
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE SKILLS

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

We use language to talk, listen, read and write. There are four major language skills — listening (L), speaking (S), reading (R) and writing (W). While listening and speaking are oral language skills, reading and writing are written language skills. Listening and reading are also called receptive skills (the child receives communication in an oral or written form of language); speaking and writing are expressive skills (the child expresses herself using the oral or written form of language). The development of each of these skills is significant for the language and literacy development of the child.

In day-to-day life, we do not think much about these skills of language. However, as a teacher, you need to know about these language skills because a correct understanding will influence how you will teach language during the pre-primary and early primary school years. Therefore, in this Unit, we will discuss the key language skills. This understanding will later help you develop and support children's language development.

Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of each of the four language skills – listening (L), speaking (S), reading (R) and writing (W);
- discuss how thinking is integrated with language and feeds into the development of LSRW skills;
- differentiate between oral and written language; and
- understand the simultaneous and integrated development of the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

1.2 MEANING OF VARIOUS LANGUAGE SKILLS

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four key language skills. In Figure 1a, listening and speaking skills are listed as ‘oral language skills’ while reading and writing are listed as ‘written skills’. We can also refer to reading and writing as ‘print-based skills’.



Fig. 1a: The Four Fundamental Language Skills

In this Section, we will discuss the meaning of these fundamental skills of language, i.e, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

1.2.1 Listening

Have a look at the given example to understand what listening consists of.

At the beginning of the new academic session, new children were enrolled in Sarita’s class, a primary school teacher in Lucknow. Sarita asked all children to introduce themselves by telling their names and age. Most of the children spoke in Hindi and some in English. One child, Alok, hesitated to speak. After much persuasion, he introduced himself in Oriya, “Mo nama Aloka banga. Mu cha barshaa ayura. (My name is Alok. I am six years old.)” Children looked in amazement and confusion at him as they could not understand what Alok said. However, another student Mili, who was bilingual and knew Oriya and Hindi introduced herself to Alok in Oriya with a big smile saying, “Mo name Mili, Alok. (My name is Mili, Alok.)”

In the above example, Alok addressed the entire class but only one girl could respond to Alok while others were quiet. Why do you think this happened? Could only Mili hear Alok? Of course not! It happened because Mili knew the Oriya language and she could not only hear what Alok said (like other children) but could understand (comprehend) the meaning of his words too, and thus, she could listen to Alok. The rest of the class could hear Alok saying something but they could not listen to him as they did not know Alok’s language.

While in this instance, listening did not take place because children did not know Alok’s language, however, listening might not take place even when the language of the speaker is known to the listener. Let us understand with the help of an example.

Amit told his sister to bring some toffees on her way back home. The sister, who was in a hurry, nodded to Amit and left home. In the evening, Amit's sister returned with two coffee packets for Amit. To this, the mother said, "Did you even listen to him?"

In this example, while Amit's sister knew the language, and heard Amit, but she was in a hurry to leave the house, she did not listen to him. She took 'coffee' for 'toffee'.

Both these examples make it clear that 'hearing' refers to receiving any and every sound in the environment, but 'listening' implies hearing with comprehension. In a marketplace, many sounds and many people are speaking. We hear these sounds but we listen to the shopkeeper from whom we buy things. This means that we not only hear the shopkeeper but we also try to understand and analyze it. In other words, we try to comprehend its meaning. Hence, 'listening' is 'hearing with applying comprehension to understand what has been heard'. When the child understands the meaning of what has been said, it means that the child has acquired listening comprehension. So listening comprehension means understanding the meaning of spoken words.

1.2.2 Speaking

Let us discuss what we understand by speaking with the help of the given example.

Sarah, a teacher in a village in Rajasthan recited a poem in English and made children memorize the poem. She recited one line at a time and asked the children to repeat each line after her. In a period of a week, all the children could fluently recite the English poem.

Now can one say that while reciting the English poem word to word, children were speaking the English language? In a way, they were speaking but did they know the meaning of the poem they were reciting so fluently? So the answer is 'No'; no speaking is taking place in this instance. It is because speaking is not about simply uttering words, though we can say that it is a part of it. The skill of speaking consists of speaking with understanding, instead of merely repeating or uttering words or sentences whose meaning is unknown to the speaker herself. So just as in the case of listening, speaking also involves comprehension. The speaker must understand what she is speaking, even if her speech is not fully grammatically correct.

1.2.3 Reading

Read the given line: "*Hana wasakuragi, hitowabushi.*"

Could you read it? Yes, you could speak out what was written and so you would say you read it. But did you understand what you read? No! It is because what you read is written in the Japanese language and you probably do not know the Japanese language. If you do not know and understand the words of the Japanese language, you would not understand what you read. What you did when you read the sentence was decoding – that is, you could associate each letter with its sound and you spoke out the written word based

on letter-sound relationships. Decoding is part of reading, but reading is more than decoding. Just like speaking and listening, reading also involves the aspect of comprehension (understanding the meaning). Reading without understanding is only the mechanical act of saying out aloud the sounds in the words; no meaning is extracted or assigned to these words.

You must have seen children read a paragraph or a sentence but when you ask them to explain its meaning they cannot do so. They can decode the text because they know the letter-sound relationships or because that text has been read out to them so many times that they have memorized the words visually and read it fluently, giving the impression that they are understanding what they are reading. However, that is not the case. They do not comprehend the text. We cannot call this 'reading' because children have not understood what they have read. The ability to decode a text is a part of reading, but not reading in its wholeness. Unless a person understands the meaning of what has been read, we cannot call it 'reading'. Therefore, **reading consists of two aspects: word recognition and language comprehension. In both of these aspects, many competencies are involved.** Let us understand this with the help of Figure 1b as shared below.

THE MANY STRANDS THAT ARE WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING

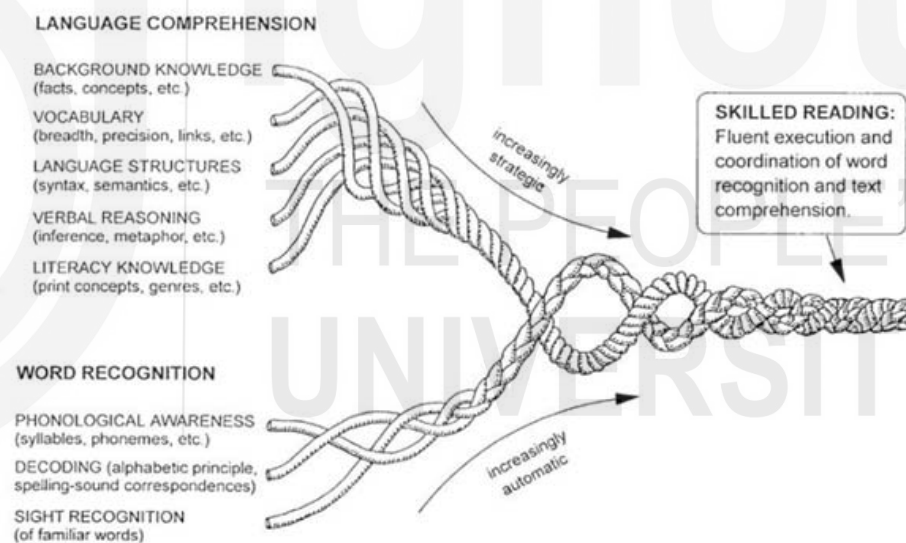


Fig. 1b: Scarborough's Reading Rope

Source: Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.)

Figure 1b suggests that reading consists of two major aspects, i.e., language comprehension and word recognition. Each of these aspects includes competencies that a child uses to read a text. While competencies such as phonological awareness, decoding (phonics) and sight recognition help a child to identify/recognize a word, she comprehends a text by employing her background knowledge (also called prior knowledge), vocabulary, and understanding of meanings (semantics), understanding of the grammatical structure of the language, verbal reasoning and literacy knowledge. You have read about the emergence of reading and writing behaviours in young children in Block 6 of MCD-001. While the ability to comprehend text

begins to develop spontaneously as the child begins to acquire oral language development (though comprehension also needs to be further developed through teaching as well), the competencies concerned with word recognition are, by and large, not spontaneous and require explicit teaching, especially the competency of phonics.

1.2.4 Writing

If asked to define ‘writing’, how would you define it? Probably many of you would say that writing is the ability to form letters and words. However, what if children can copy letters or words, and can also read what they have copied but cannot explain what they have written? In other words, if they do not know the meaning of what they have written, would you call this ‘writing’? Not really, because the comprehension aspect is missing. The ability to form/copy letters and words might be a part of writing, but writing is certainly much more than this. If one does not know or cannot explain what she is writing, one is simply engaged in a meaningless act of copying and this does not count as writing.

On the other hand, if a 3-year-old child makes some straight and curved lines on paper (scribbling) and on asking explains to you what she has drawn, would you consider these marks on paper to be writing? Some of you may say that these are scribbles and not writing since there are no letters and the child has not used the conventional script to write a word. Actually, these scribbles are the first signs of writing and show that the child is an emerging writer. You have read about this in Unit 28 of MCD-001. Let us recall this aspect in detail so that we develop our understanding of how writing emerges in children.

Once the child has made some marks on paper (which we call ‘scribble’,) and you ask her, “What have you made/drawn/written?”, then the child who had some thoughts before she made the mark, will express that thought. **This mark or scribble, therefore, is the child’s writing since it is a thoughtful expression.** Many parents and teachers do not understand that writing is essentially a way of expressing one’s thoughts and ideas through any type of symbol. These symbols can be letters of a language or pictures or any other symbol (such as the symbol of a skull and two crossed bones, which is used to represent ‘danger’) or a combination of these all. Let us understand this further with the help of the writing of a three-and-a-half-year-old boy shared as follows (Figure 1c).



Fig. 1c: Early Writing

Sample Sourced from Dr. Neelima Gokhale, Early Literacy Consultant, Nagpur, Maharashtra

Do you think that the child has written something meaningful and which can be understood? Probably not from an adult's point of view but if we see it from the child's perspective who has written it, it holds meaning. In the given sample, the child has written a 'poem' on the topic 'Monkey', similar to a poem the teacher read out in class two days ago. When the teacher asked the child to tell her what he had drawn, he said that he had written a poem and he 'read out' his poem to the teacher, running his finger from left to right across the lines of scribbles, just as we would do to read a conventional script. In the sample, the child has represented a real-world creature (monkey) with its drawing and conventional letters and sentences with scribbles; he understood the line-like nature of the written poem and so he made horizontal scribbles in lines, one after the other. This is called 'symbolization', where one thing stands for something else and this is the first level of symbolization. The next level of symbolization is when a child learns to use conventional letters instead of pictures and scribbles, which we call this learning to 'read' and 'write'. So the child's drawing and scribbles will be considered as an early stage of writing because the child uses these as symbols to express a meaning. So drawing, scribbling, reading and writing using the conventional script, all involve the insight that symbols have meaning.

All of these early attempts at writing show the child's growing interest and understanding of print; these should not be dismissed. We only consider conventional writing using letters to write words and sentences as 'correct' writing. However, this is the final stage of writing and there are many stages before the child reaches this stage, which we adults must recognize and appreciate. We are often worried about how soon children will learn to write accurately like adults. Without worrying much about it, we need to understand that moving from scribbling to drawing to a mix of scribbling, drawing, and script to invented spellings to conventional writing is a process of learning to symbolize. This process will take time and during the process, there will be several phases in which pictures and conventional symbols will be mixed together.

So, we conclude that writing, like listening, speaking and reading, is a meaning-making exercise. We (both adults as well as children) write to express our thoughts. **It is the act of composing and putting one's thoughts together on a paper/board using symbols.** Thus, writing is not simply equivalent to a mechanical process of forming letters and words.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Does the child exhibit a particular language skill in the given scenarios? Whether yes or no, give your reason for the same.

a) A girl gets greeted by a new class fellow in a language unknown to her.

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b) A Marathi-speaking child recites an English rhyme from her memory.

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c) The child makes a drawing using various shapes and explains it to her mother.

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d) The child reads a particular poem and explains its meaning to the teacher.

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2) “Children’s scribbles should be accepted as writing.” Elaborate.

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1.3 THE ROLE OF THINKING IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

There is one more important and overarching aspect of language development that is often neglected by educationists and teachers. This aspect is that of the interlinked and inseparable relationship between language and thought. Let us see how (Figure 1d).

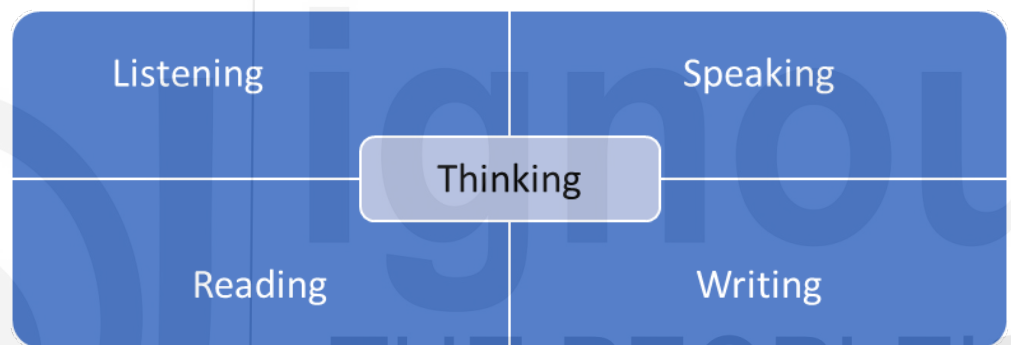


Fig. 1d: Thinking is at the Core of Language Development

1.3.1 Language Supports Thinking

What is the purpose of LSRW? Lev Vygotsky suggested that language or speech allows a child to make sense of the world. Language helps one to explain, reflect, analyze, imagine, hypothesize and make connections. Language provides labels (names) for objects, events, experiences and emotions. In this way, we form concepts and this makes it possible for us to interact with one’s environment. Let us understand this with a quick example.

A five-year-old was fascinated by the farming tools that she saw her father using every day. Pointing to each of his farming tools, she asked her father, “Papa, what is this?” To which her father replied, “That’s a pruner. Oh, it is a pipe. This one is a seed-sower.” The young girl learnt the names and simultaneously, her father also showed her what each tool was used for.

In the example given above, it is quite evident that the naming or labelling of objects helped the child to understand that each has its own name and function. In this way, her thinking was expanded, and by knowing the name of each tool, she could easily remember the information related to that tool. The child formed a concept of each tool; the thought was supported through language.

Let us understand this through another example. When a young child is introduced to a word, say the word 'Horse' she is also introduced to the concept of a 'Horse'. Initially, the child may refer to many different four-legged animals as 'Horse'. However, as her vocabulary and understanding of what exactly the word 'Horse' stands for develops, she names different four-legged animals with their respective names. Thus, she forms a concept of all these different animals. Similarly, having a vocabulary for different kinds of emotions helps a child to identify and differentiate her feelings and explain whether it is anger, or irritation, or frustration, or depression, or anything else. As their vocabulary expands, so does her thinking.

1.3.2 Thought Supports Language

Until now, we discussed that the child's thinking develops through language. However, it is a two-way process. Language also develops through thinking. The language-of-thought hypothesis (LOTH) advocates that mental representation has a linguistic structure, or in other words, that thought takes place within a mental language. The hypothesis is sometimes expressed as the claim that thoughts are sentences in the head. Mental language resembles spoken language in several key respects: it contains words that can combine into sentences; the words and sentences are meaningful, and each sentence's meaning depends systematically upon the meanings of its component words and the way those words are combined. Thus, the child's thought or mental language serves as an inbuilt foundation that helps a child to acquire a language used in her environment. Let us understand with the help of an example.

There is a mental word that a child assigns to the fruit of guava, say 'appu'. She also uses another word 'meamow' to denote 'sweet'. No one has taught these words to her, nor does anyone uses these words in her surroundings. As the mother asks her while feeding the guava, she often asks the child, "How is the guava?" to which the child responds, "appu meamow" which means guava is sweet. The mother also responds, "Yeah! Guava is sweet." Gradually, the child also begins to use and respond to 'appu' as 'guava' and 'meamow' as 'sweet'.

Here, the words of the child's thought or mental language "appu is meamow" means "guava is sweet". To believe and understand that 'guava is sweet' the child refers back to her mental concepts. It is because the child already has a concept and corresponding labels pertaining to the words 'guava' and 'sweet'. Instead of straight away learning the names as per adult language, the child makes use of her thoughts/mental language to learn the name in the everyday use language. Thus, the child's language development took place because of her existing or prevailing thoughts/thinking.

1.4 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

We use both oral and written language to communicate with each other in our daily lives. We need to support the development of oral and written language skills in the child as well as teach these through classroom instruction as well.

Oral language consists of verbal (spoken words) as well as nonverbal cues such as (gestures, facial expressions, voice modulation). It usually takes place in informal settings and is generally temporary, i.e., it is not recorded. On the other hand, **written communication** consists of communication through the use of symbols, i.e., words. It usually takes place in more formal settings, is recorded and thus, is relatively permanent in nature.

One of the key differences between these two is of the **context**. In oral communication, both the listener and the speaker are familiar with the context of the communication because they are present in the same situation and there is immediate feedback or clarification. This does not happen in the case of written communication because the reader and the writer are not present together. The cues which can be seen and heard in oral communication and which help us to understand the context of the communication and the meaning (gestures, facial expressions, voice modulation) are not present in written communication and so the writer has to insert the nonverbal cues into the text.

For example, look at the given sentence — “तुम ये काम करोगे”

This sentence may have different meanings when spoken to someone in person. It might be a command, question, request or even mockery. If the person to whom this sentence is addressed is present while the sentence is spoken, he/she may understand the exact meaning by taking note of the speaker’s facial expression, tone and other cues.

Now imagine, if this sentence was a part of a storybook wherein one person speaks to another one, “तुम ये काम करोगे”. How will you as a reader understand what this sentence actually means?

Here, you will require more information, cues in the written form to understand the exact meaning. Let us see how this can be achieved by referring to the given sentences.

“तुम ये काम करोगे!” (Command)

“तुम ये काम करोगे?” (Question)

“‘तुम ये काम करोगे?’ उसने मुसकुराते हुए पूछा ।” (Request)

“‘तुम ये काम करोगे?’ उसने ठहाका लगाकर बोला ।” (Mockery)

In the above sentence, adding an exclamation mark (!) showed that the speaker is giving a command. By adding a question mark (?) at the end of the sentence it was made evident that the speaker is asking a question. The writer added the symbol ‘।’ and extra words in the third and fourth sentences to

make the reader understand that the former is a request and the latter is intended to mock the other person.

As a teacher, one needs to be aware of the difference between oral and written communication. It is because the written language is far more complex for a child to understand than the oral language. The teacher needs to be aware that the written text is not simply oral language written down, as you could also see in the example discussed above. Sometimes, we may indeed record oral conversation exactly how it was spoken. However, this is not always the case. It is because the way a language is spoken and written is different. When we speak, we are present in that situation and we understand many things without those things having to be said. Although when you have to convey the same conversation in writing, you have to convey the context also. And that's why written language is not simply recorded oral language.

As a result, the transition from oracy to literacy is not an easy leap, because literacy involves dealing with symbols that need to be specifically taught. A child who is exposed to print, reading, and writing activities in the environment may begin to acquire some aspects of literacy and comes to understand that a certain meaning is embedded or can be expressed through text. While this understanding is supportive, it is not enough to make the child able to read and write. To develop literacy among children, there needs to be some explicit instruction. It is not as simple as acquiring oral language naturally by hearing it in the environment around you. To acquire literacy, the child needs to learn to break the spoken language into sounds and then further associate each sound with a symbol. In other words, she needs to be taught the alphabetic principle which will help her to decode. However, as mentioned earlier as well, decoding is only one aspect – merely knowing the alphabet and its sounds is not enough to read and write with understanding. You will read more about this in Units 8 and 9 of this Course.

1.5 TEACHING LSRW (+THINKING) IN AN INTEGRATED MANNER

The traditional view of language learning views the development of the four skills of language as sequential, which means that one skill develops after the other and each skill develops independently of other skills. However, this assumption has been challenged by experts who support the developmental view of language acquisition. The developmental view of language acquisition claims that these abilities develop simultaneously and the development of one ability influences the development of other abilities.

However, many people hold the following five incorrect views with respect to the four skills of language. These predominant beliefs and practices are discussed below, wherein we have discussed why they are problematic, and what is the actual learning and development pattern of children's language skills.

- a) **The first incorrect belief is that listening and speaking develop fully before the skill of reading and writing start to develop.** However, this is not true. As you have read a child of two years makes scribbles and if you ask her she can tell you what she has drawn. She is still learning the oral language but she has started to show writing behaviours too. A three-year-old child runs her fingers over the pages of a familiar storybook as if she is actually reading a story. This child is showing reading behaviours while her oral language is still developing.

Implication for Teaching: Breaking these language skills into compartments and teaching these separately does not support the natural learning pattern of the child. This makes the process of language learning sequential and mechanical for the child. The prime purpose of teaching language should be to develop a child's interest in listening speaking, reading and writing. This segmentation takes away the joy and the interest of the child in language learning too. So we actually need to integrate the teaching of LSRW. The following example shows us how the teaching of LSRW can be integrated.

A Grade 1 teacher first described a poem and then recited it to the children. Then the teacher and the children also recited it together a few times. After this, she asked children to make drawings in response to the poem or they could write their own poem using their own words and imagination. Children began to draw. A few attempted to write a poem. One of the children drew horizontal lines one under another. The teacher approached her and the following conversation took place:

Teacher: *What are you doing?*

Child: *I am writing a poem.*

Teacher: *That's very nice. What is this poem about?*

Child: *My house.*

Teacher: *Can you read out to me what you have written?*

Child: *The child ran her finger over the horizontal lines and said some relevant sentences about her house, such as, "My house has three rooms. It is in Delhi."*

Though the child had not written any text using the conventional script of language, he read as if something conventional was written.

In this example, the child and the teacher are both listening and speaking and the child also shows early reading and writing behaviours. This child must have seen a poem written in a book (or a chart paper) as it was being read out to her; so now she tries to replicate the structure of the poem in her writing by drawing lines one under the other, which represent 'sentences'. You know that children's early or emergent writing is in the form of drawings, lines, shapes, pictures, letter-like formation. So listening to others when they were reading, seeing them using a book to read, and seeing the text in the book has led the child to 'writing'.

So the above example shows how in the past, the child's listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities developed simultaneously and together. Also, as the teacher and the child continue to engage in conversation about what the child has written, L, S, R and W continued to develop together. So, as this example suggests, all language skills develop simultaneously.

- b) **The second incorrect belief is that while listening and speaking develop almost from the time the child is born, reading and writing develop only as a result of formal language teaching when the child joins the school.** Indeed, the skill of speaking and listening develops in children spontaneously without the need for any formal teaching while the role of instruction is crucial in learning the skill of reading and writing. However, this does not mean that learning to read and write begins only on joining the school. In a print-rich environment, the child spontaneously forms ideas about reading and writing and shows emergent reading and writing behaviours much before she joins the school. We have given many examples of this in the discussion in this Unit earlier. For instance, you would have come across two and three-year-old children who can identify the wrapper of the chips they like to eat, the logos of the TV Channels and show their interest in writing by scribbling on the walls and floor with chalks or pencils. These are emergent reading and writing behaviours. While children cannot read and write as adults do, but we cannot deny that they are active readers and writers much before they join the formal school.

Implication for Teaching: A teacher who incorrectly believes that children begin to learn to read and write only after joining the school, will not notice children's early reading and writing behaviours. She will not make use of children's prior experiences in the process of teaching them to read and write in the classroom. Thus, she misses out on using the rich resource that the children bring to the classroom. She treats children like a 'blank slate' instead of realizing that they are active meaning makers and have gained knowledge that she can make use of while teaching.

However, once a teacher understands that the child's reading and writing do not necessarily begin in school as a result of formal instruction, she will make note of and use the child's early experiences with print to further build and strengthen her literacy skills. Also, as she understands that listening and speaking do not precede reading and writing, rather they develop simultaneously, the classroom activities will ensure that the child gets an opportunity to develop and practice L, S, R and W together. The language lessons will have a fair balance of teaching strategies such as discussion, rhyme singing, drama (for oral language skills), and also read-aloud sessions, guided reading, free-hand writing, etc. (for written language skills). You will read more about these strategies in the subsequent Units of this Course.

The following conversation between a facilitator (F) and a practicing teacher (T) further elaborates how L, S, R and W develop together much before a child enters the school.

T: *Okay, you have convinced us that listening, speaking, and thinking go hand in hand. However, we still believe that listening and speaking should precede reading and writing; and that writing should follow reading.*

F: *You are right that usually when a child learns a new language, some amount of listening and speaking do precede reading and writing. Although, I would like to point out something. When children come to school, there are differences between children who have been raised in homes that are literate versus homes where there is no literacy – even though children from both kinds of homes have not yet learned to read or write.*

T: *Yes, there are big differences!*

F: *Yes, this is because children from literate homes have learnt a lot about reading and writing already – even before they learn how to read and write ‘aksharas’ (letters) and words in school. They have learnt that print has uses in life, and they have learned different ways in which the adults around them use print in their lives (e.g., to read a newspaper, to read signs, to make lists, to fill forms, etc.). They have also learnt many things about print, for example, the direction in which it moves, how to read it to find meaning, and so on. So, though we can’t say that these children have learnt to read and write conventionally, they have already begun learning to read and write – even as they’re learning to speak and listen.*

***Note:** Example 2 is an excerpt from Nisha Butoliya N. and Menon S. (2020) ‘Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing: Sequential or Simultaneous?’, p. 14-15.

- c) **The third incorrect belief is that in formal education more importance should be given to reading and writing in comparison to listening and speaking.** You would have noticed that in school most teachers are concerned about teaching children to read and write. Whenever a child joins the school, the focus is on teaching a language and the teacher begins this task by teaching the alphabet of a particular language. However, most schools do not focus on developing the listening and speaking skills of the children as a part of the curriculum. This happens maybe because we do not consider listening and speaking as a part of the formal language development process. Another reason could be that we do not understand the importance of oral language development in the development of literacy or written language skills. Actually, oral language serves as the foundation for literacy development. For example, refer to the example of the Japanese language given in Sub-section 1.2.3 of this Unit. You could decode the phrase, “*Hana wasakuragi, hitowabushi.*” but could not understand it. It happened because you have no vocabulary in the Japanese language. And since you have no vocabulary in Japanese, you cannot even write anything in Japanese. **Thus, without oral language, written words are simply symbols with no meaning.** Oral language is the foundation upon which the child’s literacy skills are formed. A child needs to have the vocabulary in the language and know the usage of that language to be able to learn to read and write in that language.

Implication for Teaching: Developing literacy skills becomes easier when a child discovers the connection between oral and written forms of language. The child comes to understand that the written text holds meaning and spoken words can be recorded using the symbols that she witnesses in the text. Therefore, before a child is introduced to reading and writing in a particular language in the classroom, she should have considerable proficiency in its oral language. The child should be given enough opportunities for the development of oral skills during the early school years too before she begins to explore and acquire the skill of reading and writing in a formal setup. The development of oral language should not be ignored and we should not directly start with teaching reading and writing in that language. We assume that as the child is learning to read and write a language, she will develop oral language too. However, this is not an appropriate way to teach a new language to a child and this has many harmful consequences for children. We shall discuss this aspect in our subsequent Units as well.

- d) **The fourth incorrect belief is that output by the child in the form of speaking and writing can emerge without adequate input in the form of listening and reading.** For instance, many teachers expect the child to be good at speaking and writing (expressive skills) without developing listening and reading (receptive skills) adequately. This is like expecting an output without giving input. If a child does not have adequate language input through listening and reading, she will also not be able to produce language either through speaking or writing. In short, if we wish our children to be fluent speakers and expressive writers, we will have to offer them an environment that offers them enough resources and opportunities to listen and read so that they can develop interest and gain mastery over their skills in speaking and writing too. On the contrary, usually, in a formal language learning class, we see very little language input given to a child. We do give some inputs but these are not adequate. A child is expected to speak on a topic, without getting a chance to ever listen to a variety of speeches that others would have made. We demand our children write flawless compositions without offering them first-hand experience in exploring and reading a variety of literature from a young age itself.

Implication for Teaching: If this belief prevails, the teacher is not likely to create opportunities that allow the child to explore and engage with listening and reading experiences. This leads to burdening the child as we do not offer adequate resources and experiences to develop her language skills. Therefore, the teacher needs to ensure that a language-rich environment is created for the child wherein she has access and opportunity to explore and make sense of various resources and inputs that may strengthen her language and literacy skills. Also, though providing relevant and timely input in the form of listening and reading opportunities is critical, it is not sufficient. We also need to teach speaking and writing explicitly to children for them to show significant improvement.

- e) **The fifth incorrect belief is that it is adequate to learn a language only based on the content given in the textbook for that class. Usually, a teacher teaches the chapters and content of the textbook and feels this is enough to develop the child’s language.**

We have to keep in mind that language learning is much more than learning the content of one textbook. One textbook can never be enough to learn a language. Exposure and access to several language inputs will eventually help improve a child’s language skills. Children are active meaning-makers and symbol-users who view the world holistically and learn holistically too. Children who receive more language inputs, opportunities to interact with others, to practice language skills are likely to develop better language skills.

Implication for Teaching: When the teacher’s prime reliance is on the textbook, she neither acknowledges the role of the child’s prior knowledge in her own learning, nor does she provide exposure to other reading-writing materials that can support the child to develop her language skills. For example, a classroom driven by textbooks as the prime source of learning will not have a library. However, offering a rich language environment beyond the textbook is necessary to develop a child’s language skills. We will discuss how we can create and offer a rich language-learning environment for the language and literacy development of the child in Unit 5 and 6 of this Course. It will help you to ensure that enough meaningful language inputs are provided to the children for the development of their language skills.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Give an example of each of the given:
 - a) Language supports thinking.
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.....
.....
 - b) Thinking supports language.
.....
.....
.....
.....
- 2) Mark the given statements as ‘True’ or ‘False’.
 - a) Writing develops only as a result of formal language teaching when the child joins the school.
 - b) Equal importance should be given to all language skills in formal education.

- c) Resources, other than textbooks should be used to develop children's language skills.
 - d) Listening and speaking develop fully before the skill of reading and writing start to develop.
 - e) To develop children's expressive skills such as speaking and writing, adequate language inputs should be offered to them.
- 3) Which of the following instances show the simultaneous and integrated development/teaching of the skill of reading and writing?
- a) A child observes the print in her environment and try to write these down.
 - b) The teacher conducts reading sessions for the first six months with a class and then gradually introduces some writing activities too.
 - c) The teacher gives writing task to the children without giving them any prior reading material.
 - d) The children were read out a story and then they were encouraged to draw/write it in their own words.
 - e) The teacher creates a small library in the class, however, they were not given the liberty to explore or read these.

1.6 SUMMING UP

There are four major skills of language – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Contrary to popular belief, all of these skills develop simultaneously and also feed into the development of each other. Therefore, while teaching language, one has to keep in mind that language learning is a holistic phenomenon. At the same time, language is essentially a process of meaning-making; thinking is an integral part of language learning. Teaching LSRW need not be a mechanical, sequential and boring exercise. In fact, the prime purpose of language learning should be to develop independent and creative thinking beings who can make sense of the world and also express themselves through various language skills. Therefore, the focus should be on building and developing an understanding of how language works, instead of mechanically teaching LSRW skills.

1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) a) No, it seems that the child 'listened' to the new classmate but she does not understand the language. Thus, she simply heard her and could not listen to (comprehend) what she heard.
- b) No, the child simply uttered a rhyme from memory. Most probably, she does not know what she spoke; so no speaking took place.
- c) Yes, writing took place. The child expressed herself through drawing which is her way of writing.
- d) The child read (decoded and comprehended) the text.

- 2) The early attempts at writing in the form of scribbles show the child's growing interest and understanding of print. This may not be the final stage of writing or appear similar to conventional writing, but it is also writing in the sense that it allows the child to express her thoughts through various formations which may or may not have some characteristics of adult-like writing. Moreover, these early scribbles serve as the foundation for the child to become an effective writer in the future.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) a) When a young child is introduced to a word, say the word 'Tree', she is also introduced to the concept of a 'Tree'. The label forms the concept in the child's mind.
- b) The child may know the concept of what 'Milk' is but may not know the name, and thus, she often names it herself 'Mimi', 'Moy', etc. The child's conceptual knowledge results in her giving a label to the object.
- 2) a) True
- b) True
- c) True
- d) False
- e) True

3)

Instance	Language Skill Developed	Reason
A child memorizes Kashmiri song and sings it out all day long.	None	The child is simply uttering words out; while it is a part of speaking, but unless the child knows the meaning of the song, it does not count as listening.
A girl makes her family members sit in front of her, tells them her favourite story.	Listening and Speaking	The child must have listened or have been read the story to herself. Recalling the story, she is narrating it in her own words.
A child makes a circular figure and make also draw some horizontal lines under it. When asked, he says that he has written the recipe of cake and share it verbally.	Reading and Writing	The child wrote something meaningful, even if not written using conventional script. She also reads it out to the teacher/parent.