

SECTION

17

CONVERSATION/ COMMUNICATION IN CONTEXT



ORAL LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

Whatever else we learn about Language, it has to be remembered that the English Language continues to be a living, developing entity. Speaking it is the foundation on which everything else is built – the language of Literature, of business, of learning and of daily communication with family, at work, and in playing sport spring from this foundation.

Study this conversation carefully.

TEACHER: Awuraa, what do you say to your friend when you offend her?

AWURAA: Please, I will tell her 'I am sorry'.

TEACHER: That's very good.

In this Section, we are going to learn about formal/ informal language use in communication or in conversation. We will look at when, how and in which cases or situations we are supposed to use the formal and informal languages in our everyday conversation or communication.

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- Use language appropriately in different speech situations (Formal and informal).

KEY IDEAS

- Formal language is the language used during official gatherings and occasions such as speech and award ceremonies, debate, school assembly, public speaking, and sessional addresses.
- Informal language is language generally used in peer conversations and dialogue.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGES

These are two broad categories of language use, differing in tone, vocabulary, and purpose. While formal language is used in professional or academic settings, informal language on the other hand is used in everyday conversations, social media and casual writing.

Formal Language

Formal language is the language used during official gatherings and occasions such as speech and prize-giving/award ceremonies, debate, school assembly, public speaking, and sessional addresses. Other occasions include seeking permission in the classroom and

making a report to the headmaster/headmistress. Language used in these settings must be polite and generally devoid of contracted forms of verbs. We do not use slang and pidgin English in formal language.

Some forms of languages that are used in formal conversations and communications are:

1. **Polite language:** These are languages that we use to show courtesies, respect and considerations among our friends and others. They include the use of words that soothe our mind and soul; they normally include words or phrases that show gratitude, requests and apologies where necessary. Some words that are considered polite are:
 - a. Please and Thank You: These words are used to show respect and appreciation. Example: ‘Could you please give me your pen?’ ‘Thank You for your help.’
 - b. Apologies and Excuses: ‘I am sorry I was late. It was unavoidable.’
 - c. Indirect Requests: Example ‘Would you mind helping me with this?’
 - d. Respectful Address using titles, and last names. Example: ‘Good morning, Mr Asiedu’, ‘Excuse me Sir/Madam’.
2. **Quotations and statistics:** Statistics refer to numbers or data or information that are used to quantify, support, or refute an argument. In formal language statistics are used to provide evidence, demonstrate trends, enhance credibility, clarify and quantify arguments. These words are used when citing someone else’s words, whether they are spoken or written. They are commonly used to:
 - a. Support Arguments: Quotations from experts, authors, or prominent individuals can strengthen an argument by providing authoritative backing. As Kwegyir Aggrey once said, ‘if you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation’.
 - b. Illustrate a Point: Quotations can also express a complex idea or emotion, ‘In the words of Chinua Achebe, ‘Things fall Apart, the centre cannot hold’.
 - c. Maintain Formality: In formal writing or speech, quotations are often used to ensure that the tone remains serious and respectful. “According to the rules and regulations of our school, it is an offence to scale the walls of the school.”
3. **Rhetorical Questions:** These are questions that do not require an answer or response, but to make a point, highlight a thought or provoke reflections. Rhetorical Questions are used in formal language to engage the audience by drawing their attention, by encouraging them to think more deeply about the topic, example: ‘Isn’t it right if we engage our girls in sporting activities in our school?’ Rhetorical Questions are also used to emphasise a point by asking a question that has an obvious answer, that the writer or speaker underscores the significance of a point. ‘Who doesn’t want to become a millionaire?’ Rhetorical Questions can be used to bring out contradictions in an argument or situation. They prompt the audience to reflect on the issue at hand, often leading them to consider their own beliefs or actions. Rhetorical Questions can persuade the audience by leading them to a particular conclusion without directly stating it. ‘If not you, then who should?’ Rhetorical Questions can smoothly be used to bring out new ideas in a speech work or written work. In formal language, rhetorical questions are a powerful tool to guide the audience’s thinking, emphasise key points, and make the communication more engaging and persuasive.

4. **Idioms, Idiomatic and Figurative Expressions** are all language elements that bring out meanings aside the real definitions of the words used. They add colour, style, and creativity to communication.

Idioms are phrases or expressions whose meaning cannot be understood from the actual meanings of the individual words. Idioms often reflect cultural differences and are specific to particular languages. Examples: ‘Take French leave’ (to leave without permission), ‘Hit the nail on the head’ (to tell the truth), ‘To dance to the music’ (to follow the flow or momentum).

Idioms have some characteristics such as:

Fixed Phrases: Idioms are usually set expressions with a specific word order. They often don’t translate well into other languages because they are tied to cultural references or historical events. They are commonly used in informal language but can also appear in formal writing or speech to add more explanations or meanings in a clearer way.

Idiomatic Expressions are phrases or sentences that use idioms, but can also include other figurative languages like metaphors, similes or hyperbole. Like idioms, the words together have a meaning different from the individual meanings of each word. They are used in a broader way to refer to any expression that is characteristic of a particular language.

Examples of Idiomatic Expressions: ‘In a jiffy’ (be with you in a minute), ‘To let the cat out of the bag’ (to reveal a secret) ‘a widow’s mite’ (something small but of greater value because of the donor). Some characteristics of idiomatic expressions are:

- a. **Non-literal:** Idiomatic expressions have meanings that are not directly from the real or actual meanings of the words.
- b. **Expressiveness:** Idiomatic expressions often convey a particular emotion, tone, or difficulties that might be hard to express in plain language.

Idiomatic expressions are used in several ways in both spoken and written language.

- i. Idioms can make language more colourful and engaging. They often add meaning or make a thought clearer. Example, saying ‘kick the bucket’ is more expressive than saying he or she is dead or has died. It would be completely wrong/insensitive to use the phrase as consolation to someone who has died.
- ii. **Conveying Complex Ideas Simply:** Idiomatic expressions can make communication simpler than expressing complex ideas. ‘When we get to that bridge, we shall cross’ is better than saying ‘this decision is difficult’
- iii. **Reflecting Cultural Understanding:** Using idiomatic expressions correctly creates a deeper understanding of a language and its culture.
- iv. **Creating a Conversational Tone:** Idiomatic expressions are often used to create or bring out a relaxed, conversational tone. They are more common in informal speech or writing making the conversation feel more natural and friendly.

- v. **Humour and Playfulness:** Many idiomatic expressions are used playfully, example 'let the cat out of the bag' which means to reveal the secret, can be used in a light-hearted way to add humour to a conversation.
- vi. **Expressing Attitudes or Emotions:** Idiomatic expressions can make statements soft to avoid directness. Example, 'She is now finally at rest' usually means that she has died, to avoid having to state bluntly, 'She is dead'.
- vii. **Supporting Storytelling:** Idiomatic expressions can be used in narratives to spice up or add depth to characters, setting or dialogue. They help create real or genuine characters, and realistic dialogues, especially when the characters are part of a specific cultural or social background. Some writers use a character's repeated phrases as a device to reveal aspects of the character's personality.

The use of idiomatic expressions enables speakers and writers to make their communication more engaging and culturally rich.

5. **Controlled Jokes and humour:** this simply talks about jokes, or humorous content that is carefully made, or delivered to meet specific objectives. This kind of humour is often created for a particular audience or setting, making sure that it does not in any way often or cross certain lines. Some aspects of controlled jokes and humour include:
 - a. **Suitable for the audience:** Controlled humour is created to suit the sense of the audience. Examples: jokes made in a suitable setting are mostly free of conflicting ideas like politics, religion, or sensitive personal matters.
 - b. **Cultural Sensitivity:** humour takes into consideration cultural differences and avoids the use of stereotypes or remarks that could be considered insensitive or offensive to different cultural groups.
 - c. **Jokes are very important to the context in which they are being presented.** Example a joke made during an SRC week celebration might relate to the event or topic at hand, keeping the humour focused and important.
 - d. **Avoidance of Challenging topics:** To prevent challenges or conflicts, controlled jokes steer clear of subjects that could provoke controversies or conflicts such as race, gender, politics or religion.
 - e. **Controlled humour is used in educational settings to make learning more engaging.** It is carefully selected to be both informative and entertaining, enhancing the learning experience without distracting from the material. Above all, controlled humour is about balancing the need to entertain with the need to respect the audience and context. It also paves the way for humour to be enjoyed in a wide range of settings without crossing boundaries or causing unattended harm. Thus sarcasm is generally to be avoided in educational contexts.

Informal Language

Informal language is generally used in peer conversations and dialogues. It is useful for getting information across effectively and concisely. It is also a more relaxed form of communication. It is also a relaxed form of communication. It is the preferred form of language used for any kind of communication that is personal rather than official. Informal language draws people closer together (a sense of familiarity)

Informal language comprises the use of:

1. Contracted forms of words
2. Slang words
3. Pidgin
4. Colloquialism
5. Ellipses
6. Jargon

1. **Contracted form of words:** These are short words or phrases in which one or more letters are taken out or replaced by the use of an apostrophe. They are usually and most commonly used in informal speech and writing to make communication more flowing and efficient. Examples of contracted forms of words are: “He’s” the contracted form of “He is”; “Wouldn’t” is the contracted form of “Would not”; “They aren’t” is the contracted form of the word “They are not”; ‘Isn’t it’ is the contracted form of ‘Is it not’.

2. **Slang words:** These are unconventional words or phrases that are mostly used during casual communication or conversations. They can be specific to some particular groups, regions or subcultures and often change over time. Slang can be used to express familiarity, humour and a sense of belonging to a group.

Some examples of words that are used as slang:

‘Ghost’: To suddenly cut off all communication with someone (e.g. I ghosted him after our first meeting”).

‘Babe’: A term of endearment for the significant other (‘Babe, I miss u so much).

‘Lol’: short form for ‘Laugh out loud’).

‘Drape’: deals with fashion (‘she was draping in her new blue jeans over the white club shirt’).

Slang most often changes with new terms popping up, giving way to new slang coming out. There is a saying, ‘Nothing dates you more than the slang you use.’

3. **Colloquialisms:** They are informal words or phrases, or expressions that are more commonly used in our everyday communication than in formal speech and writing. They often bring out how people in some particular area or regions speak or among a specific group. These at times include idioms, slang or regional dialect. Colloquialisms add a sense of semblance or warmth to communication. Examples of colloquialism are ‘wanna’; a contraction of ‘want to’ e.g. (‘I wanna go to the movies this Friday’).

‘Xup’, A casual greeting or way of asking how someone is faring or feeling. (‘Xup with you this afternoon’) Another example of colloquialism is ‘shoddy’ which refers to a girl, (‘The shoddy was here yesterday’). Colloquialisms mostly differ from one

region or culture to another, and they contribute to the uniqueness and richness of all languages.

4. **Ellipses:** When we say Ellipses in informal speech or language, we are referring to three dots (...) that are used in writing to indicate the omission or that something has been left out or also to create a pause. We use four dots (. . . .) when the ellipted part is at the end of a sentence and has included a full stop. Ellipses can be used in the following forms:
 - a. a. **Omission of words:** To show that a portion of a text has been left out, often in quotations. Example: ‘She said, I will always be there for you...as long as I live’.
 - b. **Pause or Hesitation:** to show a break or pause in speech or an incomplete thought. “Kofi didn’t tell me if I should wait for him...probably he won’t come back today.
 - c. To also show that something has been left unsaid.” Kimathy was about to embark on a trip, but...it's ok.”
5. **Jargon:** This is a special language or terminology used by a set or specific profession, group or activity. They are expressions that are specific to a particular field and may not be easily understood by those who are not part of that field. Examples:
 - a. **Schools Jargon:** ‘Gobe’ used in schools to refer to gari and beans with palm oil. ‘Ashi’ is used to refer to a student who leaves or runs away from school before school closes. Sport, Politics and Business/Economics are full of jargon expressions. You might think of examples in a group.
 - b. **Legal Jargon:** ‘Subpoena’ used to refer to a legal document ordering someone to appear before or attend a court.
‘Habeas corpus’: A legal principle that protects against unlawful detention.

Jargons can be useful for efficient communication within a specific group but can also create barriers to understanding for those who are not used to the terminologies.

Activity 17.1

1. Click on the link below and watch the short conversation on ‘A visit to the market’ https://youtu.be/X_xmgTJpoU4?si=CWBDxuiOua72XZ0j
2. From the video you just watched, describe the type of conversation or communication that is going on?
 - a. Is it formal conversation or informal conversation?
 - b. Describe what is happening in the story?
 - c. Who are the participants in the story?
 - d. Where is the conversation taking place?
 - e. Comment on the usage of formal language throughout. What is learned?
 - f. What lesson is the story teaching us, if any (moral values)?

Activity 17.2

1. Read the informal conversation between Maame Kay and Papa.

Maame Kay: Where is the Teacher's table?

Papa: The teacher's table is at the right-hand corner of the class.

Maame Kay: Where is the dustbin?

Papa: It's right under the teacher's table.

Maame Kay: Where is Awuraa Adwoa?

Papa: She's gone to the restroom

Maame Kay: OK.

2. From the above informal conversation
 - a. Who are the participants?
 - b. Who is the intended audience in the conversation?
 - c. Where is the conversation taking place?
 - d. Comment on the use of Informal language throughout.

Activity 17.3

1. Read the conversations below and identify which one is *Formal* and which one is *Informal*.

Conversation 1

The new policy has been implemented to improve customer satisfaction. It aims to reduce waiting times and enhance overall service quality. Our team has organised extensive training to ensure a peaceful handing over. We are convinced that these changes will have a positive impact on our customers' experience.

Conversation 2

Hey guys, so we've got a new policy that's supposed to make things better for our customers. Basically, we're trying to cut down on waiting times and make our services more awesome. We've all been trained up, so fingers crossed. It's gonna make a big difference. Hopefully, our customers will be stoked with the changes.

2. Answer the following questions
 - a. Identify some words that are used to indicate if a text is Informal or Formal.
 - b. What is the conversation about?
 - c. Who are the speakers in the second conversation?

ACTIVITY 17.4

Call a friend and form a dialogue using informal language about yourselves.

ACTIVITY 17.5

Write a short essay on a formal conversation and another essay on an Informal conversation using the appropriate words or phrases.

Extended Reading

- Functional English for Senior High Schools
- A+ English Language by William Ofori & Samuel Sarfo Duku

References

- Carter, R., et al; McCarthy, M. (2020). Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide (2nd ed.) Cambridge University Press.
- Azar, B. S., et al; Hagen, S. A. (2021). Understanding and Using English Grammar (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Roach, P. (2009). English phonetics and phonology: A practical course (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Wiredu. F. J, (1992). Organised English Structure, with A Self-Study and Practice Book for students of Training colleges, the Polytechnics and the Universities: Academic Publications Accra.

Review Questions

1. Identify the language type to use in the following situations;
 - a. Orientation / Introduction ceremony
 - b. SRC meetings
 - c. Committee meetings
 - d. At the Mall
 - e. In the hospital
 - f. At the post office
 - g. Peer conversation
 - h. Asking permission from the class prefect
 - i. Asking permission to visit a friend
 - j. A meeting with the form master/mistress
2. Using the headings below, create 5 conversations, one for each, using formal or informal language to depict the situations:
 - a. Sending condolences
 - b. Inability to meet a schedule
 - c. Speech at birthday parties
 - d. Graduation ceremony
 - e. Send –off ceremony
3. Create a four slide PowerPoint or flipchart presentation on the use of formal and informal language in communications.

Acknowledgements



Ghana Education
Service (GES)



List of Contributors

Name	Institution
Beatrice Antwiwaa Boateng	Oti Boateng SHS, Koforidua
Jennifer Afua Kyei-Baffour	Sakafia Islamic SHS, Kumasi
Isabella Sika Keh	Achimota School
N-yalamba Jerry Njomoun	Tatale E.P. Agric SHS