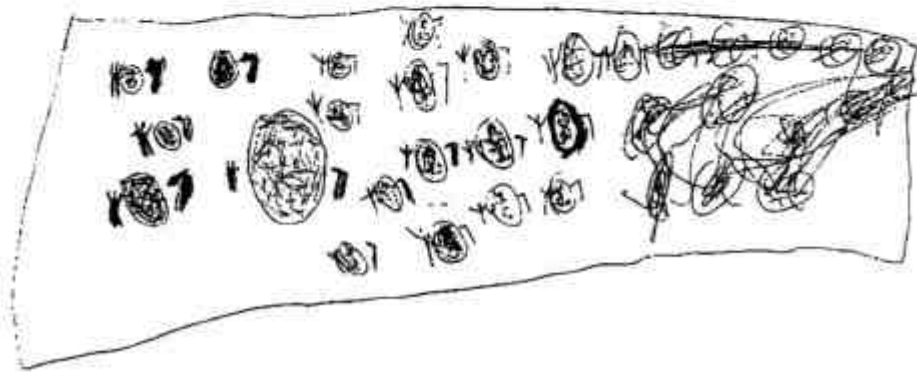


Language Strand

Unit 2: The Nature of Language

Module 2.2 Spoken and Written Language

EW
NOJEIHLNT.
ERBTKEBEIHQILXZYTeiA@CEB.
GLOYBIEIORBIE M@BRB.
ORTEKPLTEBIEIHOI.



Lecturer Support Material

Acknowledgements

Materials written and compiled by Dr. Joan Kale.

Acknowledgments:

1. The Alphabet Makers pp 17, 44, 65
2. The Psychology of Literacy p. 148
3. Spoken and Written Language

Layout and diagrams supported by Nick Lauer.

Date: 22 January 2003



Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Project

Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)
GRM International

Papua New Guinea-Australia Development Cooperation Program

Unit outline

| Unit | | Modules |
|--|-----|---|
| Unit 2 The Nature of Language | 2.1 | Language Families (Core) |
| | 2.2 | Spoken and Written Language (Core) |
| | 2.3 | Language Structure (Core) |

Icons



Read or research



Write or summarise



Activity or discussion



Suggestions for lecturers

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Module 2.2. Spoken and Written Language

Rationale

This module contains a brief introduction to the technology we know as literacy. It includes information about why people from many social groups the world over felt the need to move from face-to-face oral interaction to that of writing down aspects of their languages in permanent form. It provides answers to some questions, such as: Under what conditions did people find written records necessary? Who developed these written down varieties of language? Who had access to the written language? How different were the written-down languages from the spoken language varieties?

As well as the questions raised above, we want to consider the impact of learning to become literate in today's schools. Teachers are concerned about why children who come to school able to relate fluently in talk to one another in one, two or more languages, sometimes have difficulty in becoming competent and effective writers and readers. Why should this be? So, we examine a number of related issues that may go part of the way to explaining why children may have problems with academic writing. If we as teachers are clear about these issues, we will have a better idea about what we can do to help pupils learn the special language of schooling.

How to use this module

This module is basically an information-giving exercise. However, it includes:

- Activities for the students to engage with, and to discuss with their classmates
- Topics for the students to explore in private study or as assessment
- Issues for the students to think about.

Through participating in these activities, it is anticipated that students will have a better understanding of the complex learning task expected of children as they move from the oral to the written mode in the processes of schooling.

Section 1. Spoken language came first

Introduction

The spoken language came first. For many millennia, speech was sufficient to meet the communicative and social needs of people who lived in nomadic communities. Literacy, on the other hand, gradually developed long after speech, to serve human needs that the spoken mode could not satisfy. Writing becomes important when some kind of permanent record of facts, information or ideas is needed. So we see that where literacy has been taken up in a society, it is because literacy fulfils functions and purposes that the oral mode cannot fulfil.

The two kinds of language – speech and writing - have evolved to serve different purposes, in different contexts (or settings). Speech is more appropriate to serve some social functions; written text is more appropriate to serve other social functions. We could think of bilingual communities here as an analogy: people do not use each of their languages in every social situation. One language is appropriate for a certain set of interactions, depending on who is being spoken to, what is being spoken about, what the purpose of the talk is. In the same way, there is no point in doing exactly the same things in speech as in writing. Certain social functions are better served by one rather than the other.

Why do societies move from face-to-face interaction to written modes of communication?

It has been suggested that writing evolved to meet needs that arose in the way of life of a group of people, because of changes in their culture.



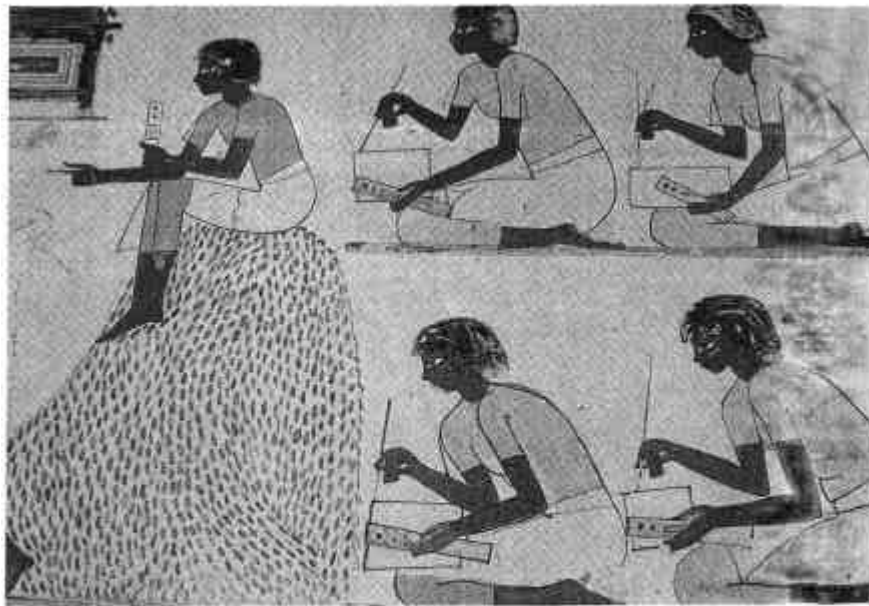
2.2 Activity 1

Suggest some conditions that might arise to cause a group of people the need to develop a writing system.

A very complex series of events was set in motion when certain groups of long-ago ancestors changed their whole way of life from hunting and gathering to that of agriculture.

- People in hunting and gathering communities tended to live in small, very mobile groups, and were continuously on the move from one location to another in search of food, shelter and escape from foes.
- The shared and valued knowledge of their culture was passed on by word of mouth through many speech acts such as the telling of legends, histories and epic tales of ancestors. There was nothing to be gained from writing, since valued knowledge could be passed on by word of mouth in face-to-face interaction.

- However, some of these small communities became settled in favoured locations. They grew foodstuffs; they herded animals and built more permanent dwellings.
- The communities grew larger, and needed to be organised to permit groups to live together peaceably, and their patterns of culture underwent fundamental changes.
- It became necessary for language to be reduced to a lasting form where it could be referred to again when necessary. Records had to be kept that allowed these larger communities to regulate their activities, especially when it came to goods and services being sold and exchanged across distance and time. Now ‘language-as-process’ had to be transformed into ‘text-as-product’ – a thing that could be seen, touched, handled and referred to. People’s memory of what happened was no longer enough.



SCRIBES RECORDING THE HARVEST

Kneeling scribes record the size of the grain harvest. The farmer would then have to give a proportion of the grain to the pharaoh as a tax. Many scribes worked in the government, copying out accounts, taxes, orders and laws. They were like civil servants.

The evolution of writing meant that language could now meet a whole range of functional demands. Writing could be used for invoicing goods being traded, for keeping records of taxes raised and collected, for marking property and making lists of property owned by different people. It could be used for recording laws, history, religious works and narrative stories that previously had been passed down in the oral mode.

2.2 Activity 2
















Do some Library research about the development of a writing system in early Egyptian or Mesopotamian or Greek civilization.

Write a 700-word Report to record your research.

Include information about 'how, when, where, why' a writing system became necessary to their way of life, and the purposes to which writing and recording information was put.

Include a time-line showing how the spoken language developed a writing system over time.

Writing evolved from visual images which had already come into use in settled societies. Below is an example of the development of the Semitic alphabet from some of the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

| EGYPTIAN | | SEMITIC | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| HIROGLYPHIC SYMBOLS | PICTOGRAPHIC AND PHONETIC VALUES | SINAITIC (pre-PROTO-SEMITIC) SYMBOLS | PHOENICIAN (with SEMITIC) SYMBOLS | PHONETIC VALUES |
|  | head t-p |  |  | r |
|  | hand -d |  |  | y |
|  | rejoice h- |  |  | h |
|  | water n- |  |  | m |
|  | mouth r |  |  | p |

Illustrations of symbols

Some later indigenous writing systems

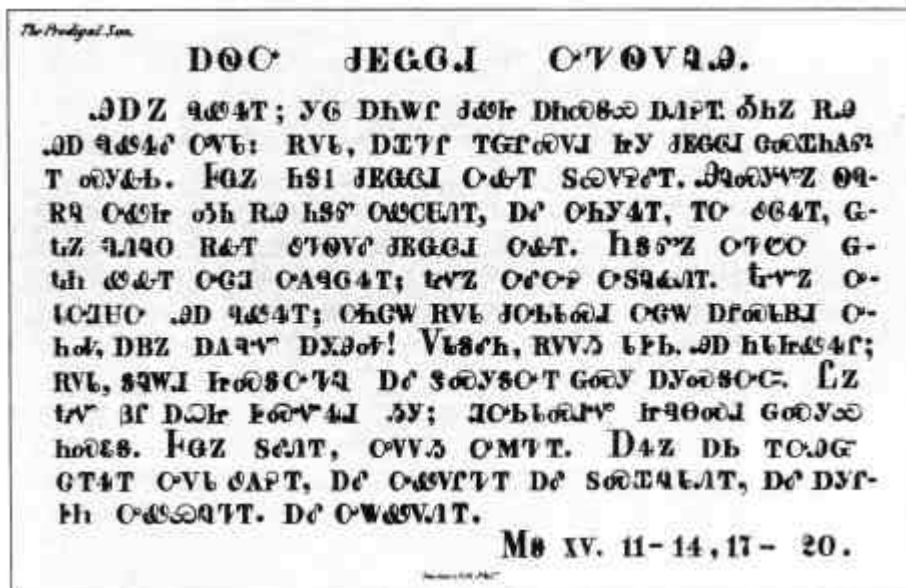
1. Sequoyah, the American Cherokee Indian

Sequoyah, a North American Cherokee Indian, (c. 1765 – 1843) is the only illiterate person known to have created a writing system. Convinced that the white man's power lay in the written language, he determined to provide the same for his people.

How would one write his own language? By making a picture of each one of thousands of words? Sequoyah tried that. He drew symbols with pokeberry juice on chips of wood. But his wife, angered by his neglect of the family, threw the chips into a fire. Sequoyah decided to try a new method.

He noticed that just a few recurring groups of sounds of speech (syllables) combined to form numerous words. After 12 years of hard work, he completed a set of 86 symbols. Next he had to convince the tribal elders it would work. He taught his young daughter, Ah-yoka, to read and write. Together they carried out a demonstration. Sequoyah left the house while Ah-yoka wrote what the sceptical elders dictated. When Sequoyah returned and read what Ah-yoka had written, the elders who had spoken the words were dumbfounded, and then ecstatic. Their own language could be written! Literacy caught on like wildfire among the Cherokee. Within months they were able to read and write in two languages (Cherokee and English), and a steady stream of literature poured from their own printing presses.

Here is the story of the Prodigal Son written in Cherokee script:



Prodigal Son written in Cherokee script

2.2 Activity 3

Archaeological research in PNG has established that intensive agriculture has been part of the way of life of the inhabitants in the Wahgi Valley for tens of thousands of years.

- *Suggest/discuss reasons why Highlands peoples did not develop a writing system, as did, e.g. the Mesopotamians or Egyptians.*
- *Were there any traditional writing systems in PNG that you have heard about, or know about?*

Can you think of any traditional activities where once the spoken word was enough, and now the written word is also used? Describe them to a classmate.

2. The Vai writing system of West Africa

The Vai script of West Africa was one of the first indigenous writing systems to be discovered and researched by European scholars. Europeans believed at that time that the industrial nations and white people represented superior cultures, partly because they had access to literacy in the Roman script.

When the '*sophisticated characteristics*' of the Vai script were discovered, scholars were unable to find a satisfactory answer to the question of how 'these natives', who lived basically in the middle of nowhere in the opinion of whites, came to possess a cultural treasure of such high quality, '*one usually met with only among people of ancient and rich culture (i.e. Europeans!)*'. Mostly, whites did not seriously believe that a 'Negro race' could have shown it could be on an equal footing with whites in having access to this '*most civilized of all the arts*'.

Research has now unearthed some interesting information about the script. First, it had a long developmental history – it took a long time to become the kind of written language the scholars met with. It may have started out as *pictograms* (pictures representing words) as did other languages. Over time, the script inventors and users built on a system of graphic signs that had previously served purposes in ritual and ceremonies. Thus, over time the pictograms were transformed into syllables for writing the language more fully.

In any event, it appears that the Vai people seized on the invention with enthusiasm. Many people in the towns could write the script: men mainly, but also some women. At one time there were even schools for teaching the script, but these did not last long and were replaced later by Mission and Koranic schools that taught English and Koranic scripts.

Obviously, the script's rapid spread shows that it served important societal needs. As we have seen, one condition for the uptake of literacy in societies

is the existence of trading networks and commercial ventures on a large scale. Being on the coast, the Vai traded between European traders and people in the inland of Africa. They exchanged gold, timber and ivory for salt, tobacco and some other metals, and eventually also traded slaves. Vai acted as middlemen and were frequently away from their home areas, so the script was useful in writing letters to family members. Since only Vai could read the script, it kept family and trading secrets intact.

The main functions of the Vai script, then, were for practical record keeping and communication needs while at the same time keeping Vai business enterprises secret, and protected the community from outside influences such as exploitation by European and other traders.

Among the Vai people, there were some people who were literate in three different writing systems. Only Vai was taught informally, when people expressed an interest in using the script to read and write. Yet it was much more widespread than either English or Koranic literacy.

- Many Vai, both men and women, wrote in the Vai script
- A very small percentage of Vai had gone to Western type schools, and were literate in English.
- The Vai followed the religion of Islam, and many boys attended Koranic schools where they learned to write the Koranic script and recite large chunks of the Koran by heart. Girls did not attend these schools.

Next is an example of the Vai script used in a family letter.



Vai script used in a family letter.

 **2.2 Activity 4**

Discuss these two questions with a classmate. Record your findings. Compare with other members of the class.

- *Why might these two groups of people the Cherokee Indians and the African Vai have felt the need of a writing system?*
 - *What might they have used these writing systems for?*
-

Topic for private study

The following are topics for the students to explore in private study (or for assessment).

When was PNG's first contact with the literacy of the industrialised West, e.g. Germany, Great Britain, Australia?

What were the *purposes* for which print texts came to be used (e.g. reading *and* writing) in PNG?

Who had access to literacy? Under what conditions? In which languages?

What does it mean to be 'literate' in contemporary PNG?

Give reasons why you think literacy is/is not important for your fellow-nationals in PNG.

What *kinds* of literacy do people in PNG need?

What is gained and what is lost when a society becomes literate?

Section 2. The rise of literacy in the Industrialised West

The development of literacy in the history of Western societies was a process that took place over centuries. As we have seen, the remarkable phenomenon of the invention of writing brought about a profound change in human experience. Now, people were able to process and make use of knowledge and information in new ways.

But becoming literate was only available to a class of privileged elites. Over the centuries, valued manuscripts had been copied by hand, and only a few people learned to read and write to take responsibility for these tasks.

The invention of the printing press in the 15th Century in England signalled the start of a new era. Now, materials could be printed relatively quickly; more reading materials became available to the population and more cheaply, and the written word took over some of the functions previously carried in the oral mode. There was a significant shift from spoken language to print text as the main storage place of knowledge and ideas of the culture.

One outcome of this availability of mass literature was that written language became powerful – more powerful than the spoken word - and remains so up until the present time. Sometimes this power of print blinds us even today to the importance of the spoken word, especially in schooling. We choose to get information and ideas from books, and sometimes overlook the importance of other ideas and knowledge that are not written down.

Over the last two or three centuries ‘education for all’ became the goal of industrialising societies. Those children whose parents could afford to have them attend school and not work on the farms, were expected to learn to read and write and know their numbers.

Now that print materials were so readily available, a lot of classroom tasks focused on print and talking became less acceptable, so that pupils were expected to learn in silence. Children were to talk less and less and reading and writing became more highly valued than the ability to act creatively on the world through spoken language.

As well, more and more of pupils’ progress came to be measured through print texts. There was possibly a reason for emphasising reading and writing tasks: teachers were in charge of large numbers of children in classrooms as governments tried to get more and more children into school. For the sake of discipline the pupils were set reading and writing tasks and discouraged from talking, even the kind of talk that encourages the development of thinking skills. Everything was learned through books, which took on an authority all of their own.

Another outcome of this emphasis on print was that the written word was seen as the ‘correct’ or ‘superior’ form of language. It is only in the last two – three decades that educators have begun to see how biased this point of view is. Now, educators and linguists are emphasising the importance of talk in the development of children’s thinking processes. Now teachers are being encouraged to consider the importance of developing both oral and written language in schooling, since both have an important role in children’s intellectual development. We are aware of this shift of emphasis in today’s schools in PNG, particularly in the emphasis being placed on development of children’s first language in their elementary school years.



2.2 Activity 5

On a spare sheet of paper, write out the main idea in each paragraph.

Then, write a summary of this text.

Compare your summary with a classmate. Discuss differences.

Finally, identify the text type, and justify your choice.

Section 3. Spoken and written text in our contemporary PNG society

Undoubtedly, *oral genres* (spoken language of different types) play a very important and probably indispensable role in some settings. For example, imagine trying to organise the family to go somewhere without speaking. It could be done, but it would be difficult.

Some theorists have said that the introduction of literacy in particular cultures has caused the loss of some powerful spoken traditions (orality) in practice in pre-industrial cultures. Oral genres such as epic poetry, rhetoric (*the art of using words impressively in speech or writing*) and dialectic (*the art of logical disputation*) have become less important since the rise of print and industrialism (*a social system in which large-scale industries have an important part*).

However, we can now talk about ‘*secondary orality*’ – ways of speaking and listening that are removed from the immediate face-to-face interaction of intimates, yet use the oral mode. These include radio and TV.

If radio and TV were available in every village in PNG, would literacy cease to be important?

It is apparent that speech and print play very different roles in our lives, and for some of us, we could no more live without the one than we could live without the other.

2.2 Activity 6

Discuss with a classmate possible answers to the following questions:

- *What happens when people speaking together don't understand each other?*
 - *How do speakers check whether their listener understands them?*
 - *How does the listener check what a speaker means?*
 - *What might be the reason for differences in the kinds of language used in face-to-face situations (e.g. the difference between, say, a doctor consulting with a patient, and that same patient writing to his/her friend about the illness)?*
-

2.2 Activity 7

Try to imagine for a moment what our daily lives would be like without writing and print. What might we not be able to do? What would we not have?

- *What useful functions does written text perform for us?*
- *What do you achieve in your daily life-style through written text?*
- *What do/did your parents' generation achieve through the written word?*
- *What do/did your grandparents' generation achieve through the written word?*
- *What kinds of literacy does Papua New Guinea need in these current times?*
- *Are there any areas of contemporary PNG life where literacy is irrelevant?*
- *How can we protect the powerful traditions of orality (the ways of speaking) of many traditional societies in PNG?*
- *Draw up a chart like the one below to record your uses of speech and written text during one day at College. Bring your chart to the first Language lecture in the next week, for discussion.*

| Settings where speech was more effective | Settings where literacy was more effective |
|--|--|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Next lesson,

- *Compare your list with a classmate.*
- *What general observation(s) can you make about the situations when:*
 - *Literacy was more effective than speech?*
 - *Speech was more useful than writing or reading?*

Section 4. Differences between speech and writing

Are talking and writing just different ways of saying the same thing?

Is written text the same as talk written down?

To find answers to these questions, read and analyse the following transcript.

Elsy is a 5-year-old Torres Strait Islander child growing up in a town where she lives with her grandmother. A friend had taken Elsey to visit a Nature Reserve, a kind of zoo, on the outskirts of the town. Besides many Australian land animals and birds, there were also sea and river creatures, including many crocodiles of different size. After the visit to the nature reserve, Elsey was retelling for Grandmother what happened when the crocodiles were fed.

| | |
|------|---|
| Elsy | Tell you 'bout the crocodile first. |
| GM | Well this crocodile, 'e smell tha/watnau? The chicken smell |
| E | mm? It's a raw one 'e's not a cook one but they eat raw one so.....this first big crocodile where they wanna send them away <i>(The animal keeper told some children who were sitting near the fence close to the crocodile enclosure to move back a little away from the fence)</i> well, 'e smell/'e's/take tha smell of it, so... <i>(Talking about the crocodile again)</i> 'e went down an' jus' stop/ for a minute an' see if tha man gonna throw it but tha man was tying it up (3 secs pause) an' 'e was talking 'bout the crocodile before the crocodile would/come <i>(Telling us about crocodile habits)</i> this crocodile pit 'is 'ead/'is 'ead in first then ...'is tail then 'is 'ole body so...when this man, because 'e are scared othawise 'e will/ othawise that crocodile would take tha rope away <i>(5 second pause)</i> so when 'e bin come for tha thin one, this thin one 'e bin wane nau? <i>(Torres Strait Creole – 'what next'?)</i> this thin crocodile, if you chuck it in or you majorly jus' leave it in there, they w' jus' snap an' grab it, then... <i>(Talking about the enormous crocodile with very large jaws)</i> tha rope will bee/began to pull tha man.... |

Here is a written recount of the same episode.

On Thursday, we went to the nature reserve. We saw many animals and birds, but I want to talk about the crocodiles we saw. There were several crocodiles inside an enclosure, or yard, with a very strong, high fence around it. There was a deep pool in the middle. Some visiting school children were sitting very close to the wire fence. The keeper told them to move back away from the fence. The keeper was standing on a raised wooden platform, and while he was telling us about how crocodiles lived and behaved, he was tying a dead chicken to a long rope.

As soon as the two small crocodiles who were sunning themselves on the far bank saw and smelt the keeper with the chicken, they started sliding slowly into the water. Another, larger crocodile lay half-in, half-out of the water, waiting to see if it could grab the chicken the keeper was now throwing on the ground, then pulling back up again.

Then the keeper threw the chicken onto the ground again, in front of him, near the water's edge. At that moment, a huge crocodile that we had not known was there, came lungeing out of the water. The children who were sitting near the fence got a very big fright, and moved back very quickly. They did not know the big crocodile was there, either! This enormous crocodile grabbed the chicken, chewed on it, and just before he swallowed it, the rope came loose from his jaws. So the keeper was not pulled down into the crocodile's mouth.

In what ways could we say that the written Recount text is the same as the oral recount Elsey gave to her grandmother?

- One obvious way is that both depend on the same language – English – for their existence.
- They share a lot of common vocabulary. Underline the words in the talk transcript that are also used in the written text.
- They share the same grammar system (of English) Identify some common features of grammar in each.
- They share the same meaning system

In what ways could we say that each text is different from the other one?

- One obvious *difference* we can mention is that written text leaves out a lot of what spoken text includes. For example, even writing down the conversation between the two speech partners above, there is a lot that has to be left out: In speech we create meaning through such features as:
 - tone of voice
 - pitch
 - loudness
 - stress
 - intonation patterns.

There is no simple way these features can be written down, although linguists who transcribe spoken language into written text have a set of conventions, or symbols, they can call on to represent some of them in print, as is the case here. This is so that the reader can get more of a 'feel' for the talk as it was happening. But if we had to include these symbols in every piece of text we wrote, we would soon become non-writers, because it would be a very slow process!

Below is a set of conventions used to transcribe the conversation above between Elsey and Grandmother.

- / The oblique is used to show that the speaker hesitated while speaking.
- ... Three full stops indicate a longer pause than the one signalled by an oblique.
- 'e The single quotation mark indicates a missing sound – (*he*).

There are many more conventions used by linguists when transcribing speech; these are just a few examples from Elsey's talk above.

 **2.2 Activity 8**

List some of the information the written text included, that the speaker left out, because she assumed Grandmother knew it already.

A further (not-so-obvious) difference between speech and writing is the issue of lexical density. The meaning of this term will become clearer with the explanation below.

In the next transcript, as in the text of Elsey talking with her grandmother, we can see the false starts, pauses, repeats in the 'spoken-text-written-down'. But we sometimes forget that when we are writing something, we may make several rough drafts before we have edited out all the hesitations, false starts, pauses, mistakes etc. Here is one example of a written text in the draft stages that makes this point very clear.

So when we identify a category such as the Subject, ~~we do not ask~~ proceed to
~~ask~~ "what does ~~the~~ grammatical function ~~mean?~~" The appropriate question is rather
 'what does ~~the~~ grammatical function ~~mean?~~ in this ~~environment?~~'. In this case, the
 choices of meaning ~~are the~~ relevant environment is the interpersonal metafunction, since when we
~~investigate this we~~ find a paradigm which is realized by
 systematic variation in the choice of Subject. To ~~look at things this way~~
 (1975) take seriously Firth's notion of 'meaning as function in a
 context'; ~~and if we are focusing on~~ the relevant context is that of
 semantics, lexicology, ~~discourse~~ discourse (cf. Martin, 1983: 40 ff.). It is difficult, for
 (Example: J.R. Martin, AJL 2, 1963) that very reason, to give a brief example; but here is a piece of
 discourse based on a ~~real dialogue but doctored~~ ^{so as} to keep it intelligible without ~~having to~~
 describe the whole situation. ^{ing} Telling a story of a ~~specific~~ experience, a specific ~~case~~

Halliday (1985). p100.

One theorist, named Kress, says that in English, writing and speech are very clearly related to each other, since they both call on the same language to create meaning. However, each calls on the language in different and *equally complex* ways. To illustrate that point, Kress gives the following examples of two texts that talk about the same issue. That issue was that the government wanted to build a dam on a certain river, and the water from the dam would flood the valley where people had run farms for a long time.

The first text is spoken, an interview with a woman who had lived and worked on a dairy farm in the area for most of her lifetime. The second text is from a letter written by the State Minister for Natural Resources to a resident of the valley where the dam was to be built.

...and ah/...we're down like/further/...but they said at the time/...it'd be seven acres/they thought that they'd be taking of ours/down there like/you know/that was a good while ago/...well/... whether whether they came here/oh/...look/I forget/...and ah Perce went round with them/or whether they came here/and... judged for themselves/I don't know/but they never looked in the house/...if/...if they did come here/they didn't come to the/...come in the house/or anything/...

...and ah/...well/whether they will come/or whether they won't come/or when they're ready to come/I don't know/...'spose they'll notify us/but oh we've had/...oh/...had letters from them/...but ohh gosh/eh/...they/...well the letters they write are away over your head/...you know/er/...about this/and about something else/...well I said to perce/well look let the/...let the tail go with the hide/I said if they want the place/they'll take it/and if they don't want it/well we'll still live here/...so we're not going to worry about it/

Dear Mrs. S....

I am writing to acknowledge your further letter in regard to the proposed Tillegra dam. I share your concern for losses to the local dairy and beef industries which will arise from future dam construction at *Tillegra*. You must appreciate, however, that the Government is obliged to take into account all the likely effects of each alternate proposal when making any decision with such far reaching consequences. Economic, social and environmental impacts must be examined not only on a local base but regionally and, if applicable, at a State wide level. Not the least of these considerations is the need for an economical and reliable source of water to the people and industry of the Lower Hunter Valley. The decision favouring Tillegra was based on these wider considerations. The Government has accepted that it is the right choice.....

What can account for the differences between the two texts? Let us examine some of the issues involved.

Speakers and writers usually relate to their audiences in different ways, e.g.

- A speaker has face-to-face contact with the person to whom s/he is speaking. This means that the speaker and listener are usually known to each other, share a lot of information about the topic being discussed, or can interactively *build up the field of knowledge*. That is, where the listener does not understand something, the speaker can provide the necessary details to help the listener understand what s/he is talking about.
- The speaker can monitor the effects of what s/he is saying, and modify the conversation in line with the listener's understanding, and the listener can ask for something to be made clear where there is some misunderstanding.
- In the example of speech above, the speaker can assume that the listener knows who 'we', 'they' 'at the time' 'ours' refers to. Speaker and listener inhabit a *shared*

world, so the speaker does not have to explain a lot of things to the listener. So we could say that a lot of knowledge is already shared, and does not have to be made *explicit*. Indeed, if we put in a lot of details that the listener already shares, they are likely to say, '*I know, I know, get on with it!*'

- Spoken language is *spontaneous* – in casual conversation, we do not often plan ahead in detail what we are going to say, as we do in writing. So in face to face conversation, there is little time for censoring out irrelevant speech, or to review what we are saying. Once we have to *watch what we are saying*, our speech becomes far less casual, and sometimes we are silenced by not being able to say what we want in the way we want to say it.
- Although we cannot 'hear' the conversation, we can reconstruct without too much trouble the intonation patterns, stress, speed of the speech which help the person listening to understand what she was saying. We can also get a window on the speaker's feelings and opinions from words like '*well*', '*oh gosh*', '*you know...*'.
- A writer's position is quite different. What are some of the differences?
- The readers of the text are somewhere else in time or space. That is, the readers may read the text in the newspaper next day, or next week or even next month. They may not even be in the same town or country, or continent - as the writer.
- The writer may not know anything much about their audience – the readers. So the writer focuses more on the topic and needs to exercise greater control over the subject matter being written about.
- The act of writing is quite deliberate – writers review, edit, censor and reword their writing.
- The written text has little or no connection with the space it is being written in, unless it is a personal letter between, say, a parent and child.

So we could say that a speaker is *involved with the audience* while a writer is *detached from the audience*. This detachment of writer from audience is one reason why a writer has to 'encode' all meanings in the text, since the reader cannot ask the writer to explain or clarify what has been written.

Here is a summary of this information:

| Spoken language | Written language |
|--|---|
| Speech is universal. Everyone learns to speak a first language in the first few years of life. | Not everyone learns to read and write that same language |
| The spoken language has dialect variations | The written language is expected to conform to a standard form of grammar and spelling |
| Speakers use their voices (pitch, stress, rhythm) and bodies (gestures, facial expressions) to help convey their meanings | Writers have to rely solely on the words on the page to express meaning |
| Speakers use pauses and intonation | Writers use punctuation |
| Speakers pronounce words | Writers spell and write words |
| Speaking is usually spontaneous and unplanned | Most writing takes time. It is planned. The writer can go back and change what has been written |
| A speaker speaks to a listener who is right there, nodding or frowning, interrupting or questioning | For the writer, the reader's response is either delayed or nonexistent. The writer has only one chance to convey information and be interesting and accurate enough to hold the reader's attention. |
| Speech can have a lot of repetition. The speaker can pause, offer to start again, rephrase without losing the meaning of the utterance | Writing is more formal and compact. It progresses logically with fewer digressions. |
| Speakers use simple sentences connected by a lot of <i>ands</i> and <i>buts</i> . | Writers use more complex sentences with connecting words like <i>however</i> , <i>therefore</i> , <i>in addition to</i> . |

Lexical density

Lexical density as a measure of the difference between speech and writing. This term refers to a way of studying and analysing spoken and written texts to identify how each takes up different features of the grammar of a language – in this case, of English. Two terms that explain a method for measuring lexical density are described below.

- *lexical item* (or content word) is a technical term in linguistics that refers to sets of *vocabulary* or *content words* and the way they cluster together in different texts.

Lexical items are the words that carry the *content* of the text. They are the words found in dictionaries that can be easily defined. They belong to an *open set* of language items. This means that as languages change and absorb new words for new technology, new ideas or new objects, lexical items representing this expansion of the culture are added to the language.

Lexical items are:

- nouns
- verbs, including phrasal verbs
- some adverbs
- adjectives

- *grammatical item* (or function word). The main function of a grammatical item is to build and maintain relationships between the lexical items. The task of grammatical items is to hold the text together.

Grammatical items include :

| | |
|--------------|--|
| articles | a, the |
| pronouns | he, she, you, me |
| prepositions | in, beside, under |
| conjunctions | and , because, while |
| some adverbs | usually, often |
| finite verbs | have, was, is (as in 'have eaten', 'was running' etc). |

Grammatical items belong to a *closed* system in the language. This means that we do not add to or keep inventing the prepositions, articles and conjunctions etc. of English. There are a fixed number of such items in any language, and they are part of the system of grammar that the language users make use of in the construction of meaning.

Generally, written texts are more *dense* than spoken texts. That is, written texts contain more words that carry meaning, - the lexical items. We can test this by showing lexical items as a percentage of the whole number of words. For example, in this sentence of written text:

The Conservation Committee has offered advice to local community councils on forest conservation.

There are 13 words in all in the clause. Four (4) are *grammatical*; nine (9) are *lexical*. In the following sentence, a spoken text, count up and compare the number of lexical items with grammatical items:

"The only car accident I've ever had was in rain and fog on the mountain".

In the sentence,

There are words altogether

There are..... lexical items

There are grammatical items

As an observation, you could say that there are twice as many grammatical items as there are lexical items in this spoken text. This is the opposite of the written text above. This is one major difference between spoken text and written text: written language has a much *higher ratio* of lexical items to total words.

So we could say that, relatively speaking, the difference between spoken and written language is one of *density*: written language is more *dense* than spoken language because the information in the text is presented in big 'chunks' of lexical items. This

affects its readability. However, spoken language is more ‘intricate’ than written language. Both spoken and written language are complex in their own way.

Measures of lexical density are also useful to decide how difficult a text will be for pupils to read. We can find out and compare the lexical density between written texts by using another kind of formula to the one above. These are the steps involved:

- Count the number of clauses in a text
- Count the number of lexical items in a text
- Divide the number of lexical items by the number of clauses. This gives us the relative *lexical density* of the text.

This way of analysing different texts is a useful tool for deciding which text on a particular topic is harder to read – *more dense* than another on the same subject. With this formula, you can choose texts that are within the ability range of your pupils. Study the text below, taken from *Muruk Escape*, a reader for Grades 7 – 9.

“Don’t move!” said Koavi in an urgent whisper.

Neri’s young legs trembled as she stared nervously at the forest clearing in front of Koavi.

She sensed that her father was anxious – really frightened, in fact – and that made her feel worse.

There are four (4) clauses

There are 24 lexical items. Therefore, this text has a *lexical density* of 6.

Now read the following text, taken from *Paradise* magazine.

Green, green and more green – nothing but a myriad of shades of green!

Flying over or travelling through the bush of Papua New Guinea one cannot but notice this predominant colour – leaves, vines, palms, mosses, grasses.

Mother Nature has painted almost all the vegetation with a green palette.

Read the first sentence with (*there is*) inserted before *nothing* to make better sense of the text. In fact, leaving it out makes the text even more dense, thus harder for the reader.

So we have three (3) clauses, with 32 lexical items. This text has a *lexical density* of 10.6. It is likely to prove a difficult text to read and understand for younger readers.

2.2 Activity 9 – A Quiz – test your general knowledge!

Answer T/F to the following:

1. *Speaking is faster than writing.*
2. *Reading is faster than writing*
3. *Speaking is faster than reading*
4. *Typing is faster than speaking*
5. *Speaking is many times faster than writing.*

Now check your answers

- *The speed of writing depends on the individual writer, as well as the kind of script the language is written in.*
- *Speaking is about ten times faster than writing, and three times faster than typing, depending on how fast the typist can type!*
- *Some people read more quickly than others; the kind of material people are reading, and the reason they are reading it, often dictates how fast they read. But, generally, people read more quickly than they either speak and listen, or write.*

When we are talking, we are moving rapidly from one new idea to the next. Now, we say that we speak ten times more quickly than we write. So writing is a slow and laborious process for most of us. What is our brain doing in the time it takes us to write something down? While our hands are busy forming the writing, our brains are moving on to the next idea we want to write. So we have the time to shape a range of ideas into a more complex, coherent and integrated whole.

Section 5. Is learning to read and write the same as learning to speak?

2.2 Activity 10

What answer would you give to the question above?

Look back at the transcript of Eley talking with her grandmother, and the Recount of the experience she had (written by someone else!). List some features Eley might have to learn in order to be considered an effective writer of a Recount. Compare your list with a classmate.

Now study the following transcript, which is a written-down record of a child's oral recount.

2.2 Activity 11

Child: 'Well last Saturday / this....last Saturday / well / we played / against / another soccer team / and / well the last team we played against / we uh lost / and this team / this time / we / they / this was the first time / that they played against another team // and it was / three nothing / /and we were three //.'

Now imagine that you are the child (a boy or girl – that played soccer) and your teacher has asked you to write out your oral recount as a written text.

What changes do you have to make so the reader can understand the text?

What information has been left out that you may have to put in?

What can you leave out to improve the 'flow' of the text?

Compare your complete written text with a classmate. What are the differences between your version and theirs? Talk about different omissions/inclusions between your texts.

Section 6. Spoken and written language, and schooling

Now let us consider the implications of what we have been learning, for the processes of schooling.

The two language modes of speaking and writing are equally important in different ways. Yet literacy has achieved a special significance in Western technological societies. This is because societies like Australia, and increasingly in PNG, now build so many habits of thinking, of working and of dealing with experience in the written mode. Thus, literacy has become essential to higher educational opportunities, and job and career prospects.

Also, as PNG society has become more complex, it has become necessary to record public and private records, e.g. legal texts, texts of governance, rules and regulations, financial records of different institutions, medical records, educational documents, in permanent form. It now seems that literacy is here to stay!

What are the effects of this proliferation of print texts on schooling? And what is the relationship between literacy and schooling?

Schooling in mainstream societies represents a special set of institutionalised (routinised) activities that centre on the learning of general purpose skills, the most important of which is literacy. As such, classroom activities can be studied as a series of staged, purposeful activities between teacher and pupils that lead to the pupils becoming literate in ways valued in society.

In order to be regarded as literate in school, children must be able to shift from the face-to-face conversational discourse strategies appropriate in the home to the more written-like strategies of discursive prose, as we have seen in the examples in Section 4.

What are some of the strategies that the young learner has to develop?

- Assume that the reader has *no background knowledge of the topic being talked about*. Therefore, put in details that make the text easier to understand, even when you suspect that the reader already knows them.
- Include *all contextual information* to help the reader understand time, place, setting and participants, and any cultural information that makes the text easy for the reader to understand.
- Put all the information into well-chosen words, since the reader cannot see facial expressions or gestures.
- Learn how to use punctuation etc. to carry some of the meaning

Thus, the discourse style of the speaker has to be well organised, and focusing on one topic – what one researcher has called the ‘*topic centred*’ discourse style.

Acquiring such a *literate discourse style* is not equally easy for all children. Some children come to school with a discourse style that is already close to the literate standard of the school and hence have less to learn about how to write about experiences.

And Christie points out that even children who are somewhat familiar with what is going on in the classroom, such as routines and procedures, may not necessarily understand what is expected of them as they make the major transition from spoken language to written language. Not all children will be able to participate with comparable skill. One researcher into classroom language (Christie) maintains very

strongly that *what counts as school failure is a pupil's inability to recognise and use the language that is necessary for mastery of the various kinds of school learning*. And ability to manipulate the language necessary for such learning is a matter of *knowing how to do it* - knowing how to talk and write about the topic, and how to use one's linguistic resources to give information in the ways that are valued in classrooms.

These issues will be taken up in more detail as you proceed through the Units and modules of the Language Strand in subsequent studies.

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