



TOPIC 1

LA LENGUA COMO COMUNICACIÓN: LENGUAJE ORAL Y ESCRITO.

FACTORES QUE DEFINEN UNA SITUACIÓN COMUNICATIVA: EMISOR, RECEPTOR,  
FUNCIONALIDAD Y CONTEXTO.

LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION: ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE.

FACTORS THAT DEFINE A COMMUNICATIVE SITUATION (ADDRESSER, ADDRESSEE,  
FUNCTIONALITY AND CONTEXT).

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

*"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place"*  
*G.B. SHAW*

### A) JUSTIFICATION

The main aim of this topic, as its title suggests is to present the issue of language as communication and several related aspects that define a communicative situation such as transmitter, receiver, functions and functionality and context.

There is no doubt of the relevance of this topic within the sphere of Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Education since communication is always present in our lessons: songs, tales, rhymes, phonics, vocabulary, explanations, etc.

### B) CURRICULAR LINKS

The importance of this topic is fairly justified if we take into account the current legislation (*LOMLOE 3/2020 29TH December* and the *LEA 17/2007 10th December*), according to which the main objective in the teaching of English is to promote the effective and comprehensive learning of the English language as a fundamental skill for communication, personal development, and future opportunities.

The *LOMLOE* recognizes the importance of English as a global language and aims to ensure that students acquire the necessary linguistic competencies to navigate in an increasingly interconnected world.

Specific objectives of the *LOMLOE* regarding English language education include:

1.- Early language learning: Promoting the introduction of English language instruction from the early stages of education, recognizing the benefits of early exposure to language learning.

2.- Communicative competence: Fostering the development of communicative competence in English, emphasizing the acquisition of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to enable effective communication in real-life situations.

Intercultural understanding: Promoting intercultural understanding and respect through the teaching of English, facilitating students' appreciation of different cultures and perspectives.

3.- Digital literacy: Integrating the use of technology and digital resources to enhance English language learning, including the use of digital tools and resources for practice, interaction, and access to authentic English language materials.

5.- Teacher training and professional development: Providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities for English language teachers, ensuring they have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively teach English as a second language.

6.- Equity and inclusion: Ensuring equal access to quality English language education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, geographic location, or individual abilities.

The overarching goal is to equip students with the necessary linguistic and communicative skills in English to succeed in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, enabling them to pursue further education and engage with a diverse range of cultures and perspectives.

As I have mentioned before in the aforesaid objectives of our State Educational Law, one of the main aims is to achieve what CANALE named as Communicative Competence, concept that later

on was evolved and implemented into CEFR “Plurilingual Competence” and which is also now present in our current law.

### **C) TOPIC DEVELOPMENT**

This topic has been designed considering the works of authors and linguists such as HYMES, JACKOBSON, and GOFFMAN among many others that will be present when explaining the main concepts and theories.

First of all, I will give a general overview on the concept of language and what is communication as well as the main elements governing it, focusing later on on both oral and written communication.

## ***1. LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION***

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### **1.1. WHAT IS LANGUAGE?**

Many are the definitions that we find to define language according to the author, due to the importance of language have been changing along the history. From the big set of language definitions we can point out some of them:

*“ language is a purely human and non instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols” (E.SAPIR).*

*“Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory symbols” (R.A. HALL).*

*“Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts.” (HENRY SWEET)*

*“A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates.” (G. L. TRAGER).*

*“A set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements” (N. CHOMSKY)*

Language is the main means by which people communicate. As a general definition now we can thoroughly define language as *a system of signs that are combined by conventional rules to transmit or receive information.*

One of the most important contributions to this topic was **CHARLES F.HOCKETT**'s development of approach to comparative linguistics where he attempted to distinguish the similarities and differences among animal communication systems and human language.

Hockett initially developed seven features which were published in the 1959 paper

*“Animal ‘Languages’ and Human Language.”* However, after many revisions, he settled on 13 design-features.

Hockett argued that while every communication system has some of the 13 design features, only human, spoken language has all 13 features. In turn, this differentiates human spoken language from animal communication and other human communication systems such as written language.

Charles F. Hockett's 13 Design Features of Language are:

**Vocal-Auditory Channel**

Much of human language is performed using the vocal tract and auditory channel.

Hockett viewed this as an advantage for human primates because it allowed for the ability to participate in other activities while simultaneously communicating through spoken language.

**Broadcast transmission and directional reception**

All human language can be heard if it is within range of another person's auditory channel. Additionally, a listener has the ability to determine the source of a sound by binaural direction finding.

**Rapid Fading (transitoriness)**

Wave forms of human language dissipate over time and do not persist. A hearer can only receive specific auditory information at the time it is spoken.

**Interchangeability**

A person has the ability to both speak and hear the same signal. Anything that a person is able to hear, they have the ability to reproduce through spoken language.

**Total Feedback**

A speaker has the ability to hear himself speaking. Through this, they are able to monitor their speech production and internalize what they are producing through language.

**Specialization**

Human language sounds are specialized for communication. When dogs pant it is to cool them off, when humans speak it is to transmit information.

**Semanticity**

This refers to the idea that specific signals can be matched with a specific meaning.

**Arbitrariness**

There is no limitation to what can be communicated about and there is no specific or necessary connection between the sounds used and the message being sent.

**Discreteness**

Phonemes can be placed in distinct categories which differentiate them from one another, such as the distinct sound of /p/ versus /b/.

**Displacement**

The ability to refer to things in space and time and communicate about things that are currently not present.

**Productivity**

The ability to create new and unique meanings of utterances from previously existing utterances and sounds.

**Traditional Transmission**

The idea that human language is not completely innate and acquisition depends in part on the learning of a language.

**Duality of patterning**

Meaningless phonic segments (phonemes) are combined to make meaningful words, which in turn are combined again to make sentences.

Therefore, after having analyzed the main properties of language (what's language?) shall we analyze what is language for (what are the main functions of language?)

**1.2.- WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?**

Why do we use language? To communicate our ideas. Let me start by defining what communication is. Many are the definitions that spring from the concept:

In 1928 **AMSTRONG RICHARDS** proposed one of the first definitions for communication “Communication takes place when one mind so act upon its environment that another mind is influenced and in that another mind an experience occurs which is like the experience on the first mind”.

Later on, communication was understood as “the exchange and negotiation of information between at least two individuals through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, oral written or visual modes and production and comprehension processes”

Therefore, from this definition we can conclude that:

- It is a form Of social interaction.
- It always has a purpose.
- It involves creativity and unpredictability.

Thus, we must bear in mind that communication is the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols or code.

Having defined the concept of communication it is very important to analyze the different ways in which it occurs and the process it entails.

**2. THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION**

Learning a language is not only a grammatical and lexical process but also a social one. When we learn a language our main purpose is to communicate (and being understood) in this way we must look at Pragmatics which is concerned with the way language is used to communicate.

According to **HARMER** the nature of communication springs up two different branches:

- a) The Speaker -> who wants to communicate .
  - > has a communicative purpose
  - > selects from his/her language store what is appropriate

On the other hand, communication would be meaningless and pointless as well as futile if the listener did not occur. Thus,

- b) The Listener -> wants to listen
  - > is interested in the communicative purpose
  - > processes a variety of language

It was **JASSWELL** who said that in order to achieve such a purpose, the main task was to answer “Who said what to whom with what effect?” To do so, several models were proposed.

- i. **SHANNON AND WEABER** proposed their model in the 50s. "*The Mathematical or Lineal Model*" is very clear as well as simple and successful. The model was originally intended for electronic messages. There are five main elements arranged in linear order:
- 1.- Information source.
  - 2.- Transmitter: the one who changes the information into a signal.
  - 3.- Channel of transmission: the physical connection through which the message is conveyed.
  - 4.- Receiver: the one who changes back the information which is sent into the destination.
  - 5.- Destination.

Later on the model was rearranged and the five elements were renamed so as to specify the components for other types of communication:

- 1.- Source
- 2.- Encoder
- 3.- Message
- 4.- Channel
- 5.- Decoder
- 6.- Receiver

To these elements, it was also added the notion of Entropy or Noise Source which diminished the integrity of the message and distorts it for the receiver, i.e it turns intelligible messages into unintelligible ones.

However, the greatest antidote to entropy is Redundancy, which prevents the failure of communication by repeating the message's elements.

Finally NORBERT WIENER, added the principle of Feedback: the message sender must be responsive and calculate the effect of his/her utterances on the listener or receiver. Without this, interaction cannot function.

- ii. **JACKOBSON'S** model is one of the most productive ones analyzing the process of communication since the British linguist describes the elements of language use and communication as well as shows what humans do with language, i.e. The functions of language itself.

According to him, the process of communication contains the following elements:

|           |         |           |
|-----------|---------|-----------|
|           | Code    |           |
| Addresser | Message | Addressee |
| (Encoder) | Channel | (Decoder) |
|           | Context |           |

**Addresser and addressee:** They are the participants in the communicative act. The addresser (encoder or source) is the author of the message and the addressee (decoder or receiver) is the person or people to whom it is directed, or not, as in the case of a telephone conversation in daily life, we are continuously changing roles as addressers and

addressees. In an English classroom we should also try to vary the interactions, so that the communicative act is as genuine as possible.

**The Message:** The content of information that the speaker sends to the listener. Medium and channel: The medium is the means by which a message is transmitted; there are two types of media: speech (phonic medium) and writing (graphic medium).

**The Channel:** The place through which the message flows. It may be either physical or psychological. It enables both speaker and listener to stay in communication.

**The Code:** A limited and moderately wide group of signs which combine according to certain rules known by the speaker and by the listener. This system is shared by addresser and addressee. Language is the most frequent code used. But there are also other extra-linguistic codes. Non-verbal communication is very important in the first year of learning the spoken language, because students still have very little communicative competence

**The Context:** The situation in which the speaker and the listener are in, which sometimes helps to interpret the message. The linguistic context and situational context refers to the context provided by the linguistic system itself. The situational context will influence the language type that is used in a communicative act.

To these elements three more items were added:

**The purpose:** is the intention of a message. Addressers in a communicative act want something to happen as a result of what they say or write. They may want to give some information; they may want to express pleasure or they may want to apologize. The purpose will vary the election of the words of the addresser. If the intention is to apologize, the addresser can choose among a variety of apologizing forms.

**The topic:** is the matter about which the interaction is developed. Topics can be varied: health, transport, clothes, sports, etc. in order to have successful communicative activities in the English class it is essential for the topics to be based on the students' interests.

**Register:** in linguistics, register refers to a defined style of language and has to do with the formality in the use of language. The register relates all the factors entering into a communication act: the topic, the channel, the medium, the tenor and the context. We can differentiate the following registers: formal, Consultative, Casual, Intimate and frozen.

Each of these elements has a correspondent in the functions of language since Jakobson also stated what humans do with language, i.e. what they use the language for.

Jakobson's model classification is the most successful one though it comprises Bühler's communicative functions (though renamed) and three more.

Let's analyze them in further depth.

**Emotive function** focuses on the addresser and resembles Bühler's *expressive* function. The addresser's own attitude towards the content of the message is emphasized, i.e. A mood is projected in this use since it is related to the feelings that the speaker wants to convey. Examples are emphatic speech or interjections.

**Conative function** is allocated to the addressee. Bühler called it the *appellative* function. It is directed towards the addressee since we want to cause some sort of effect on the receiver.

One example is the vocative.

**Referential function** refers to the context. Here we, again, have the function emphasizing that communication is always dealing with something contextual, what Bühler called *representative*.

**Phatic or Transactional function** helps to establish contact and it is oriented to the channel of communication. Some of these utterances only serve to maintain contact between two speakers, i.e. to check if communication still exists as well as to keep the channel busy. They initiate (*I, 2, 3, probando*) or end (*Bye, see you*) communication.

**Metalinguistic function** deals with the code itself. This is the function of language about language. This whole reader is an example of metalanguage. We use it to examine the code. The metalinguistic function is also predominant in questions like “*Sorry, what did you say?*” where the code is misunderstood and needs correction or clarification.

**Poetic function** is allocated to the message, i.e. to the beauty of the message. The referent loses its importance of the way it is expressed. Messages convey more than just the content. They always contain a creative ‘touch’ of our own. These additions have no purpose other than to make the message “nicer”. Rhetorical figures, pitch or loudness are some aspects of the poetic function.

Naturally, several functions may be active simultaneously in utterances. To find out which function predominates requires analysis.

These functions of language have the following pedagogical implications:

- The English language teacher should not only teach the language for students to communicate their ideas (referential function), but he/she should also teach expressions, phrases or interjections to help them maintain relationships (phatic function), enjoy the language (poetic function) or to understand the language better (metalinguistic function).

iii. **HALLIDAY’S MODEL** entails the process of communication and the elements from the point of view of Semantics.

The British linguist Michael Halliday believes language exists to fulfill certain human needs, such as the need to make sense of the world or to relate to others. His model of language is called **functional or systemic grammar**. The development of this grammar was a reaction to more abstract approaches associated with Chomsky’s generative grammar. Halliday sees language as a social and cultural phenomenon, whereas Chomsky sees it as a biological one. According to this author there are the following functions of language:

**The ideational function:** This function emphasizes language as an instrument of thought with which we represent the world to ourselves. We use the language to conceptualize the world: language refers to real or imagined objects, persons, events, etc.

**The interpersonal function:** This function emphasizes language as an instrument of transaction by which we represent ourselves to other people. We use language as a personal medium: to establish or maintain social relationships.

**The textual function:** This function emphasizes language as an instrument of communication with which we construct sentences cohesively and coherently. We use language to form texts, whether spoken or written.

Several pedagogical implications can be derived from this view of language:

- The language presented to students must be contextualized in realistic and natural situations.
- Students are expected to interact with one another through pair and group work in order to experience communication.
- Syllabuses should be organized around the notions and functions that learners should acquire.

### 3. COMMUNICATION THEORIES

We have seen so far that communication entails interaction. Whenever interaction takes place we need to negotiate meaning. Competent language users do know what words mean literally, though given the functions of language it is not always used in a literal way. Communication is a collaborative venture in which participants make efforts to achieve communicative endings (checking meaning, selecting the topic, predicting, etc.).

#### **3.1. SPEECH ACT THEORY**

The British philosopher J.L. **AUSTIN** was the first to draw attention to the fact that many utterances do not communicate information but are equivalent to actions.

Two main types of functional potential there may exist:

*Performative* utterances performing an act either explicit (promise, war, deny) or implicit.

*Constative* utterances are those asserting something which is true or false.

According to his studies there are three performative acts:

**Locutionary act:** The performance of an utterance: the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning. That's the saying of something which is meaningful and can be understood.

**Illocutionary act:** This refers to the act which is performed as a result of the speaker making an utterance, i.e. using an utterance to perform something such as requesting, promising, warning, welcoming...

**Perlocutionary act:** it refers to the speaker's actual effect that the utterance has on the listener, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not.

However, all illocutionary acts may lose their illocutionary force if they do not satisfy several criteria known as Felicity Conditions. These are conditions that language users adopt to when they are engaged in communication.

Among these principles, Preparatory and sincerity conditions are worth mentioning since people automatically accept them then they communicate. If any of these do not obtain, then a special interpretation of the speech act has to apply.

### **3.2. COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE**

In social science generally and linguistics specifically, the cooperative principle describes how people interact with one another. As phrased by **PAUL GRICE**, who introduced it, it states, “*Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.*” Though phrased as a prescriptive command, the principle is intended as a description of how people normally behave in conversation. The cooperative principle can be divided into four maxims, called the **Gricean maxims or Cooperative Principle** describing specific rational principles observed by people who obey the cooperative principle; these principles enable effective communication.

**Maxim of Quantity:** states that speakers should give the right amount of information. A speaker should say neither too little nor too much.

**Maxim of Quality:** states that a speaker’s contribution to a conversation ought to be true. They should not say what they believe to be false, nor should they say something about which they lack evidence. It is flouted sometimes to achieve sarcasm.

**Maxim of Relevance:** states that contributions should clearly relate to the purpose of exchange. Speakers should be relevant.

**Maxim of Manner:** states that the contributions should be clear, perspicuous; speakers should avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

These maxims are extremely important when we deal with implied meaning, where the communicative value of the exchange is enormously eloquent.

## ***4. SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE***

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Up to this point we have studied the concept of language as means of communication, amongst other functions.

### **4.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE**

Now, let us move onto another important aspect of this unit, which deals with the main differences between oral and written language, therefore differences between writing and speech but before summarizing the main differences between spoken and written language we will outline their main features independently.

#### ***4.1.1. – SPOKEN LANGUAGE***

It is the most obvious aspect of language; speech is the universal material of language. Man has almost certainly been a speaking animal. The earliest known systems of writing go back perhaps some 5000 years. This means that for many hundreds of thousands of years human languages

have been transmitted and developed entirely as a spoken means of communication. The description and classification of speech sounds is the main aim of phonetics.

Sounds may be identified with reference to their production, their transmission and their reception. These three activities occur at the physiological level, which implies the action of muscles and nerves. The motor nerves that link the speaker's brain with his speech mechanism activate the corresponding muscles. The movements of the tongue, lips, vocal chords, etc, constitute the articulatory stage of the speech chain, and the area of phonetics that deals with it is articulatory phonetics. The movement of the articulation produces disturbances in the air pressure called sound waves which are physical manifestations. This is the acoustic stage of the chain, during which the sound waves travel towards the listener's ear. These sound waves activate the listener's ear drum.

#### **4.1.2. WRITTEN LANGUAGE**

On the other hand, we have written language which evolved independently at different times in several parts of the world. We can classify writing systems into two types: Non-Phonological Systems: These do not show a clear relationship between the symbols and the sounds of the language. They include the pictographic, ideographic, uniform and Egyptian hieroglyphics and logographic.

Phonological Systems: These do show a clear relationship between the symbols and the sounds of language. We can distinguish between syllabic and alphabetic systems. In a syllabic system each grapheme corresponds to a spoken syllable. Alphabetic writing establishes a direct correspondence between graphemes and phonemes. In a perfect regular system there is one grapheme for each morpheme. However, most alphabets in present day use fail to meet these criteria. At one extreme we find such languages as Spanish, which has a very regular system; at the other we find such cases as English and Gaelic where there is a marked tendency to irregularity.

#### **4.2.- DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE.**

Now, let's dive deeper into the main differences between writing and speech. The most obvious is the contrast in physical form. Speech uses phonic substance typically in the form of air-pressure movements, whereas writing uses graphic substance, typically in the form of marks on a surface. As writing can only occasionally be thought of as an interaction, we can establish the following points of contrast:

- The permanence of writing allows repeated reading and close analysis. The spontaneity and rapidity of speech minimises the chance of complex preplanning, and promotes features that assist speakers to think standing up.
- The participants in written interaction cannot usually see each other, so they cannot make clear what they mean. However, in speech interactions feedback is possible.
- The majority of graphic features present a system of contrasts that has no speech equivalent. Many genres of written language, such as tables, graphs and complex formulae, cannot be conveyed by reading aloud.
- Some constructions may only be found in writing; others only occur in speech, such as in slang and swear words.
- Finally, we can say that writing tends to be more formal and so it is more likely to provide the standard that society values. Its performance provides it with a special status.

Despite these differences, the written and spoken language has mutually interacted in many respects. We normally use the written language in order to improve our command of vocabulary, active or passive, spoken or written. It is true that writing has derived from speech in an historical sense, but nowadays their independence is mutual.

### **4.3 SCHOOL IMPLICATIONS**

The knowledge of the characteristics of oral and written language allows the teacher to design activities which will develop both of them; we can point out some implications in the class:

- Oral language is easier to acquire than written language, so it should be introduced earlier. It is more natural for a person to start listening and speaking first and later to read and write.
- Written language is characterized by a bigger demand in the correction of its structure than oral language. Sentences should be complete and grammatically correct, and words should be spelt correctly.
- Errors in oral language should be considered as more normal within the learning process, due to time constraints when uttering a message.
- Spelling exercises are important: students find the writing of words in English difficult, because of the difference between the oral and written forms.
- The understanding of oral expressions should be encouraged.
- The graphic features of writing make the learning of this skill the slowest to acquire. The preparation of texts should be very simple and guided in primary education.

## ***5. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS***

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Communication, either written as well as oral, is present in our daily life, as well as its strategies norms and conventions. Therefore, its proper use and usage must be thoroughly taught to our students from the early stages to a more advanced ones since they will find all these elements when writing a small text, listening to a story or having a conversation.

In the Spanish curriculum, communication its norms and conventions are envisaged throughout the stage since it is imbued from its “communicative and intercultural dimension” *Order 30th May, 2023*.

It is in the same legislative document, the *Order of 30th May in the Appendix 2* where it is stated that the teaching practice must aim at putting into practice “activities and communication strategies of comprehension, production, interaction and mediation, understood at this stage as the activity aimed at facilitating mutual understanding and processing and transmitting basic and simple information”.

The block about communication deals with the fact that it will be necessary to mobilize for the development of communicative activities of comprehension, production, interaction and mediation, including those related to the guided search for information.

Therefore, the importance of this type of content cannot be understated since students cannot communicate successfully if they do not follow the proper conventions when engaged in natural communicative exchanges.

All these reasons are Paramount when we are planning activities in our lessons. Students must always be engaged in meaningful communicative activities, i.e those promoting real-life meaningful situations.

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