of seriousness, politeness, and respect.”

Bricker (1974) and Gossen (1974) on the basis of their work on the Mayan speech community, and Fox (1974) looking into the Rotinese speech community, infer “formal speech” as distinct due to “special structuring” particularly “redundancy and syntactic or semantic parallelism”.

Rubin (1968) in her paper “Bilingual usage in Paraguay” delves into how people switch between Spanish (treated as high variety) and Guaraní (treated as low variety) in Paraguay, and while doing so she analyzes formality in language based on what kinds of linguistic behaviour are acceptable in formal situations and how much of deviation from a defined standard can be permitted with regard to language use in such situations.

Fischer (1972), in his paper on how the Trukese and the Ponapean speech communities use language to interact, explicates a formal situation as linguistically marked by the incorporation of “respect vocabulary” and “formal etiquette” to demonstrate politeness in language use. Fishman (1972) outlines formal situations as “lecturelike” and associates formality with non-frivolous and impersonal use of language. Like Fischer, Ervin-Tripp (1972) also considers the display of linguistic politeness to be characteristic of formal situations alongside “the seriousness of such situations”.

On the basis of these observations, we do realise that formality is a variable affecting the situation or the domain where the language users are physically or virtually placed, and it influences the way we use language in an empirically verifiable manner. Formal domains are those social spaces of language use where we need to be serious and precise about the topic of conversation keeping in mind the professional context and we also need to display linguistic politeness and respect in accordance with the organizational hierarchy and the standard organizational etiquettes.

Our workplaces, our offices, our universities, our examination halls are impersonal and formal spaces which we share with our colleagues or professors or fellow students or seniors positioned varyingly in the organisational or workplace or academic hierarchy. Therefore, we almost always need to be serious, precise, structured and courteous in the way we use language to initiate or to participate in an impersonal conversation, to propose a collaboration or to decide upon the terms of an academic association, etc., (except for those rare moments when a joke or a frivolous exchange of words or a light banter is acceptable to break the monotony) within the formal or the official domain.

Even with regard to formal domains, the level or standard of formality often varies from one domain to another. What is considered to be formal in the administrative building of your university may be dissimilar from what is formal in the branch manager's office of a private sector bank. So, we are looking at certain norms and structures of language use.

We will next look at the intricacies of a formal conversation. But before we do that, let us answer a few simple questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How does a formal domain vary from an informal domain?

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- 2) What is register variation? Consider a normal week day in your life. How frequently do you switch between registers? How different is it from a weekend?

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- 3) Consider the following domains:

Playground, College canteen, College auditorium, Metro station, Lecture hall, Father's office, Multiplex, Police station, Hospital, Kitchen, Court room, Principal's office

Classify them into formal and informal categories.

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2.4 FORMAL CONVERSATION AND FORMAL USE OF LANGUAGE

What is a formal conversation?

A formal conversation is quite simply a conversation that takes place in a formal domain, to address an official or domain-specific purpose, not concerning the personal interests of the participants, whereby the participants adhere to the formal use of language.

Use of language

A formal conversation has its own distinct components. A formal conversation is set in motion with the participants formally greeting each other, followed by a formal introduction and subsequently moving on to the specific topic or the focus of the conversation.

The participants exchange their ideas and reach the conclusion in accordance with the protocols of the formal use of language.

The participants end the conversation through a formal exchange of good-bye.

Formal greetings to initiate a formal conversation	
<i>Sample opening sentence</i>	<i>Sample response acknowledging the greeting</i>
Hello, Mr. Singh / Hello, Mrs. Singh	Hello, Mr. Kumar / Hello, Mrs. Kumar
Hello, Professor.	Hello, Arjun / Hello, Geeta
Good morning, Mr. Singh / Good morning, Mrs. Singh	Good morning, Mr. Kumar / Good morning, Mrs. Kumar
Good afternoon.	Good afternoon.
Good evening, Professor.	Good evening, Arjun / Good evening, Geeta
How are you?	Fine, thank you.

Formal introduction before moving on to the topic of the conversation	
<i>Sample formal introduction</i>	<i>Sample response</i>
Mr. Singh, let me introduce myself. I am Arjun Sehgal, a final year student of the undergraduate programme in humanities at Indira Gandhi National Open University.	It's a pleasure to meet you, Arjun / Pleased to meet you, Arjun
Mr. Singh, I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Gupta. / Mr. Singh, I'd like to introduce you to Ms. Sharma / Mr. Singh, allow me to introduce you to Mr. Gupta / Mr. Singh, allow me to introduce you to Ms. Sharma	It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Gupta / It's a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Sharma / Pleased to meet you, Mr. Gupta / Pleased to meet you, Ms. Sharma

Now, coming to the specific topic of the conversation, how do we characterise the formal use of language, for instance the formal use of English in our case. Some of the observable features of the use of English in formal conversations, are tabulated with examples.

Contractions are strictly not preferred in the formal domain or in formal conversations.	Formal use of language	As opposed to
	The results will not be announced till the end of the year.	They won't announce the results till the year end.
	The manager is going to announce an early retirement.	The manager's gonna announce an early retirement.
	This cannot be quite accurate.	This can't be real.
	This information is not to be trusted.	I don't trust this information.
Phrasal verbs are not preferred in the formal domain or in formal conversations. Only a handful of formal phrasal verbs are infrequently used.	The lack of cheaper options is frustrating the targeted segment of customers.	The lack of cheaper options is putting the targeted segment of customers off.
	The store-in-charge gave the keys to the security guard.	The store-in-charge handed over the keys to the security guard.
	The newcomers should not be so stressed and socialise with their seniors.	The freshers need to loosen up and hang out with their seniors.
	The caretakers should leave at this very moment.	The caretakers should buzz off right now.
Interrogative constructions with modal verbs are preferred in the formal domain or in formal conversations.	Can you explain the benefit of this move?	What is the benefit of this move?
	Could we schedule this meeting for a later time?	Schedule this meeting for a later time.
	May I have another cup of tea please?	I want another cup of tea.
	Might I suggest a different issue for our next seminar?	I want to suggest a different issue for our next seminar.
Colloquial expressions and slangs are never	His nonsensical attitude is very frustrating.	I am sick of his bullshit attitude.
	The engineer lost his job for his irrelevant excuses.	The engineer got fired for his lame excuses.

allowed in the formal domain or in formal conversations.	It would be appreciable if you leave us alone.	Why don't you just fuck off?
	The newcomer's presentation was absolutely unimpressive.	The newbie's presentation absolutely sucked.
In certain formal situations, first person pronouns are avoided in a conversation. To achieve this, the passive form of the verb is used. This bypasses the issue of being responsible for the action and is intentionally done by the speaker when he or she does not want to claim agency.	The interns were questioned about their past work experiences and job profiles.	I asked the interns about their past work experiences and job profiles.
	Our journalists have been trained to investigate incidents regardless of the actual ground challenges and adversities.	We have trained our journalists to investigate incidents regardless of the actual ground challenges and adversities.
	During the meeting with the Professor, my state of work was discussed.	During my meeting with my Professor, I discussed my state of work.
	When it comes to taking risks, there is no second thought.	When it comes to taking risks, we never think twice.

Evidently, the formal use of English involves longer, complete sentences with perfect grammar. A formal conversation takes more time than an informal one. There is also the rejection of any and all colloquialities. Complex and compound sentences are in greater proportion. Questions are posed using an indirect grammatical structure; there is a general tendency to incorporate indirect verbal phrases like “appears to be”, “seems to be”, etc.

Finally, once the participants have concluded, there is the exchange of formal good-byes.

Ending the formal conversation with an exchange of formal good-bye

<i>Sample formal good-bye</i>	<i>Sample formal response</i>
It was nice meeting you, Mr. Singh.	It was nice meeting you too Mr. Kumar.
It was good to see you, Professor.	It was good to see you too, Arjun. / It was good to see you too, Geeta.
Have a good day, Mr. Singh. / Have a good day, Professor.	Thank you. I wish you the same.
Good night / Goodbye	Good night / Goodbye

2.5 INTRICACIES OF SPEAKING WITH REFERENCE TO A FORMAL CONVERSATION

In a formal conversation, we need to be meticulous about certain aspects while speaking.

- **With respect to the content of a formal conversation**, as speakers, we need to ensure that all of the articulated ideas and personal opinions are highly pertinent as well as satisfy the requirements of the conversation along with the topic around which it revolves. The conversation progresses in clear, distinct parts that highlight a structured pattern of expression of ideas (solution-oriented, analytic and ordered), with smooth and effective transitions.
- **With respect to the use of language in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we must demonstrate an impactful command over the language and be confident in using it. We should express ideas with clarity and power. As a result, the meaning of the message and the flow of thoughts can be easily followed by the listener.
- **With respect to the aspect of delivery in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we need to articulate our perspectives in a strong and perfectly audible voice with appropriate stress variations to create interest and grab the focus of the listener. There has to be intelligent use of vocal modulation while consistently maintaining eye-contact with the listener, without any abrupt lapses or pauses that can break the flow and thereby affect the listener's impression.
- **With respect to the organization of ideas and professionalism in a formal conversation**, as speakers, our message must convey the sense of a purposeful whole with one predominant objective that is rationally actualized through the entirety of the conversation. A well-articulated message will not require repetition or restatement, even when the content or the objective is somewhat complicated. The way we speak and the way we appear, must be in compliance of the decorum, conventions and protocols of the formal space where the conversation is taking place or is supposed to take place. We should also be particular about the issue of ethical persuasion whereby we support claims with compelling evidence (quantitative and qualitative) from appropriate sources.
- **With respect to the aspect of appeal in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we need to incorporate planned elements to appeal to the personal interests and preferences of the listener, while preserving the context of the presentation. In this regard, wherever and however possible, we have to study the available profile(s) of the listener(s) and form a perception about his/her (or their) interests and inclinations. Also, wherever feasible, appropriate highlighting techniques must be employed.
- **With respect to engaging the listener in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we need to use innovative ways to involve the listener and successfully keep them engaged without losing their attention through the

clever manipulation of rhetoric. Our conversational approach must be authentic, witty and unique.

- **With respect to concluding a formal conversation**, as speakers, we need to convincingly connect the main ideas to the way we broached the topic with a precise yet pleasant ending using simple words. There has to be an understandable transition to the ending and the listener should be strategically prepared for it.

Similarly, in a formal conversation, we need to cautiously avoid certain blunders.

- **With respect to the content of a formal conversation**, as speakers, we must not include ideas and opinions which, although credible, are not exactly required for the objective of the conversation. Because of these, the main message will not be clearly interpretable and the supporting arguments will require further strategic organization as well as lucidity to create the desired impact. Moreover, too frequent presence of fillers and pet phrases (for instance, umm, ahh, ok, so the thing is, like, etc.) with negligible or no transitions to connect the main points can fluster the listener.
- **With respect to the use of language in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we must avoid ambiguous expressions, grammatical errors and vocabulary slips. In addition to these, we should also steer clear of expressions and arguments that can possibly puzzle or insult or offend the listener.
- **With respect to the aspect of delivery in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we should not use a lax voice with a conspicuous lack of stress and vocal variations. Having very less eye-contact with the listener and not maintaining it for any effective duration can be disastrous. While speaking if we lose track noticeably and at times even resort to the use of some digital or personal note, it becomes clear that we are not suitably prepared for the conversation. In worst case scenarios, this can seriously damage the speaker's future credibility.
- **With respect to the organization of ideas and professionalism in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we must be careful about incoherence as it will lead to a glaring lack of an overall sense of meaning. Incoherence also creates the demand for restatement or repetition which can compound the confusion and leave a poor impression. We should certainly never go to the extent of sounding unethical in being too persuasive without the necessary evidence or justification to support our perspectives. Desperate measures of verbal persuasion in a formal setting can prompt the listener to question the integrity of the speaker.
- **With respect to the aspect of appeal in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we should not bring in such planned elements to appeal to the personal interests and preferences of the listener, that are out of sync with the context of the conversation. The comprehensibility of the message too gets blurred due to these discordant elements and we must avoid falling into this trap.
- **With respect to engaging the listener in a formal conversation**, as speakers, we should not veer off-topic as we run the risk of losing the focus of the listener, even more so in the present age with a drastic reduction in the attention spans of people.

- **With respect to concluding a formal conversation**, as speakers, we must not simply summarise or recall the main points without a carefully reasoned conclusion. When there are no perceptible transitions as we build up towards the ending, the conversation loses out on consistency and ease of understanding.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Consider the following sentences:
 - i) The plan to evacuate the area won't work out as there aren't enough vehicles to drop everyone off at the safe zone.
 - ii) Rohit went ballistic after his brother cocked up his plan to attend the long-awaited event.
 - iii) I want this cleaned immediately.
 - iv) I penalised some of the employees for being always late.

Which of the above can be used in a formal conversation? In accordance with our discussion till now, revise the ones which you feel cannot be used in a formal conversation.

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- 2) With respect to language and delivery in a formal conversation, what are the blunders that we need to avoid as speakers?

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2.6 7 CS WITH REFERENCE TO A FORMAL CONVERSATION

According to Francis Bergin, the 7 Cs that determine our success as participants in a formal conversation are as follows:

	How do we ensure it?	What should we not do?
Candidness	As speakers, we must be honest and sincere in our statements without flattery and superficiality. When it is our time to receive a response, we should listen patiently without being guided by any sort of misplaced prejudice or bias. We should be fair to everyone in the conversation. Expressions like, “In my honest opinion”, “quite frankly”, “to put it fairly and directly”, etc., relay our clear stance. It exhibits how we are considerate of diverse interests as well as of the need of everyone to know things transparently and unambiguously. Our commitment to equally inform all in the conversation boosts our credibility and our way of speaking is characterised by the “you” attitude.	If you think about it carefully, the natural instinct of children is to be very candid. This is obvious from the embarrassment of any parent whose toddler has just asked, in a clear, loud voice: “Mommy, why does that man have no hair?”. Now, to address these embarrassing lapses, from the time most of us learn to speak, we are taught to lie; not malicious lies, but airbrushed versions of the truth that are intended to make other people feel good about themselves. Most deceits of this kind have nothing to do with being formal, but of course the habit of telling “white lies” inevitably colours the way we interact with others in a formal conversation in our attempt to be pleasant. So, when we compliment someone: “I appreciate what you are wearing”, or “We must meet over lunch soon. I will call you”, or “you must tell me the secret to this”, we are reinforcing patterns that will serve us poorly in our formal conversations.
Clarity	As speakers, we must be clear and accurate about our ideas and opinions. While an impromptu deliberation on a specific issue does make it difficult for us to articulate ideas accurately as well as powerfully on the spot, we can work around it by using	We should never incorporate statements or arguments that are not in support of the main idea and are therefore frivolous or purposeless. As equal participants in a conversation, when we are listening to somebody’s

	lucid expressions and familiar words, along with appropriate stress, cautious variation of loudness and tone as well as meaningful pauses.	feedback on what we expressed, we must never harbour any doubt or uncertainty, fearing the possibility of upsetting other participants. In fact, the loss of face is greater later on, when this doubt or uncertainty leads us to make a faulty remark. Unmistakeably, we must speak to edify and not to impress.
Completeness	Completeness of what and how we speak is the precursor to clarity. Acknowledging the fact that we are humans and prone to mistakes, it is possible to miss out on certain points while speaking. To minimise the chances of such inadvertent lapses, we need to pre-plan and pre-structure our message. The aspect of completeness demands that we supply all relevant details in a formal conversation while responsibly answering questions that listeners might have. In this regard, to sufficiently quell doubts, a bit of extra clarification or extra information will not affect clarity. A helpful way to ensure that our message is complete and that we are ready to respond to any question is to take the Five W Question test, i.e., 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'why', along with the allied 'how'.	In case we do not have the answer to a particular question in course of a conversation, we should candidly acknowledge our present inability to address it. Beating around the bush, giving evasive replies, getting defensive, etc., should be avoided as they will only amplify the confusion and create an insincere impression.

Conciseness	In a formal conversation, brevity and economy of expression are golden.	We should not repeat unless requested by another participant in a formal conversation. Furthermore, in a formal conversation, repetition does not imply emphasis; on the contrary, it implies a dearth of ideas or perspectives.
	Verbose	
	Concise	
	As regards the fact that	
	Considering	
	Because of the fact that	
	As / Because	
	are in need of	
	need	
	not very far from here	
	nearby	
Concreteness	Specificity and definiteness are imperative in a formal conversation. Being specific as a speaker creates a strong impression of valuing time and not being vague about the objective. More than the right amount of detail in what we speak, concreteness is about providing the right detail for the right audience. For instance, in the field of marketing, this aspect is exploited by developing detailed profiles of ideal or typical users of a planned product and then trying to figure out what the response would be to a new product or advertisement campaign. Concreteness is not just about specificity of ideas; it is about the effective specificity of ideas, so that they inspire action.	We must not use vague expressions nor incorporate vague details that cannot be empirically verified. A concrete statement comes with a verifiable source, which has a proven track record of reliability. For instance: According to the Institute for Strategic Change, the “stock price of ‘well-led’ companies grew by over 900% over 10 years, compared with 74% for poorly led companies”. According to the research cluster led by Prof. Odgers at the Harvard Business School, the quality of leadership accounts for some 15-20% of the total variance in companies’ performance.
Correctness	In a formal conversation, grammatical errors in the form of verb agreement errors, verb conjugation errors, pronominal errors, etc., often crop up as bloopers.	We should not stretch out sentences as it dramatically increases the chances of such errors.

Courtesy	Being well acquainted with the decorum of a formal conversation is crucial. Courtesy requires us to be pleasant, polite and respectful yet firm and determined to express our ideas with conviction and clarity. There are norms like: • how many people can speak at once • how much one person should speak • what can be the focus of the speaker, and so on. It is also easy to interpret the norms by observing instances of their violation. For example, the practice of turn-taking in a formal conversation indicates that only one person speaks at a time. If another participant starts speaking before the first person has finished, it is considered to be an interruption. So, in a formal conversation, the accepted norm is one person speaks at a time and when it is clear that he or she has finished speaking, the other person may begin.	Our tone should not be aggressive or dismissive. While speaking, our choice of words must not, directly or indirectly, hurt the listener's sentiments or ridicule his or her viewpoints. We must also never heckle or cuss, no matter how provoked we feel.
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Let us now look at two sample formal conversations to get a clear idea of all that we have covered till now.

Follow the conversations minutely and observe how the participants are engaging each other while adhering to the 7 Cs as well as the protocols of formal use of English.

2.7 EXAMPLES OF FORMAL CONVERSATION

The first example, that we are going to look at, is of a job interview since it is something that generates a lot of tension and anxiety amongst young undergraduates and job-seekers.

In a hypothetical scenario, Global Consultancy Services (GCS), a reputed software manufacturing company has a job opening in the Software Evaluation department. Saumya Mishra is the first applicant to be interviewed by the Chief Technology Officer, Rahil Zafar.

Rahil: Good Morning, Saumya. I am Rahil Zafar.

Saumya: Good Morning, sir.

Rahil: How are you doing?

Saumya: I am doing fine, sir. Thank you.

Rahil: How was the traffic coming over here?

Saumya: It is a relief that the traffic was light this morning. Thankfully, there were no traffic jams.

Rahil: That is good to know. Saumya, let's start the interview. Are you ready?

Saumya: Yes, sir. I am.

Rahil: First of all, let me properly introduce myself. I am the Chief Technology Officer. As you know there is an open position in the Software Evaluation department, and I need to fill this position as soon as possible.

Saumya: Sir, can you please tell me a little bit about the position?

Rahil: It is an entry-level position. The new employee will have to work closely with the Software Development Team. He or she will also have to deal with the clients on a daily basis.

Saumya: What type of qualifications do you require?

Rahil: I require a four-year college degree in Computer Science Engineering at the very least. Some work experience would be helpful.

Saumya: What kind of experience are you looking for?

Rahil: If you have done some coding, that is good. However, since this is an entry-level position, I do not require a lot of experience. I am willing to train the new person.

Saumya: That is great!

Rahil: Saumya, could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Saumya: I was a student at Netaji Subhas University of Technology. I just graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science Engineering. I have been working part-time as a junior coder for the last two years to support my family.

Rahil: What are you looking for in a job?

Saumya: The job should help me explore the sector of Software Evaluation. I have learned a lot of theories at college, and now it is time for me to put them into practice.

Rahil: Anything else?

Saumya: I also hope that it will help me grow in this field.

Rahil: Can you elaborate on your strengths? Why should I hire you?

Saumya: I am a hard-working person and a fast learner. I am very eager to learn, and I get along well with people.

Rahil: Fine, that is fair enough. Now, let me ask you a few quick questions. You do not mind working long hours, do you?

Saumya: No sir, I do not.

Rahil: How well can you handle pressure?

Saumya: I think I do fairly well. When I was going to college, I took quite a few courses each semester while working at least thirty hours every week. And, I handled that situation very well.

Rahil: Do you still seek any other clarification?

Saumya: No sir, I think I have a pretty good understanding of the job. I believe that I can handle it with ease, and I hope to get the opportunity to work for you.

Rahil: Saumya, it was nice meeting you. Thank you for coming. My office will get back to you with the decision.

Saumya: It was a pleasure meeting you too, sir. Thank you for seeing me. I look forward to hearing back from your office.

In the second example, we look at another hypothetical scenario. Aamna Bashir, the Customer Experience Manager of the furniture company Sajawat, has received an order modification request from an old customer. In the following conversation, she discusses it with the Production-in-Charge Kaushal Trivedi.

Aamna: Kaushal, can you please come to my office? I just received a revised purchase order from one of our old customers.

Kaushal: I am here.

Aamna: Kaushal, remember the order we received from Flying Pixels two weeks ago?

Kaushal: The one for a consignment of 100 black leather workstation chairs?

Aamna: Yes, that is the one. Have we started production on it yet?

Kaushal: I do not think so since we do not have to deliver until the twentieth of this month, another fifteen days.

Aamna: That is good to know. I just received a revised order from its Purchasing department. They want memory foam cushions instead of leather cushions.

Kaushal: We have already ordered the leather from Comfort Evolved. It will cost us more if we request a change of order now.

Aamna: There is no need to worry. Flying Pixels is willing to pay an extra twenty-five percent for the modification.

Kaushal: It is fine then. When do we have to ship the order? Is it still due on the twentieth?

Aamna: No, they have given us extra time to complete the new order. It is not due until the twenty-fourth of the month now.

Kaushal: Did they change the shipping terms? Do we still have to deliver the order, or will they come here to take it?

Aamna: We still have to manage the shipping process, and it is still going to Coimbatore.

Kaushal: Then I do not have to make any shipping changes other than changing the pickup date.

Aamna: I think you should contact Vinod Movers as soon as possible. The twenty-seventh of this month is a religious holiday, and its shipping schedule is going to be tight.

Kaushal: You are right. They might not accommodate our change if they receive our message too late.

Aamna: Kaushal, here is the change of order from Flying Pixels. You can sign and mail it back to them after reviewing it.

Kaushal: I better give a copy of this new order to our Production department. They need to be aware of the change.

Aamna: How is our Production department doing?

Kaushal: It is running on a very tight schedule. We received quite a few orders lately.

Aamna: I bet all the customers want their orders now or as soon as possible. The Production department will have to work a lot of overtime this month.

Kaushal: Overtime already started last week with all the employees in the Assembly department working an average of two hours overtime per day.

Aamna: I hope the customers appreciate our quick response time and the fact that we always go the extra mile to give them whatever they want.

Kaushal: It does pay to meet the customers' demand. Everybody likes our products and services. Even though it is sometimes very difficult to please everybody, it is fine with me because I love this company, and I want to see it prosper.

Aamna: We can take pride in a job well done. Besides, it makes our job easier also.

Kaushal: Yes, I would not like to hear people complain. I would hate to deal with unhappy customers.

Aamna: It is truly stressful to deal with unhappy customers. I doubt that I will be able to relax even when I get home at the end of the day.

Kaushal: To be honest, I cannot either. So, everything is set. I will call Flying Pixels and tell them everything is arranged and on schedule.

Aamna: Thank you for your help, Kaushal.

Kaushal: You are welcome, Aamna.

Now, that we have an idea about formal conversations, we will move to the next Unit to discuss the various aspects of informal conversations.

- 1) While you were conversing with your Professor, he corrected the expressions “if that were the case” and “at regular intervals of time” and asked you to use “if so” and “regularly” instead. How would you interpret these corrections?
 - a) Using clearer expressions to avoid ambiguity
 - b) Replacing fuzzy or vague expressions to be concrete
 - c) Using grammatically sound expressions to be correct
 - d) Using economic expressions to be concise
- 2) In a formal conversation, why should the expression ‘very bad condition’ be replaced with ‘75% of the people have been starving for the last 3 days’?
 - a) To maintain clarity
 - b) To maintain conciseness
 - c) To maintain concreteness
 - d) To maintain completeness
- 3) In a formal conversation, offensive expressions are replaced with euphemistic ones to address the issue of Select the appropriate option to fill in the blank.
 - a) Correctness
 - b) Courtesy
 - c) Consideration
 - d) Conciseness
- 4) Pair up with your best friend in your batch or in your locality. Let your friend assume the role of the Senior Manager of an esteemed bank in which you are an employee. You have been recently promoted to a managerial position due to your consistent performance. You are happy yet anxious about the new responsibility. Engage in a formal conversation in English with your friend, who as a Senior Manager is trying to reassure you that you will be doing well in the new role.

Simultaneously record this conversation on a smartphone using the Recorder application. Prepare a written transcript of the recording. Approach your tutor at the study centre for his or her feedback.

- 5) Approach someone in your batch or in your locality with whom you have infrequent interactions. Imagine the context of an academic seminar where you two are trying to know each other better over lunch break and possibly collaborate on something in the future. Engage in a formal conversation in English with the aim of establishing a connection. Simultaneously record this conversation on a smartphone using the Recorder application. Prepare a written transcript of the recording. Approach your tutor at the study centre for his or her feedback.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have provided a brief overview of the different aspects of formal conversations. We have given you:

- an understanding of the notions of domain and register.
- the different interpretations of the notion of formality as studied by eminent linguists.
- a bird's eye view of the nuances of formal use of language with respect to English.
- a description of the various aspects of speaking with reference to a formal conversation, highlighting what we need to adhere to and what we need to avoid.
- an idea of how the 7 Cs influence the outcome of a formal conversation.
- a taste of how formal conversations transpire in the real world.

Before heading over to the next Unit, please make sure that you have answered all the questions given in 'Check Your Progress'. This will help you revisit the ideas we have already talked about while giving you some practice in expressing yourself in your own words. We hope that you have enjoyed learning about formal conversations.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to read more about formal conversations, you may consult:

Alan Barker, *Improve Your Communication Skills* (London: Kogan Page, 2000)

Shirley Taylor & Alison Lester, *Communication: Your Key to Success* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Business, 2009)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

2.10 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

For the answer to 1, refer to 2.2 and 2.3.

For the answer to 2, refer to 2.2.

Informal domain	Formal domain
Playground	College auditorium
College canteen	Lecture hall
Metro station	Father's office
Multiplex	Police station
Kitchen	Hospital
	Court room
	Principal's office

Check Your Progress 2

Formal Conversation

- 1) None of the sentences can be used in a formal conversation.

Informal	Formal
The plan to evacuate the area won't work out as there aren't enough vehicles to drop everyone off at the safe zone.	The plan to evacuate the area will not succeed as there are not enough vehicles to transport everyone to the safe zone.
Rohit went ballistic after his brother cocked up his plan to attend the long-awaited event.	Rohit was furious after his brother ruined his plan to attend the long-awaited event.
I want this cleaned immediately.	Can you please get this cleaned as soon as possible?
I penalised some of the employees for being always late.	Some of the employees were penalised for consistent lack of punctuality.

For the answer to 2, refer to 2.5.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (d), 2 (c), 3 (b)

4) Sample conversation

Sunil: Good morning, Ashok. It is a big day for you! I am very glad on your promotion.

Ashok: Good morning, Sunil. Yes, it is a big day. But it is also a day full of anxiety for me.

Sunil: You have a lot of experience with the bank. It will be very helpful to you in your new role.

Ashok: I have never managed people before. I hope I will be able to do justice to all the new responsibilities.

Sunil: You do not need to be so anxious. You will do fine. You are a natural leader, and you will lead well.

Ashok: Do you truly think so, Sunil?

Sunil: I am certain about it. You have always been an impressive coach. It was your leadership that led the bank's cricket team to victory in the inter-bank tournament.

Ashok: Managing a cricket team and managing a branch are not exactly the same thing.

Sunil: Yes, not exactly but in a number of ways they are. First, being a manager requires putting together a reliable team in which the members trust each other.

Ashok: That is an accurate observation. When team members do not trust each other, they are unable to perform optimally and it leads to trouble.

Sunil: Second, a manager needs to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the members of his team. This assessment helps to identify the right people for the right requirements.

Ashok: Yes, that is true. To get the best out of my team members, I need to know their strengths and weaknesses. Then, I can coach them accordingly if the need arises.

Sunil: Third, you need to identify the sources of motivation for your team members.

Ashok: Sunil, you are right once again. All of the team members need to be motivated.

Sunil: Fourth, you need to prepare for the unfavourable times. Also, at times, there will be problematic team members. You need to be ready to train them or discipline them.

Ashok: Yes, that is the toughest part of being a manager. I need to be good enough to train them and also firm enough to discipline them.

Sunil: You already know what you need to do as a manager. Although it is not similar to managing a cricket team, you will be fine. All you need are the occasional readjustments.

Ashok: Thank you for your faith in me, Sunil.

Sunil: You are welcome, Ashok.

5) Sample conversation

Mohan: Hello, I am Mohan.

Anuj: Hello, I am Anuj.

Mohan: This is a pretty good seminar so far, right?

Anuj: Yes, I like it. FICCI always delivers good seminars. All of the speakers are very well-known and also very knowledgeable. Did you attend the seminar on Leadership in last January?

Mohan: No, I missed that one. Who was the speaker?

Anuj: It was Mr. Shiv Khera. He is the author of *You Can Achieve More*. It was a great seminar. Mr. Khera gave us a lot of pointers on how to get the best out of people. You should sign up for that seminar next year.

Mohan: I certainly will. I am very interested in any discussion on Leadership. I wish to pursue a postgraduate diploma in Management and one day become a manager. It is a challenging task. It is the reason why I am here today.

Anuj: I too have a similar goal. I feel motivated by the stories of great organizational leaders. My aim will be to create harmony and cooperation as a future manager.

Mohan: To be honest, I also need to learn how to better manage my workload. I always run out of time. It seems like the days are getting shorter and shorter.

Anuj: You need to sign up for the *Learn How To Beat the Deadlines* seminar. It is happening next month.

Mohan: I will check whether I will have any free time next month. I know sometime next month I will have to go to Gandhinagar on an academic trip.

Anuj: Good for you. Mohan, its 1:30 PM already. I guess our break-time is over.

Mohan: The topic of the next session, *How To Make Powerful Presentations*, seems to be really interesting. We better not miss any part of it. Let us get back to our seats so that we can learn how to deliver a great presentation.

Anuj: Yes, as future managers we should be able to present confidently. It is one of the important skills to influence people.



UNIT 3 INFORMAL CONVERSATION

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Warm Up
- 3.2 Informal domain and informal register
- 3.3 Informal conversation and informal use of language
- 3.4 Proliferation of informal and urban expressions
- 3.5 Influence of context on interpretation
- 3.6 Issues faced by novice speakers in informal conversations
- 3.7 Examples of informal conversation
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Suggested Readings
- 3.10 Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through the details discussed in this Unit and completing the exercises, you will be able to:

- perceive how informal domains are different from formal ones;
- understand the aspects of informal use of language with reference to English;
- grasp how contexts influence interpretation of messages in informal conversations; and
- identify the challenges faced by novice speakers in informal conversations and learn how to overcome them.

3.1 WARM UP

- Think of at least 10 colloquial expressions that you use while talking to your friends. Don't be shy!

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- Apart from the consequence of being reprimanded, why do you feel that you cannot use them in the classroom with your teacher?

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3.2 INFORMAL DOMAIN AND INFORMAL REGISTER

This is the third Unit of the third block in your course on Reading & Speaking Skills. We are going to explore informal conversations and realise how different they are compared to formal conversations.

In the previous Unit, we have already learned how a domain is any social space of interaction where the communicative exchange or conversation takes place. Consequently, while using the spoken form of English, we need to be careful about the domain where the conversation is taking place or the domain being addressed through the use of our utterances.

Based on our knowledge of formality and the nature of formal domains, we now need to understand that informal domains are the exact opposite in nature. Informal domains are those social spaces of language use where we are relaxed and spontaneous about the topic of conversation due to the personal and intimate context; we are free to display a variety of linguistic emotions in accordance with the private and frivolous nature of such interactions. Social etiquettes are also quite different from organizational etiquettes. Informal domains, like the home environment, an amusement park, a roadside eatery, etc., induce a sense of comfort and freedom of expression.

To clarify this further, our homes are extremely personal spaces which we share with our immediate family members (in rare situations with extended family members), and therefore the domain of home is characterised by the greatest degree of intimate relationships and displays of intimacy. Consequently, we very rarely need to be serious, precise and courteous while interacting and conversing in the home domain (except for extraordinary circumstances like a medical emergency, an accident, etc.).

The cafeterias where we meet our friends over coffee, the markets which we frequent for buying essential commodities, the movie theatres where we enjoy the latest blockbuster, the playgrounds where we enjoy a game of cricket, the parks where we chat with our friends and laugh loudly over their jokes, etc., are all different informal domains.

The way we change our manner of using a language, (for instance, English) switching between formal and informal registers, is a sociolinguistic phenomenon and it illustrates the fact that both formal and informal domains comprise our lives and we switch codes to adapt to the communicative needs of the particular domain.

3.3 INFORMAL CONVERSATION AND INFORMAL USE OF LANGUAGE

What is an informal conversation?

An informal conversation is quite simply a regular conversation or a personal conversation that takes place in an informal domain, to address a regular or a personal issue. Informal conversations require us to be relaxed, casual, empathetic

and open, whereby we adjust the tone of voice according to who we are speaking to – somebody much younger to us, a close friend or a much senior family member.

Use of language

An informal conversation is different from a formal one in multiple ways, including form, use of language, purpose and content. There is absolute freedom in terms of the use of colloquial expressions, urban expressions, slang, broken utterances, etc. Naturally, there is a whole inventory of expressions that individuals tend to resort to in an informal space, but avoid in a formal environment.

An informal conversation has its own unique components. An informal conversation is set in motion with the participants informally greeting each other, at times with loud exclamations, vivid displays of emotion, use of nicknames, etc. Only when the participants are not known to each other, there is an informal introduction and subsequently the participants move on to the focus of the conversation. For instance, when we are introduced to a friend of a friend on an outing, such informal introductions become important. Such introductions can be done by an introducer (e.g., your friend who is known to you) or by the person himself or herself (who is not known to you).

Informal greetings to begin an informal conversation	
<i>Sample informal greeting</i>	<i>Sample response acknowledging the greeting</i>
Hey / Hi / Hey, Deepak / Hi, Deepak	Hey / Hi / Hey, Rishi / Hi, Rishi
How are you? / How are you, Deepak?	I'm good / All right / I'm good, Rishi / All right, Rishi
How are things?	Pretty good.
How's it going?	OK. Not bad.
How you doing?	I'm doing good.
What's up?	Nothing much / Not a whole lot / Nothing /Nothing special / Not much
What's new?	
What's happening?	
What are you up to?	
What's going on?	
Informal introduction, when the participants are not known to each other, before moving on to the focus of the informal conversation	
<i>Sample informal introduction</i>	<i>Sample informal response</i>
Veena, this is Mukesh. He's in my batch.	Hi Mukesh. Nice to meet you.
Hi. My name's Atul.	I'm Praveen. Nice to meet you.

The participants exchange ideas freely and turn-taking often takes a back-seat in open-ended informal conversations where people speak simultaneously. While in an informal conversation, we are visibly spontaneous, our approach is usually

laid-back, our expressions and linguistic choices are folksy and at times borderline crude depending on the audience and the setting. However, informal conversations too can have considerable alteration. For example, if a person is chatting with his or her friends, there is a greater probability to switch to a more comfortable, relaxed and unofficial way of talking. However, if somebody is informally interacting with a person for the first time and wants to impress that person, then possibly a more careful style of conversation will be adopted.

Conversational changes normally surface when people are comfortably using language to bond and improve rapport. These reflect how the language structures and expressions evolve, becoming more efficient and smoother since the original purpose of conversing in a particular language is to satisfactorily communicate ideas and feelings.

Some of the typical features that characterise the informal use of language and set it uniquely apart from formal use, are tabulated with examples.

	Informal use of language	Closest formal interpretation
Contractions are very frequently used in informal conversations.	Rahul's gonna join the party.	Rahul is going to join the party.
	She's kinda cute.	She is kind of cute. (implying: she is pretty)
	He's gonna leave cos he's hurt.	He is going to leave because he is hurt.
	I'm sorta tired after the day.	I am sort of tired after the day.
	Tell'em I ain't coming.	Tell them that I am not coming.
	Lemme see your hands.	Let me see your hands.
Relative pronouns are often dropped from relative clause constructions in informal conversations.	The girl I met in Ahmedabad was interested in football.	The girl whom I met in Ahmedabad was interested in football.
	Yesterday was a day everything went wrong.	Yesterday was a day when everything went wrong.
	Return me the book I gave you this morning.	Return me the book that I gave you this morning.
	This is the house Farhan built.	This is the house which Farhan built.
Ellipsis (i.e., intentionally omitting grammatical items) is	Seen my sweater?	Have you seen my sweater?
	Going to Delhi next week.	We are going to Delhi next week / I am going

extremely common in informal conversations.		to Delhi next week.
	Ready yet?	Are you ready yet?
	Never thought really.	I have never really thought.
Phrasal verbs, especially informal phrasal verbs feature prominently in informal conversations.	We finally pulled it off.	We finally succeeded.
	You're harping on the same point.	You are continuously repeating the same point.
	Sumit's friends forked out a lot of cash to get entry. Rohan showed up when my performance was nearly done.	Sumit's friends paid a lot of money to get entry. Rohan arrived when my performance was almost over.
Colloquial expressions, urban expressions and slangs are spontaneously used in informal conversations.	Chill man.	Relax man.
	Let's roll	Let us go. / Let us do this.
	Let's rock the show	Let us do the best that we can.
	I am feeling off.	I am feeling sad.
	You are stinking.	You are smelling awful.
	He was pissed off.	He was highly irritated.
	Grab a seat bud.	Take a seat my friend.
	That guy is a prick.	That guy is stubborn and annoying.
	Your work is so shitty.	Your work is very substandard.
	That place is a shithole.	That place is in a deplorable state/ That place is totally unlivable.
	They bailed out dude.	They left, man.
	What the hell is this?	What is this? (could be in response to a bad / surprisingly good state)
	My mind is fucked up.	I am really tired.
	That guy is an attention-whore.	That person is truly an attention seeker.
	You are such a prude.	You are so proud of yourself.
	Such a douchebag!	Such an arrogant and annoying person!

Informal conversations are personal and often contain gossips or rumours. Therefore, participants do not worry about taking responsibility as all statements made or ideas expressed are unofficial and in no way bind the speakers with respect to their appropriateness or factual correctness. As a result, it is the active form of the verb that is predominantly used.

	Informal use of language	As opposed to
Passive form of the verb is very rarely or never used in informal conversations.	Their policies destroyed the rainforest.	The rainforest was destroyed.
	Chinese hackers have stolen the information.	The information has been stolen.
	His behaviour pushed her into depression.	She was pushed into depression.
	The government has moved the project from Bhopal.	The project has been moved from Bhopal.

Finally, once the participants have expressed all that they wanted to, they end the informal conversation through an exchange of informal good-byes.

Ending the informal conversation with an exchange of informal good-bye	
<i>Sample informal good-bye</i>	<i>Sample informal response</i>
Nice meeting you. Take it easy. Take care.	You too.
I'm off. I'm out.	Ok, bye.
I gotta go. So long. See you. See you later. Bye.	See you / See you later / Bye

We will now discuss, how in the present age, informal and urban expressions are being added to the mental inventories of teenagers at a rapid pace. But before we do that, let us answer a few simple questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Talk about at least four informal domains where you converse on a weekly basis. Briefly describe the purpose of such conversations.

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- 2) Elaborate upon two aspects of informal use of English with at least four sentential examples in each case.

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- 3) Do participants in an informal conversation always wait for their turn? How is this different from a formal conversation?

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3.4 PROLIFERATION OF INFORMAL AND URBAN EXPRESSIONS

The growing knowledge of informal, urban expressions is to be attributed to the effect of the virtual world, in certain societal contexts. Speaking about the Indian context, the teenage groups accounting for the bulk of the College and the University population, exhibit an enhanced understanding of urban expressions like “Swag”, “Bae”, “G.O.A.T”, “Lit”, “lulz” and others. Social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc., have expanded our inventory of informal expressions. Colloquial slangs and cuss words also appear prominently in our annexed mental lexicons. It is obvious that interactions amongst diverse communities will bolster our word inventories, improve our understanding of culture-specific expressions and linguistically empower us to comprehend each-other better.

As Professor James Katz elucidates, “*Social interaction includes both the exchange of information among individuals and groups online and the influences of online interaction on offline communication, both face to face and through other media.*” There is the added implication of affected world-views that is mostly taken for granted or overlooked. Cultural exchanges perpetrated by the inter-mingling of individuals in a multi-lingual virtual platform, will in course of time, trigger serious thoughts on world views, encoded in one’s language and alter perceptions. The alternating trends of language usage will modify the outlook and interactions of speech communities. Brevity, clarity and context-specificity will be affected.

Professor J. Katz argues that “*Self-expression blends ineluctably with group expression.*” An individual acquainted to and preferring an informal style of speech, will cling to a unique understanding of worldly affairs, different from an individual who does not prefer too much informality. There will also be a pattern

of switching manner of language use with changing domains for that individual. The shifts in language use as the person leaves home for a new day, then greets the neighbour, has a laugh while coming across a friend on the streets and then finally settles down in his chair at his work-place will be distinct. The word-order of the language, used by the person, will be intact but there will be changes with respect to the inventory of words with changing domains.

3.5 INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT ON INTERPRETATION

Context has a powerful influence on an informal conversation, specifically on the way our utterances are interpreted. We can understand *context* in two ways – linguistic context and social context.

Most of the time when we speak, our sentences are not solitary. They are accompanied by more sentences and the totality of it forms the *discourse*. When our listeners or readers try to make sense of what we have already articulated, they do not interpret sentences in isolation. They interpret our words and sentences in connection with the other words and sentences in the spoken discourse. Linguistic context comprises these surrounding words and sentences that influence the interpretation of a particular utterance in a spoken discourse. For instance, let us consider the following sentence: *I'm going to die*. Now let us look at the same sentence in two different linguistic contexts.

1st context: *I have been having these terrible bouts of splitting pain in the back of my head. My doctor instructed me to undergo a few diagnostic tests. Finally, he revealed that I am at the last stage of head-neck cancer. I'm going to die. I don't know how to tell this to my family members. They depend on me so much. This is going to be very hard for them to accept.*

2nd context: *It's been more than a year now that I have been working under Mr. Phillips. He never understands my personal problems. He keeps pushing more and more work even when I am clearly in need of a break. Today he gave me a dozen new manuscripts and asked me quite sternly to finish them by the weekend. I'm going to die. This is just too much to handle now. Then again, I can't resign. I need money to pay my college tuition fee.*

In the first linguistic context, “*I'm going to die*” evidently signifies the speaker's impending death due to an irreversible and untreatable stage of cancer. However, in the second linguistic context, “*I'm going to die*” does not signify death. The statement reflects the immense mental pressure that the speaker is under and can hardly cope up with.

Now, that we have a brief idea about *linguistic context*, let us move to the idea of *social context*.

Social context, very simply, takes into account the features of the domain where the interlocutors are situated, the social profiles of the interlocutors and the moment when the interlocutors engage in a conversation (e.g., it could be an ordinary moment that is typical of the regular state of affairs, or it could be a special moment like a colleague's wedding, or it could be a moment of grief like a funeral, etc.).

For instance, let us again consider the sentence: *I'm going to die*. An individual who has just been in a road accident and is being taken to the hospital in an ambulance, is just being extremely anxious and scared about the nature of his or her injuries, when he or she says, "I'm going to die". On the other hand, when a perfectly healthy and medically fit man, about to get married in the next few hours, says "I'm going to die" to his friends, he is just being nervous and jittery about marital life and the responsibilities that come with it. It is in fact a frivolous statement, ridiculously equating marriage and death, in the second context.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain how social context influences interpretation with at least two clear examples of informal use of English.

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- 2) Explain how linguistic context influences interpretation with at least two clear examples of informal use of English.

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- 3) Words like "Bae", "Lulz", "hooman", "turnt" cannot be found in normal dictionaries. Yet, we increasingly use such words in informal conversations. Explain with your own opinion.

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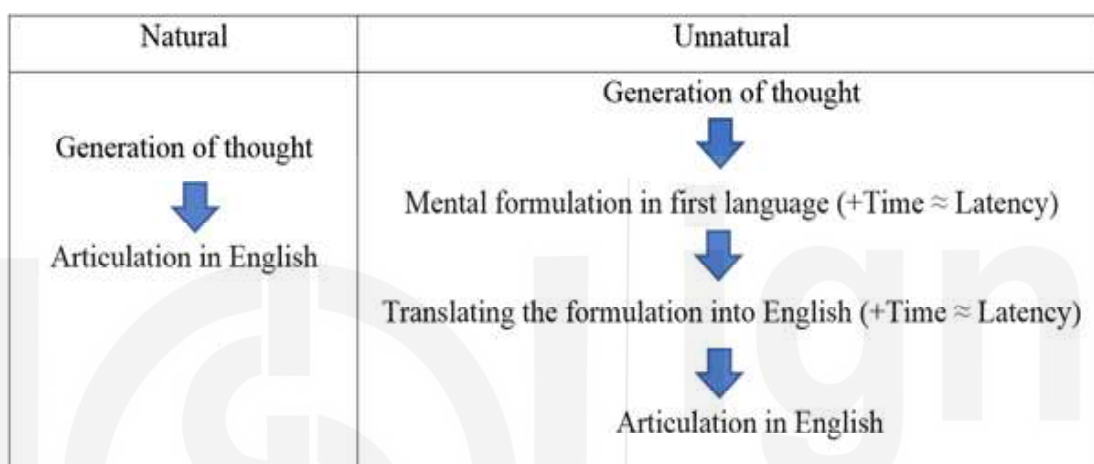
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3.6 ISSUES FACED BY NOVICE SPEAKERS IN INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

The challenge of hesitation is the most common of all and it plagues a large number of English users in the Indian context. This hesitancy and lack of confidence affects the quality of our informal conversations. Hesitation has different implications for formal and informal conversations. While in formal

conversations hesitation can negatively impact the outcome of specific events or vital professional initiatives, in informal conversations hesitation can negatively influence the nature of our intimate associations, the strength of our relationships, the trust shared with people and many other significant personal avenues around which our lives primarily revolve.

Now, the issue of hesitation can be due to a long-term lack of opportunities to speak, absence of people to use English with or even poor level of confidence, being used to a unidirectional mode of conversation where you have preferred to just listen. Juxtaposed with this very issue, is the overarching tendency of Indian learners to conceptualise something in the first language and then transfer those mental constructions onto English. Not only does this lead to Indianized varieties of English, but also induces a latency in the overall process.



The latency leads to a break of flow and when this happens multiple times, it creates self-doubt in the speaker's mind. Now, honing the ability to think and speak in English without first language interference, takes time as well as practice. However, a good starting point for you can be to record yourself and send the audio file using a number of applications like Messenger, Whatsapp, Skype, etc., to the intended listener. You can also ask for the study-centre tutor's feedback on such a recording with his or her permission. You can then listen to the self-recorded content and tally it with the tutor's feedback to better identify areas that require improvement. A productive drill for all of you who grapple with hesitation and low confidence, is also to speak freely alone, in front of a mirror for a fixed time on a regular basis. In this way, in the absence of probing eyes, hesitant speakers can build up the confidence to speak and subsequently handle informal conversations with ease.

Another great way to improve informal conversational skills is through collaborative and participative activities, i.e., through activities that require us to discuss in informal groups before performing something individually (for instance, being the representative of the Humanities stream in a discussion about the University fest) as well as activities where we need to interact informally as a team (for instance, a trip planned by the Department to a place of interest, a departmental get-together to welcome the freshers, etc.). Now considering the use of such activities to hone speaking skills, even when conducted under the supervision of an instructor, the instructor simply facilitates the process and never intervenes in the communicative channel which is completely at the level of the participants. Even mistakes committed in the process of such informal exchanges are valuable lessons and are better imbibed through actual experiences rather

than simply reading about them. In fact, such lessons are less regretful in the long run when gained through informal conversations.

An important issue with respect to informal conversations is that often in the presence of multiple interlocutors, the aspect of reciprocity gets blocked. As speakers, our focus gets shifted to such an extent on how the surrounding listeners are judging us, based on their facial expressions as well as their non-verbal feedback, that we fail to follow our own speech and as a result, are later on oblivious of the quality of our own speech. This escalates tension, self-doubt and anxiety. Recording in privacy is especially helpful for conscious, hesitant speakers. In course of time, the level of confidence exceeds a necessary threshold, after which the gaze of the listeners ceases to bother such speakers.

Let us now look at two sample informal conversations to revisit all the aspects of informal use of English, that we have discussed.

Study the sample conversations carefully, taking note of all the informal nuances that the participants are indulging in.

3.7 EXAMPLES OF INFORMAL CONVERSATION

The first example, that we are going to look at, is of a simple informal conversation between Ruchi Chaturvedi, who is a college student and her mother Sandhya Chaturvedi, who is a homemaker.

The conversation takes place as Ruchi returns home and finds her mother preparing *paneer parantha*.

Ruchi: Mumma, I'm home.

Sandhya: Hey, beta. How was college? How was your exam?

Ruchi: College was OK, and my exam was really good. Mumma, I was so worried about the exam, but now I feel awesome. What a relief!

Sandhya: Well, I'm glad to hear that. You've been studying so hard the past few weeks. Now, just relax and enjoy life.

Ruchi: What are you cooking? Umm! It smells so good.

Sandhya: I'm making *paneer parantha*. I know this is your favourite, beta.

Ruchi: Wow! It looks so yummy. Oh, I see *kheer* over there too. Looks like you've been busy mumma.

Sandhya: Sure have been! Your brother wants to take something sweet for tiffin tomorrow. So, that *kheer*'s for him. Don't you dare steal from it, Ruchi! I'm watching you!

Ruchi: All right. Fine. Can I at least have a *parantha*? I want to taste it right now.

Sandhya: Don't want to wait till dinner?

Ruchi: It looks so yummy, and I bet it's damn tasty. I don't want to wait. Please, mumma?

Sandhya: OK, go ahead. Have your fill.

Ruchi: Did you see the new recipe posted on Get Curried? I think it's called Afghani parantha.

Sandhya: No, I didn't. Want to try it though. Your papa loves parantha.

Ruchi: Same with me, mumma.

Sandhya: Mohit too. We are one parantha-crazy family.

Ruchi: Well, when are you planning to make it? I wanna watch and learn. Should we use onion or keema stuffing?

Sandhya: We haven't done keema for long. Let's use keema. I'll get some from the supermarket tomorrow. We can start in the afternoon once you get home.

Ruchi: I need to finish an assignment with a buddy. I won't get home till 7:30. Will it be too late, mumma? If that's late, you can start without me.

Sandhya: 7:30 sounds fine. I'll finish preparing the rest of the dishes. Then I'll keep everything ready for our session before you're home. OK?

Ruchi: Also make sure we have enough flour, mumma. Seems like you've used a lot to make the paranthas today.

Sandhya: Don't worry. Still plenty of flour in stock. Enough to make at least forty paranthas.

Ruchi: Forty, huh? Forty sounds like a good number, but let's not overdo. Let's make about twelve.

Sandhya: OK, we'll make twelve paranthas tomorrow. No more, no less.

Ruchi: It's a deal.

Sandhya: Enough about making paranthas. I need to start making daal and raita for dinner. Oh no! It's 6:30 already. Your papa and Mohit will be home anytime now. I'm sure they'll be hungry as hell and want dinner right away.

Ruchi: What do we have for dinner tonight?

Sandhya: Well, paranthas already made. I'll make daal and raita to go with the paranthas.

Ruchi: It's been long since I've helped you in kitchen. Need any help, mumma?

Sandhya: No, beta. Go, work on your assignment if you want. Leave the cooking to me.

Ruchi: Thanks, mumma. Call me whenever dinner's ready. I don't wanna be late for your special daal, raita, parantha and kheer.

Sandhya: The kheer's for Mohit! Ruchi, don't you dare!

Ruchi: I know, mumma. Just kidding!

Pooja and Reshma are planning for the weekend. This is something that a lot of you will do with your new friends. Let's take a look at the conversation!

Pooja: So, what are your plans for this weekend?

Reshma: I don't know. Want to get together or something?

Mayank: How about a movie? PVR Vasant Kunj is showing *Avengers: Endgame*.

Pooja: Sounds like a good idea. Maybe we should eat before that.

Mayank: That's fine with me. Where do you wanna meet?

Reshma: Let's meet at McDonalds. Haven't tried their new chicken burger yet.

Pooja: Good idea again. I heard their new lamb burger rocks. No wonder it'll be good cos McDonalds always has the best burger in town.

Mayank: OK. When should we meet?

Reshma: Well, the movie is at 2:00, 4:00, 6:00 and 8:00.

Pooja: Why don't we catch the 2:00PM show? Let's meet at McDonalds around noon. That'll give us plenty of time to enjoy the burger.

Mayank: My cousin Juhi's in town. Mind if she tags along? I'd hate to leave her alone.

Reshma: Whoa! Juhi in town? Hell yeah! Get her, Mayank. Pooja, you remember Juhi, right? We met her at Mayank's birthday party a year back.

Pooja: Sorry! I don't quite remember her. Remind me how she looks like?

Mayank: She's sort of athletic, has a dragon tattoo and about your height.

Pooja: She wears glasses, right?

Mayank: Yeah, and she did that crazy dance in the party.

Pooja: Oh, I remember her now. Yeah, do bring her along Mayank. She's so cool, and super funny too.

Mayank: Thanks. She'll be excited to meet you both.

Reshma: What's she into these days?

Mayank: Well, she graduated last June. She's planning to teach from next year.

Pooja: That's nice. Where's she planning to teach?

Mayank: She's a kid-person. Absolutely loves them. So, she's targeting kindergarten.

Reshma: Wow! Kindergarten!? She must be really patient. I've always felt kindergarten is the most difficult to teach. Most kids never been to school, and they never been away from their mothers too.

Mayank: Juhi'll do fine. Not worried about her. She has her way with children.

Pooja: Think the first few weeks gonna be tough. Once the routine's set, shouldn't be a problem.

Reshma: You're right. The kids might even enjoy school. They'll have many new friends to play with.

Mayank: Also, a lot of new things for them to do. A lot of craftwork in kindergarten. I'm always amazed by what kindergarten teachers do.

Pooja: Yeah, I've seen my sister come home with such cool stuff.

Reshma: Maybe we can ask Juhi to show us something cool to do for this Diwali.

Pooja: Well, we can also check out the craft store after the movie. What say, Mayank?

Mayank: I'll talk to her. I think she'll like that. Might also help her with some projects for Diwali.

Reshma: Fabtree's a good store for crafts. They've good variety. You can find almost anything there.

Pooja: There's a Fabtree not far away from PVR Vasant Kunj. I think it's just around the corner, on Mall Road. Can even walk till there.

Mayank: So, we plan to meet for burger at noon, movie at two, and shop at Fabtree later. Right?

Pooja and Reshma: Yeah!

Now, that we have learned about informal conversations, we will move to the next Unit to discuss the various aspects of telephone conversation or telephonic conversation.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) How does a speaker's hesitation influence informal conversations?

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- 2) Pair up with a good friend in your batch or in your locality. Imagine a situation in which your mother has given you the responsibility to go to the grocery store. You are busy with an incomplete assignment. Engage in an informal conversation in English with your friend, telling him or her to do the necessary on your behalf.

Simultaneously record this conversation on a smartphone using the Recorder application. Prepare a written transcript of the recording. Approach your tutor at the study centre for his or her feedback.

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3.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have provided an overview of the aspects of informal conversations along with the different features of the informal use of English. We have given you:

- an idea of how an informal domain is personal in character and therefore fundamentally different from a formal domain.
- a bird's eye view of the interesting characteristics of the informal use of English.
- a glance at how informal and urban expressions are increasingly flooding our inventory of words.
- an understanding of how context specificities shape our interpretation of messages.
- brief insights into the sort of issues that trouble speakers and affect the quality of informal conversations.

Before heading over to the next Unit, please make sure that you have gone through all the questions given in 'Check Your Progress'. This will help you think about what we have taught while offering some good practice in expressing yourself in your own words. We hope that you have enjoyed learning about informal conversations.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to read more about informal conversations, you may consult:

Angela Cora Garcia, *An Introduction to Interaction: Understanding Talk in Formal and Informal Settings* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Shirley Taylor & Alison Lester, *Communication: Your Key to Success* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Business, 2009)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

3.10 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

For answers to 2 and 3, refer to 3.3.

Check Your Progress 2

For answers to 1 and 2, refer to 3.5.

For the answer to 3, refer to 3.4.

Check Your Progress 3

For the answer to 1, refer to 3.6.

2) Sample conversation

Abhinav: Mumma asked me to get grocery before leaving for work, but I need to finish my assignment. Can you go Vishnu?

Vishnu: I guess I can. I'm done with my assignment. What did aunty tell you to get?

Abhinav: Well, she wanted me to get enough for the whole week. Need meat, fish and vegetables. Rest, we can get anything for snacks and breakfast.

Vishnu: What do you want for breakfast?

Abhinav: Some cereal as usual.

Vishnu: Cereal everyday sucks bro. I'll get you some noodles too.

Abhinav: Get the new saboodana tikki from the frozen snacks section please. Want to find out how it tastes.

Vishnu: Do you have enough coffee and tea for uncle and aunty?

Abhinav: Yeah, there's enough. That reminds me we need some milk. We're almost out of it.

Vishnu: OK. What do you want for snacks?

Abhinav: Chips is cool. Possibly some chocolate cookies too.

Vishnu: Better write down all of this. I'm afraid I'll forget them by the time I'm at the shop. Don't wanna do two trips.

Abhinav: Right! For meat, mumma wants some chicken and some mutton.

Vishnu: Just any portion of mutton?

Abhinav: Forgot to ask mumma about that. Anyways, you can ask the butcher. He knows what's best.

Vishnu: OK. How about fish?

Abhinav: Mumma wants some basa. But make sure it's fresh.

Vishnu: How much of basa?

Abhinav: Well, get four filets. Mumma doesn't like getting the whole fish.

Vishnu: Any spices so aunty can marinate the fish?

Abhinav: Yeah, get some cumin and coriander powder.

Vishnu: Now, how about vegetables?

Abhinav: Get carrots, potatoes, spinach and some spring onions.

Vishnu: OK. I've noted everything. Anything else?

Abhinav: Nope. Quite a list to take care of. You should get going.

Vishnu: Yeah, the list is long. By the time I reach the payment counter, I'll have a full basket. All right, I'm all set to go. Will be back soon.

Abhinav: Bye! Travel safely please!

Vishnu: I will. Don't worry. See you soon.

UNIT 4 TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Warm Up
- 4.2 Telephone and telephonic communication
- 4.3 Telephone conversation / Telephonic conversation
- 4.4 Looking at a few telephone conversations
- 4.5 Different aspects of telephone conversation
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Suggested Readings
- 4.8 Answers

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our goal in this particular Unit and the accompanying exercises, is to prepare you to be able to:

- understand what is telephonic communication;
- realise how a telephonic conversation is different from a face-to-face conversation;
- grasp the nuances of language use in a telephone conversation; and
- apply the discussed ideas to improve the outcome of your telephone conversations.

4.1 WARM UP

- Do you remember the last time when you planned something with your friend over a telephone call? What were the things that you actually discussed and what were those that you both agreed to discuss face-to-face?

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- Based on the above recollection, do you feel that there are certain issues which cannot be discussed or explained over a telephone conversation? If so, why? Be frank!

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4.2 TELEPHONE AND TELEPHONIC COMMUNICATION

This is the fourth Unit of the third Block in your course on Reading & Speaking Skills. We are going to explore the interesting aspects of telephone conversations.

Communication underwent a historic transformation with the invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876 and the Bell Telephone Company was launched in 1877.

However, it was with Martin Cooper's invention of the mobile phone in 1984, that the telephonic protocol changed the way we communicate forever.

Subsequent upgradation of technology, its cheap industrial production and spread of mobile telephonic networks completely revolutionised the society. Communicative practices have undergone radical changes due to the Information Revolution brought about by mobile telephonic networks as well as the allied World Wide Web. Since its inception and implementation, the Internet has transformed the notions of accessibility and connectivity. With the fusion of mobile telephony and wireless internet, the tele-communication sector witnessed humongous advancements, research initiatives and policy changes to harness the limitless potential of virtual spaces and the 'Open' web. Since the commercialization of the Internet in 1991 to 2012, online statistics report an incredible 2.4 billion people having frequented the services offered by the Web. It is absolutely certain, that this number has gone up exponentially in the successive years, accelerated by the cheap availability of smartphones.

Language, being the mode of expression and exchange of ideas, would naturally be at the core of such a technology-fuelled communicative evolution sweeping the society. The global network of simultaneously connected telephone and smartphone users, exhibits a highly diverse linguistic community. The multilingual and multicultural conglomerate of telephone and smartphone users reflects the dynamic nature of telephonic speech communities, where code-mixing, code-switching and neologisms (i.e., formation of new words and ways of expressing) are rampant and highly unpredictable. The notion of unpredictability arises due to the shifting patterns of language use.

According to a report published in January 2020, the findings of a study conducted by the Dubai-based market research firm techARC, reveal that over 500 million Indians are communicating through smartphones and 77 percent of them are also using the online mode of communication. Another report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India predicted the number of internet users in India to rise to 500 million (approx.) by June 2018, with an increase in rural internet penetration to 20.26% (December 2017) from 18% (December 2016). Furthermore, a report by the Indian Cellular and Electronics Association in July, 2020, predicts approximately 820 million Indians to be communicating via smartphones.

These incredible numbers show how widespread telephonic communication is in the present Indian context. Due to the ease of keeping and carrying a smartphone, telephonic communication is predominantly through smartphones and mobile phones in the present context. There are telephones using wired

landline networks too in case of establishments, government offices, corporate organisations, public institutions, etc. However, the proportion of such wired telephone connections is substantially less compared to wireless telephone connections. The reason is simple. Wired telephones need the users to be in spaces where the infrastructure for the wired connection has already been supplied and set up by the network provider. This is problematic for individuals who need to move a lot and change addresses due to work related requirements and transfers. Wireless telephonic networks are flexible and easier to maintain; even in the situation of having been transferred, the roaming network mode comes into play. So, by and large, the preference for wireless, mobile telephonic networks is much more than wired telephonic networks.

Now, when we are discussing the issue of telephonic communication, how do you think we can categorise it with respect to what we have learned about formal and informal domains?

Is telephonic communication formal or informal? Think about it.

If your answer is formal, you are wrong. If your answer is informal, you are wrong once more.

You need to realise that the telephone or the smartphone network is a medium. Telephonic communication is medium-centric communication. It is the telephone or smartphone users who are situated in particular domains when they are making a telephone call. Moreover, the purpose with which a call is made can be official or unofficial. The time of the call too is a factor. Therefore, telephonic communication can be formal or informal depending on the domains where the caller and the receiver are situated, the caller's purpose as well as the time when the call takes place.

Undoubtedly, telephonic communication is an integral part of our contemporary communicative practices. While individuals in urban areas become well acquainted with the different functions of telephones and smartphones from a very young age, it does take some time and experience to become efficient telephonic communicators.

While receiving an incoming call	While making an outgoing call
It is important for us to listen attentively and understand the main points which will help us realise the objective of the caller. It is equally important to reply carefully while ensuring that you address the caller's concern or request or instruction.	It is essential to speak clearly and objectively. Depending on the personal or official nature of the call, the relevant emotional input or professional courtesy needs to be ensured. On getting the response back from the other end, it is vital to assess whether the response addresses and thereby fulfils our purpose. If not, then the communication continues.

4.3 TELEPHONE CONVERSATION / TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION

What is a telephone conversation?

A telephone (or telephonic) conversation is quite simply any conversation that occurs over a telephonic network using a wired telephone or a wireless smartphone. Since telephone conversations comprise a considerable chunk of our present-day communicative exchanges, it is necessary to take them seriously regardless of whether a telephone call is formal or informal. In fact, for those working as customer service executives, receptionists, booking agents, etc., conversing over telephone calls is the most significant aspect of their jobs.

The characteristic feature of a telephone conversation is that it is not face-to-face. This negates the possibility of getting non-verbal cues. As speakers in a face-to-face conversation, you can form an impression about the other participants in the conversation from their non-verbal cues, like facial expressions, eye-contact, hand movement, etc. It also helps you to better understand their response or feedback in a face-to-face conversation. However, in a telephone conversation all bodily non-verbal cues are blocked as the interlocutors cannot see each other. Although you cannot see the interlocutor, you can hear him or her. So, the paralinguistic features of the caller or the receiver's voice are still available and influence a telephone conversation. The properties of the speaker's voice, his or her style of speaking, choice of words and manner will determine whether the speaker will have a favourable or an unfavourable impression on the listener.

Paralinguistic features of voice	Possible implication
Warmth of tone	Whether the speaker's tone is friendly or aggressive, empathetic or dismissive, smooth or abrupt, co-operative or non-cooperative, will influence the outcome of the telephone conversation.
Pace	How fast or slow, fluent or hesitant, the speaker is, will set the flow of the telephone conversation. Pace is also often linked to the sense of urgency.
Inflexion	The rise and fall of tone add important non-verbal information to the messages exchanged in a telephone conversation.
Loudness	The varying levels of loudness can indicate assertiveness, emphasis, intimidation, secrecy, etc.

Paying heed to the paralinguistic features of voice in a telephone conversation is critical, as the words exchanged in the conversation are transient but the impression created by the paralinguistic features of the speaker's voice remains. This impression subsequently influences all corresponding telephone conversations. In the informal domain, a negative impression can irreparably damage relationships. In the formal domain, there are others institutions and avenues that you can explore, in case the outcome of a formal telephone conversation was unsatisfactory with a specific company or organization.

We will next look at a few sample telephone conversations. But before we do that, let us answer a few simple questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How is a telephone conversation different from a face-to-face conversation?

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- 2) What are the paralinguistic features that influence the outcome of a telephone conversation?

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- 3) Is telephone conversation formal or informal? Explain with at least two examples.

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4.4 LOOKING AT A FEW TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

In the Indian context, a mother's concern is an undeniable fact for all teenagers. This concern amplifies when we are away from home to pursue higher education or on a job placement, etc. Consequently, a large number of informal telephonic calls revolve around mother-son or mother-daughter exchanges.

Let us look at this brief informal telephone conversation between Mrs. Majumdar and her daughter Sonali. Sonali is studying in Delhi and is away from her home town, Kolkata. Its early winter and Mrs. Majumdar is worried about how her daughter is coping in Delhi.

Mrs. Majumdar: Hello Guddi. How are you beta?

Sonali: I'm fine mumma. How are things at home?

Mrs. Majumdar: Well, everything's fine here. The weather's getting chilly. How's it there in Delhi?

Sonali: Oh mumma, don't ask! It's already freezing here. 5°C today and the wind just kills you!

Mrs. Majumdar: Wear double sweaters when you go out and don't forget your cap, muffler and gloves.

Sonali: Don't you worry, mumma. I'm always covered.

Mrs. Majumdar: Take care beta. I'll call again. Don't miss your lunch. Bye!

Sudden movie plans with friends are very common. Let us look at another brief informal telephone conversation between Shehnaaz and Kulsum. Shehnaaz wants Kulsum to join her for a movie.

Shehnaaz: Hey, it's me! How are you?

Kulsum: Hi Shehnaaz! I'm good, and you?

Shehnaaz: I'm great! Do you wanna join me for a movie tonight? They're showing *Spiderman: Far from Home*!

Kulsum: Sounds like fun! What time are we going?

Shehnaaz: There's a show at seven in the evening.

Kulsum: Perfect. I'll buy popcorn if you buy us some coke!

Shehnaaz: Sure thing. See you later!

Kulsum: Cool. See you in a bit.

Now that we have experienced two informal telephone conversations, let us look at a few formal ones.

A situation, most of us are familiar with, is when we make an official call and the person we intend to converse with is unavailable. Let us look at a brief formal telephone conversation between Aakash and the receptionist.

Aakash: Good morning, this is Aakash. May I speak to Mr. Nishant Sinha please?

Receptionist: Good morning, hold on please. I will put you through.

Aakash: Thank you.

Receptionist: You're welcome.

(After a few moments)

Receptionist: I am terribly sorry, Mr. Aakash. Mr. Sinha is not available at the moment. Would you like to leave a message?

Aakash: Yes please. Could you inform him that Aakash called?

Receptionist: Yes, of course.

Aakash: Thank you very much, good day!

Receptionist: Goodbye!

One of the commonest things that we all have done at some point is to call some agency or the company for getting a repair done or for getting something serviced.

Let us look at a formal telephone conversation where Suhail seeks help for getting his television repaired.

Garima: Thank you for calling Samsung World. May I help you?

Suhail: I bought an LED TV from your store last year, and I am having problems with it. I need it repaired.

Garima: Let me connect you to the Service department. One moment please.

Ravi: Service department, this is Ravi. How can I help you?

Suhail: I bought an LED TV from Samsung World last year and it needs to be repaired.

Ravi: What seems to be the problem?

Suhail: I am not very sure, but I think the problem is with the processor because the LED screen does not display the different features.

Ravi: The screen displayed nothing when you pushed the Start button?

Suhail: No, nothing.

Ravi: What is your television model?

Suhail: It is a Samsung Full HD LED UA43N5005.

Ravi: I can send a technician to take a look at your television. The service visit will cost 600 rupees. Also, if he needs to replace any part, that will be extra.

Suhail: That is expensive. I thought the repair cost is covered by warranty?

Ravi: When exactly did you buy the television?

Suhail: I bought it about fourteen months back.

Ravi: I am sorry. The standard warranty only covers a year. Did you buy extra warranty coverage at the time of purchase?

Suhail: No, I did not. Are there any other options apart from paying 600 rupees for the service visit?

Ravi: No, I am afraid not.

Suhail: I guess I just have to pay for it. When can you send the technician?

Ravi: I have tomorrow October the twenty fourth at 2:00PM available. Otherwise, the next date will be October the twenty sixth at 10:00AM.

Suhail: I will take the slot for tomorrow. Will you send a reminder message?

Ravi: The technician will give you a call in the morning to confirm the appointment.

Suhail: Will the technician accept debit card payment?

Ravi: Yes, he will. By the way, you can buy the extra warranty coverage now if you want to.

Suhail: How much does it cost?

Ravi: Two thousand rupees for one-year warranty, three thousand for two-years, and three thousand six hundred for three-years.

Suhail: Does it cover both service visit and cost of spares?

Ravi: It covers everything. Do you want to sign up for it?

Suhail: I am not sure right now.

Ravi: It will be good for you. We will send the technician as many times the television needs servicing. There is no limit on how many times you can call us in a year. Also, if the problem cannot be fixed, we will provide you with a new television.

Suhail: Fine. I want to sign up for the three-year warranty program.

Ravi: I think it is a smart investment. Are you going to pay by debit card now or do you want me to send you a bill?

Suhail: Send me a bill, please.

Ravi: One last thing before you end the call, I need your address please.

Suhail: Flat number 10, Kaveri Apartments, D6, Sector D, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070.

Ravi: Thank you. It is all set. Is there anything else I can help you with today?

Suhail: No. Thank you for your help.

Ravi: You are welcome. Have a nice day!

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) On the basis of the sample conversations, how do you think Mrs. Majumdar's and Aakash's choice of expressions are different? Explain your observations with examples from the two conversations.

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- 2) On the basis of the sample conversations, how is Suhail's style of speaking different from Shehnaaz? Additionally, comment on the quality of Suhail and Ravi's rapport compared to that of Kulsum and Shehnaaz.

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4.5 DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Telephone conversations can be used to accomplish a diverse range of objectives:

- You can advertise and sell some product or a service over a telephone conversation.
- You can enquire about and buy a particular product or subscribe to a particular service over a telephone conversation.
- You can discuss a personal or a professional issue over a telephone conversation.
- You can persuade a client or a friend to do or not do something over a telephone conversation.
- You can negotiate an important deal over a telephone conversation.
- You can network personally or professionally to expand the circle of people that you know.
- You can give or receive vital information over a telephone conversation.
- You can arrange for something to be done (like a delivery, an installation, etc.) over a telephone conversation.
- You can confirm your presence or absence with reference to a personal or a professional event.
- You can explain a point to a friend or a colleague over a telephone conversation.

And this list can go on infinitely.

Some of the clear advantages of a telephone conversation are as follows:

Speed: Having a telephone conversation does not require fixing a time to meet physically or the time to carefully word an e-mail or a letter. Formal telephone calls can often come with a time criterion where there is a specific window in the course of a day or a week when the call will be accepted. However, that is still easier considering no time being spent in physically travelling to meet the person with whom you need to converse. A telephone call is spontaneous and quick, provided the interlocutors are awake and are in a state to converse telephonically.

Personal involvement: In a telephone conversation, the interlocutors are able to hear each other and perceive the quality of personal or professional effort from the paralinguistic features of the speaker's voice.

Instantaneous feedback: Telephone conversations involve instantaneous feedback from the interlocutors unless one of them is unavailable for the conversation due to some reason. Receiving instantaneous feedback widens the scope for further discussion or better clarification of the issue or idea or purpose being addressed.

Now, how can you ensure that your telephone conversations have an impact and push you closer to the intended outcome? Let us look at a few crucial pointers for better telephone conversations.

- **You need to sound involved.** In a telephone conversation, the energy and enthusiasm in your voice can convey to the interlocutor how important your message is, or how serious you are about an idea, or how urgent it is for you to solve an issue. Due to the aspect of not being able to see each other's faces, telephone conversations demand the extra bit of energy to make up for this gap.

Look at Mahesh's involvement and enthusiasm in these two samples.

Sample telephone conversation lacking in energy and enthusiasm	Sample telephone conversation with appropriate energy and enthusiasm
Mahesh: Hello. Revathi: I am looking for Mahesh Nair, please. Mahesh: Yes, speaking. Revathi: Oh, hello Mahesh, this is Revathi Iyer from Jubilant Enterprises. Mahesh: OK, how can I help you?	Mahesh: Hello, Mahesh Nair here. Revathi: Hello Mahesh, I am Revathi Iyer from Jubilant Enterprises. Mahesh: Hello Revathi, good to hear from you.

- **You need to optimally utilise the time** in a telephone conversation to nurture your relationship with the interlocutor, improve the level of understanding and establish an empathetic connection.
- **You should be friendly** as well as candid in a telephone conversation, choosing expressions that meet the exact personal or professional requirements of the conversation.
- **The pitch and tone of your voice must vary** in accordance with the flow of the telephone conversation so that the interlocutor does not lose interest and remains engaged.
- **You should reciprocate** by appreciating the interlocutor's perspectives and displaying a keen interest in his or her opinion. Using the interlocutor's name at intervals and incorporating friendly expressions can result in a fruitful telephone conversation.
- **You must avoid weak and unhelpful expressions.** They can endanger the outcome of a telephone conversation and create a weak impression about you.

Weak expression to be avoided	You should use instead
Hello.	Hello, Sakshi Bhatia here. / Hello, this is Sakshi Bhatia from the Registrar's Office. / Good morning, this is the Registrar's office. / Good morning, Sakshi Bhatia speaking.
I'll call you back soon.	I'll call you back within the next 30 minutes.
You have got the wrong extension.	I am sorry, you have been put through to Mr. Rajeev Kumar. I will try to transfer your call.
What do you want me to do about it?	How can I help you, Mrs. Bhatia?
No problem.	You are welcome. / My pleasure.
That is impossible.	I will do my best to help you with this.
Who is this?	May I have your name please? / May I know who is on the line? /Who's calling please?
I don't know.	I am not sure, but I will try to find out for you.
The only thing I can do is...	The best thing I can do is...
Sorry to keep you waiting.	Thank you for holding.

- You should always target to **create a pleasant and positivist impression** to make the best out of a telephone conversation.
- **The most important thing is to be attentive** – attentive while speaking, attentive while listening. It is your fundamental responsibility to pay full attention to every interlocutor. Your hands, your eyes and your ears should not be occupied with something (like watching a video, playing a game, typing something simultaneously, etc.) that is unrelated to the telephone conversation that is going on.
- You need to give the interlocutor the time to think and reply. There should be meaningful and well-placed pauses which indicate that the interlocutor can now respond or reflect on whatever you have stated. Speaking without any pauses or gaps gives the impression of being inconsiderate and passively aggressive.
- You must behave suitably in a telephone conversation. Breathing weirdly into the microphone or not moving away from a source of annoying background noise are red flags. You need to make appropriate adjustments to create a favourable impression in the interlocutor's mind.

We will next look at certain occasions when a telephone conversation is not advisable.

- When you need to convey an extremely bad news or disappointing development, it is better to converse in person.
- When you need to preserve a formal record of a communicative exchange, it is better not to use telephone conversation.
- When something complicated requiring extensive deliberation needs to be addressed, it is good to avoid a telephone conversation.
- When a difficult personal situation needs to be handled, it should not be done via a telephone conversation as in such situations physical, non-verbal cues are important for amplifying the emotional component of the interaction.

Now, that you have an idea about telephone conversations, we will move to the next Block where your speaking skills will be put to practice.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Based on the discussed points, let us find out which are the areas where you need to work on to improve telephonic conversational skills. Please be honest. Tick whichever box applies for what you actually do.

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
I answer the telephone on or before the third ring.			
I clearly state my name at the very beginning while making or receiving a call.			
I consciously try to create a positive impression by sounding positive and not using any negative words.			
I speak clearly and directly into the microphone.			
I pay full attention to the interlocutor in every telephone conversation.			
I apologise when I have been unable to address the interlocutor's concern in an incoming call.			
I ask for the interlocutor's permission before putting him or her on hold.			
I am patient and responsive while engaging in a telephone conversation.			

I convey enthusiasm, interest and commitment in my tone in a telephone conversation.			
I try to ensure that the interlocutor is satisfied in a telephone conversation.			
I try to establish a bond of empathy with the interlocutor in a telephone conversation.			

- 1) Activity: Engage in an informal telephone conversation with your friend enquiring about his/her wellbeing amidst the coronavirus pandemic and the widespread disruption of life. Focus on being empathetic and positive.

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- 2) Activity: Call the Customer Care Section of your telephone network provider and clearly convey your dissatisfaction with the present plan. Talk about a better plan being provided by a rival network provider and how you are considering the option of porting your present telephone number. Focus on how the Customer Service Representative tries to persuade you to not leave.

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have looked at the different aspects of telephone conversations. We have given you:

- an idea of how telephonic communication can be both formal and informal.
- a bird's eye view of the different nuances of language use in telephone conversations.
- a taste of how telephone conversations unfold in formal and informal settings.
- an understanding of the issues that can negatively impact the outcome of telephonic conversations.

Before heading over to the next Block, please make sure that you have completed all the questions across all the 'Check Your Progress' sections in the four Units of this Block.

We hope that you have enjoyed learning about telephone conversation.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to learn more about telephone conversations, you may consult:

Elizabeth Kuhnke, *Communication Skills for Dummies* (Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2013)

Richard Ellis, *Communications Skills: Stepladders to success for the professional* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

4.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

For answers to 1 and 2, refer to 4.3.

For the answer to 3, refer to 4.2.

Check Your Progress 2

For all answers refer to 4.4

Check Your Progress 3

For the activities, consult your tutor at the study centre.