

Spoken Skills in Dhaka University English Curriculum: A Document Analysis

Neelima Akhter*

Abstract: Speaking has been an undervalued skill in the methodologies of language courses for a long time. In the Department of English at the University of Dhaka the teaching of spoken skills has gone through changes in the last two decades. This study offers an in-depth document analysis of the spoken component of a first semester language course by looking into the syllabus and textbooks that the department has used since the 1990s. Analysis shows that the department has been actively involved in designing its own materials for teaching English rather than adopting western materials. Analysis of the syllabus and materials indicate a clear move from a 'direct' to an 'indirect' approach to speaking. Speaking is given less importance than other skills such as writing and reading while there is a preference for open-ended 'discussion' activities over other categories. The features of genuine spoken discourse seem to be underrepresented in most of the versions of the textbook.

Introduction

Spoken skills have not always occupied a strong position in the methodologies of language courses in the Department of English at the University of Dhaka as is the case elsewhere. Bygate (1998) points out that speaking has been some sort of a Cinderella in language teaching. In the west, it is only in the last three decades that speaking has been assigned some space in teaching and testing. Approaches to teaching speaking have been influenced by a variety of development in English language teaching (ELT) methodology and applied linguistics. For one thing, the teaching of speech has changed as the different ELT methods have waxed and waned. On the other hand, findings in spoken discourse analysis and 'corpus linguistics' have informed language teaching by revealing the nature of spoken language.

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka.

Most of the major teaching methods other than the Grammar Translation Method have put some emphasis in one form or the other on teaching the spoken language although the methodology for doing so has varied greatly. The reformers of the late nineteenth century for the first time emphasized that spoken language should be included in the language curriculum. The Direct Method, which was supposedly based on reformist principles, focused on teaching the simple sentences and vocabulary and their pronunciation through an oral method that involved demonstration and the use of realia. This method was the first one to emphasize speech over writing albeit in an extreme manner by drawing analogy to first language acquisition. The Audiolingual Method, through its pattern drills, did use an oral methodology. The focus, however, was on teaching structures rather than fluency. It is only since the 1980s, with the rise of the communicative approaches, that speaking has been recognized as a vital skill to be taught.

While methods have influenced classroom methodologies including syllabus, materials and procedure, the study of spoken discourse has cast light on the nature of spoken English and has highlighted how speech is different from written discourse. According to Richards (2008), spoken language is unplanned, instantaneous and compared to the written, which has the sentence as the unit of organization, spoken language is delivered as one clause at a time and as coordinated clauses for longer utterances. The teaching of spoken skills, therefore, should be significantly different from that of written skills.

The Department of English at the University of Dhaka mainly focuses on teaching literature in the Bachelor's Degree though there are a few courses on English language and another few on applied linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT). At the master's level, however, it offers two degrees – one in literature and the other in applied linguistics and ELT. The department, which started in 1921 with the inception of the University of Dhaka, did not offer language courses until 1985. A remedial language course was first introduced in this year to address the English language needs of the students (Alam, 2001). This course was supposed to brush up the four language skills of the first year honours students. Since then, the department has periodically modified its language curriculum. At present it offers four language courses. The first one, called 'Developing English Language

Skills', focuses on four language skills and is offered in the first undergraduate semester. 'Advanced Composition' – offered in the second semester – aims at improving students' writing skills while 'Academic Writing' – offered in the third semester – emphasizes writing following academic conventions. The fourth course is 'English for Professional Purposes' and it aims to develop sixth-semester students' skills in using English in professional settings.

While the above-mentioned four language courses emphasize different aspects of language learning, the focus of this study is to investigate how spoken skills have been taught in the premier English department of the country. I plan to offer a historical analysis of the syllabus and the materials for speaking, a skill that has been found to be scarcely practised in mainstream Bangladeshi schools and colleges (Hasan, 2004; Sinha, 2006). Adopting a qualitative document analysis approach to research, I intend to explore how the teaching of speaking has evolved in the Department of English at the University of Dhaka since the late 1990s when the department first started compiling materials from a communicative perspective.

Review of Literature

In the last three decades teaching speaking has gained importance in ELT. Recent developments in the area have focused on both the 'what' and the 'how' of teaching spoken English. In this section I discuss these two major aspects of teaching speaking: the nature of spoken language and the nature of activities used for teaching spoken language.

Nature of spoken language

Work in conversation analysis has revealed that spoken interaction has a different organizational structure than written discourse and is complex in nature. Luoma (2004) discussed the following features of spoken discourse:

- Composed of idea units (conjoined short phrases and clauses)
- May be planned (e.g. a lecture) or unplanned (e.g. a conversation)
- Employs more vague or generic words than written language
- Employs fixed phrases, fillers and hesitation markers
- Contains slips and errors reflecting on-line processing

- Involves reciprocity (i.e. interactions are jointly constructed)
- Shows variations (e.g. between formal and casual speech) reflecting speaker roles, speaking purpose and the context

Corpus based spoken language research has shown that spoken grammar is distinct from and independent of written grammar, not deviation from norms which it is commonly thought to be. Timmis (2012, p. 515) has argued that corpus research has contributed in two major ways: it has demonstrated that “some non-canonical spoken grammatical features are more systematic and pervasive than previously thought” and it has provided insights into features that have been traditionally described only with regards to their written use.

Studying CANCODE spoken corpus, McCarthy and Carter (1995) commented that spoken language should not be judged from the accuracy issues of written language and that learners should be made aware of its unique qualities. Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) argued that while written and spoken language have a common underlying grammar system, spoken language has features that are rare in the written form. Such features include

- the use of non-sentence fragments
- unconventional or inconsistent sentence structure
- ellipsis
- ‘heads’ and ‘tails’
- chunks: ‘fillers’, vagueness tags etc.

Cullen and Kuo (2007) categorised three ways in which spoken grammar differs from the written. In Category A they list productive grammatical constructions that involve “a degree of grammatical encoding in their production or grammatical decoding in their interpretation” (p. 365). This group includes heads, tails, past progressive for introducing reported speech and situational ellipsis. Category B includes fixed lexicogrammatical units – single lexemes or short phrases – “which do not undergo morphological change and are inserted into the utterance at an appropriate place, typically to modify a constituent in the utterance” (p. 365). This category includes particles that are used as conversational fillers such as ‘sort of’, vagueness tags such as ‘and things like that’ and discourse markers such as ‘you know’, ‘I mean’. In Category C they placed a small set of items that are used in

informal conversation that are “considered grammatically incorrect by prescriptive guides to correct usage” (p. 371). Examples include use of ‘less’ instead of ‘fewer’ with countable nouns, use of ‘more’ as a comparative marker with adjectives of one syllable as in ‘more fresh’. Cullen and Kuo’s study revealed that features of spoken English have filtered through British ELT coursebooks published since 2000 though in a restricted way. They also found that spoken language is presented in a procedure similar to the I-I-I (illustration-induction-interaction) advocated by McCarthy and Carter (1995) which typically involves

- exposure to the feature through semi-scripted conversational discourse for listening;
- a task on the listening text to check global comprehension;
- attention drawn on the target feature (through repeated listening or use of the transcript);
- brief explanation of the feature and questions;
- short controlled practice activity to use the feature.

Noting that spoken language has been mostly represented as deviations from the written norms, McCarthy (2001) argued that spoken grammar and vocabulary should be presented as independent, based on the evidence from spoken corpora. Comparing CANCODE spoken data with textbook dialogues, Carter (1998) showed that scripted dialogues lack core spoken language features such as discourse markers, vague language, ellipses, and hedges. Burns (2001) reported similar results together with the finding that scripted dialogues often use two-part questions while in real life they are often three-part. Studying spoken grammar in one edition of *Advancing English Skills*, the textbook for the first year language course “Developing English Language Skills”(which is examined in this study, too,) in the Department of English, Basu (2014) found that the textbook contains discourse markers, such as ‘well’, ‘you see’ and contracted forms such as ‘what’s up’ while it lacks features such ‘heads’, ‘tails’ ‘initial ellipsis’ and ‘fillers’.

Thus, naturally occurring spoken language has been found to have an independent grammar, which is underrepresented in language teaching materials.

Nature of activities used for teaching speaking

Contemporary approaches to speaking activities have two major trends. The first trend focuses on developing micro skills of accurate speech production. It emphasizes, for example, phonological patterns, lexis, grammatical forms etc. The second approach emphasizes developing fluency through engaging learners in non-controlled activities.

Littlewood (1992) pointed out that while all language learning activities aim at teaching the language system for communication, some are specifically intended to help learners master the system. He called these activities 'part-skill practice'. Many Grammar-Translation Method exercises such as practising tenses, inflexions and sentence patterns and drills popular with the audio-lingual method fall into this category, but it includes more. Activities that link language with its literal meaning by focusing on shared knowledge or situation to use the new language or on exchanging 'literal information' (p. 84) and activities that link language with functional and social meaning by focusing on controlled practice of communicative functions and role-playing tasks – all fall in this group. These activities are called 'part-skill' practice because they are carefully controlled to avoid the unpredictability of natural communication. On the other hand, some activities, which he calls 'whole-task activities', involve free communication and less external control (such as from the teacher). A problem solving task will be a good example of this. However, Littlewood pointed out that there is no arbitrary line between the two activity types: they rather fall in a continuum.

Richards (1990) distinguished between 'direct' and 'indirect' approaches to teaching speaking. The first one focuses explicitly on processes and strategies of conversation, addressing directly aspects of conversation such as strategies for turn-taking, topic control and repair; conversational routines; pronunciation; differences between formal and casual conversation etc. The second approach is the task-based approach where the focus is on using language to complete a task rather than practising language for its own sake.

The above classifications offer a broad categorization of activities. Typologies have been put forward to provide a more detailed discussion and grouping of speaking activities that can be done in the class. Ur (2012) discussed a number of activities that may help learners

with speaking. The first group includes topic- and task-based activities. In a topic-based activity learners participate using their own experience and knowledge on a topic of 'genuine controversy'. In a task-based activity students in a pair or a group try to reach a goal through interaction. The second group involves various discussion activities such as describing a picture, finding out similarities and differences in pictures, discussing a problem and suggesting solution to a problem and so on. The third group in Ur's discussion recognizes the need to learn different types of social interaction. Communicating in a language involves interactional talk which includes some formulae of courtesy among other things, for example, greeting, taking leave, ending conversations, apologizing, thanking and so forth. Such functions of speech depend as much on cultural conventions as they do on the knowledge of the language (Ur, 2012). This makes the teaching of interactional talk more difficult. Ur suggested that role plays might give some opportunities to practise such talk. For adults, more advanced or academic students, the ability to take long turns is also important. Activities like telling stories, describing a person or place, recounting a plot of a film, play or book, giving a short prepared lecture or talk can help students practise long turns.

The fourth group of activities involves some sort of role playing. Dialogues have gone somewhat out of fashion in recent years but are still used by many materials writers and teachers. In this activity students learn a dialogue by heart and perform it privately in pairs or publicly in front of the whole class. Plays are expansion of the dialogue technique, where learners learn and perform an actual play from the literature of the target language or one composed by them or the teacher. In simulations learners are given an imaginary situation, group role and task but individual participants speak or react as themselves. In a role play individual students improvise roles allotted to them while the group or pair has a situation plus problem or task as in simulations.

Richards (2001) proposed a typology including five categories from a strictly task-based point of view. Jigsaw tasks for him involve learners in combining different pieces of information to form a whole. Information gap tasks involve learners with different sets of information in negotiating to find out what the other party's information is in order to complete an activity. In problem-solving tasks students are given a problem and a set of information to use to reach a solution. Decision-

making tasks give learners a problem for which a number of solutions are possible, but they must choose one through negotiation and discussion. The last one, opinion exchange tasks engage learners in exchange of ideas but they do not have to reach an agreement. Among these five categories, first four seem close in the sense that learners need to come to one or one of a few solutions. The last one is open, leaving the outcome up to the learners.

This typology is based on a strict definition of task and excludes many activities discussed in Ur's classification, which includes both tasks and other type of activities.

Thornbury (2005) describes three stages to fluency from a sociocultural point of view: awareness, appropriation and autonomy and puts forward three macro classes of speaking activities that offer opportunities for reaching these stages:

1. Awareness raising activities
2. Appropriation activities
3. Activities that foster autonomy

Subdividing awareness to include paying attention, noticing, and understanding, Thornbury recommends the use of recordings, both for students to listen to and to make transcripts and the use of 'live listening' from the teacher or a guest. After listening learners are asked to note features and useful expressions.

Appropriation is defined as the transition from 'other regulated' to 'self regulated' through social interaction and a supportive framework. Activities that help with appropriation are

- Drills and chants
- Writing task such as dictation, paper conversations, computer-mediated chat, rewriting a written dialogue etc.
- Reading aloud
- Assisted performance and scaffolding, for example by reformulating learners' utterances
- Dialogues
- Communicative tasks such as information gap or jigsaw tasks

To achieve learner autonomy in speaking, including self-development, self-monitoring and unassisted performance, Thornbury proposes activities such as

- Presentations and talks
- Stories, jokes and anecdotes
- Drama, role-play and simulations
- Discussion and debates
- Conversations and chat

While there are many typologies to classify activities, there is a paucity of research to show which type of activities are preferred by materials writers for coursebooks and even more so in Bangladeshi context.

The Study

The present study focuses on the approaches to teaching the spoken skills the Department of English has adopted from the late 1990s till today. It specifically investigates the spoken component of an English language course called *Eng.101: Developing English Language Skills*, which is offered to first year 1st semester students doing their BA Honours in English. It is in the 1990s, with the adoption of communicative language teaching in Bangladeshi language education, that spoken English has made some inroads into the language curriculum. This study seeks to answer the following research questions with regards to the evolution of teaching speaking in the department since the 1990s.

1. How has the syllabus component for teaching speaking in the Department of English, University of Dhaka evolved since the 1990s?
2. What kinds of activities have been used in the textbooks used for teaching speaking since the 1990s?
3. To what extent do the texts used in the textbooks display features of genuine spoken discourse?

I followed an in-depth document analysis approach to answer these questions. In doing so, I used the frameworks discussed in the previous section. Littlejohn (1998) pointed out that materials can be analysed 'as they are' or as 'materials-in-action', the first being concerned with the content and ways of working that they propose and the second with what happens when the materials are brought into use. This study analyses the materials 'as they are' rather than when materials are used in class.

Findings

As already mentioned, the Department of English started a language course in 1985 as a response to the growing concern over students' inadequate language skills to engage with literature. Until the late 1990s, teachers used western materials for teaching language courses. In 1998, the Faculty of Arts made a foundation English course compulsory for its students from all the twelve departments it then consisted of. The teachers of the Department of English were given the responsibility to teach the course for which a few new teachers were recruited. The Department designed materials, first in a compiled volume taking from several authors and later wrote a textbook which has gone through several modifications in nearly two decades.

Evolution of the Syllabus for Teaching Speaking

Syllabus, defined as “a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology)” (Allen, 1984, p. 61, cited in Nunan, 1988, p. 5), is an integral part in curriculum. Syllabus and textbooks and other materials are supposed to be in sync with each other. The Department of English has been publishing a student handbook for a long time, which contains a variety of information including the syllabus. The syllabus for the first year language course being talked about here has been a detailed one since the 1990s. However, the treatment of the speaking component has varied. The syllabus published in 1997 had a functional arrangement of content for teaching speaking as can be seen below.

Speaking:

Students will focus on developing speaking which will include strategies for communication and an acquaintance with phonetics.

Tasks will include making statements, requests, inquiries, disagreeing, complaining, and apologizing, discussing and other oral presentations.

The syllabus used between 1998 and 2006 (when the Department was teaching the English foundation course to all students of the Arts Faculty) barely mentioned the teaching of speaking in just one phrase ‘developing spoken skills’ with no further specification of content. From 2007, however, there was a more detailed speaking component. The syllabuses effective between 2008 and 2015 have the same specification for the spoken skills, as is shown below:

Speaking

- Understanding social conventions (i.e., formal/informal speech, turn taking etc.)
- Guided conversations (involving different functions and situations, e.g., greetings, requesting, apologizing etc)
- Two-minute impromptu talks
- Reading news item and reporting
- Role-plays and simulations
- Preparing and presenting talks on a given theme
- Interviews
- Story telling
- Informal debates and group discussions
- Public speaking

Advancing English Skills: 1998

The textbook that the department used in 1998 for teaching 'Foundation Course 2: English' to all Arts Faculty students was a compiled book for teaching the four skills together with a smaller book for teaching grammar. It was claimed that the textbook combined "traditional methods of language teaching with more recent communicative approaches" (Preface to *Advancing English Skills*, 1998). The approach to teaching the four skills was a discrete-skills approach rather than integrated, claiming that it would allow "more intensive practice in each skill area" (Preface to *Advancing English Skills*, 1998). The speaking component in this book consisted of fourteen units compiled from the 1984 edition of a conversation book called *How to Say It* by Phillip Binham although other units did have some activities on speaking. The units were arranged according to language functions such as 'Hello and good bye', 'Requests', 'Suggestions' and so on. A notional-functional syllabus seems to have inspired the materials. Almost all texts are dialogues between two or three people, but there are no audio-video materials, which is reasonable considering that the materials were taken from a book published in the early 1980s. The dialogues are not accompanied by instructions on what to do with them and are followed by a few controlled practices. There is no global comprehension task or awareness raising task. The focus is on conversational patterns rather than opening up a scope for genuine communication. This conversation from unit 12 would illustrate the case.

Conversation I

Henry Fields: Hello, Miss Calvo. How are you enjoying your stay in England?

Carmen Calvo: I am enjoying it very much, thank you.

He: By the way, what are you doing tomorrow afternoon?

She: Nothing special as far as I know.

He: Well, would you care to come for a ride in the country?

She: Thanks, I would love to.

He: Fine. Let's meet here about two o'clock, shall we? No, on second thoughts, I will come round and pick you up at your hotel.

She: That would be very nice. About two o'clock then?

He: Good, see you tomorrow.

She: Fine.

Advancing English Skills, 1998, p. 199

There is one more conversation in this unit which exemplifies refusal to invitation after a few initial tips on how to accept and refuse invitations. The conversations are followed by controlled practice like this:

Read the invitations in 1. *Accepting an Invitation* and those that follow here, and politely refuse them.

- Would you like to come for a picnic tomorrow?
- Can you come to tea with us one day next week?
- We're having a party on Saturday. Could you come?
- Could you come to the theatre next Saturday?
- Have you got time to drop in for some supper this evening?

Advancing English Skills, 1998, p. 199

These and all the other activities in the compiled book appear to be what Littlewood (1992) calls 'part-skill' activities, what Ur (2012) calls 'social interaction' or what Richards (1990) calls 'direct' approaches to teaching spoken English because they present conversational routines and controlled practice so as to limit the unpredictable nature of communication.

All the conversations used in the book appear to be scripted or semi-scripted. There are only a few features of casual conversation. These mainly include what Cullen and Kuo (2007) call lexicogrammatical features that are fixed and are usually inserted in the utterance in a

restricted way, for example discourse markers, such as 'well', 'oh', and vagueness tags, such as 'that sort of thing' etc. However, many features of casual interaction are missing. There are no heads, tails, situational ellipsis, or non-sentence fragments which have been found to be very common in spoken discourse. There is no 'inconsistent' grammatical structure and hardly any repetition or false start. Overall, the conversations offer exposure to common expressions used in maintaining social relationships (Ur, 2012), but they lack many features of genuine conversations.

The 1998 book was used for a few years until 2001 when the department published a revised version of the original compilation in which new original units were written by the faculty members of the department.

Advancing English Skills: 2001

The 2001 textbook, like the previous one, was for all students of the Faculty of Arts. This book still heavily depended on materials adapted from other sources with acknowledgement, but there were many original units. Many units were based on authentic reading texts, mostly adapted from newspapers.

Read and answer the following:

- a) How're you getting on?
- b) Hello
- c) See you tomorrow.
- d) Goodbye
- e) See you about seven, then.
- f) Good night
- g) See you later.
- h) How do you do?
- i) See you soon.
- j) How're you?
- k) See you at the party.
- l) Good afternoon.
- m) See you this evening.
- n) Morning.

Advancing English Skills, 2001, p. 25

The discrete spoken component discussed in the previous section was scrapped. In this 29-unit textbook writing, reading and speaking were mostly integrated while there were a few units exclusively on speaking. The units were usually arranged around reading passages. 12 out of the 29 units did not have any activities for practising speaking. The rest of the units had a total of 7 dialogues and 26 activities that required students to talk. There was a combination of controlled 'direct' activities and 'indirect' activities (Richards, 1990). The first group includes guided conversations, interviews and practising conversational patterns. These can be called what Ur (2012) calls 'social interaction' or Nunan (1999) calls 'conversational patterns'. This activity taken from Unit 6 would illustrate the category.

The indirect activities, which were fewer in number, mainly involved what Ur calls 'discussion' activities in which 'discussing an issue or problem' was most common while one 'describe a picture' and one debate were there. Here is an example from this category:

Form a group and discuss why students adopt such [unfair] means. What do you think should be done to prevent cheating? Do you think students are to blame for adopting unfair means? Is the system of examination to blame? After you have finished your discussion, report your conclusions to the class.

Advancing English Skills, 2001, p. 28

The conversations used are very similar in characteristics to the 1998 book. There are few features of casual conversation apart from a few discourse markers and vagueness tags discussed in the previous section.

Advancing English Skills: 2006

Advancing English Skills was revised five times by 2006. Each time the book became bigger in volume, variety and coverage of skills. The 2006 edition was the last major revision before it was completely revamped, re-designed and renamed in 2014, which was in turn revised in 2015. The 2006 revised edition was used only for English Department's own first semester students since the centralized foundation course for the Faculty of Arts was dropped. This book contained 39 units of differing length and focus that followed a more integrated-skills approach than

the 2001 edition. The book included 29 activities in which learners are explicitly asked to talk. These 29 activities were spread over 16 units which means some units had more focus on speaking while more than half did not have speaking activities at all. However, many units had pre-reading activities which may involve some speaking. There were fewer (three) dialogues (dialogues by this time had gone out of fashion) and fewer activities (five) that fall in the group 'conversational patterns' (Nunan, 1999) or 'social interaction' (Ur, 2012). Formulaic expressions through dialogues and guided conversations that was abundant in the 1998 textbook and quite significant in 2001 textbook seems to have become unpopular with the materials writers. Unlike the 2001 textbook, this book contained more open-ended activities (13) that can be termed 'discussion' (Ur, 2012). These include describing a picture, discussing an issue, suggesting solution to a problem and expressing general opinions. These activities were sometimes guided, but mostly the topic was introduced briefly in one or two sentences/questions or bulleted points. The direction of the activity would depend on the students. Here are two examples:

Discussion point

- a. Can you explain the theme of the festival? How would you translate it into English?
- b. Name another popular cultural festival of Bangladesh.
- c. Can you think of any other cultural event that takes place in the month of Falgun?
- d. Why do people celebrate the coming of spring?

Advancing English Skills, 2006, p. 26

Speaking activity

Have you seen any plays on stage or on television? How do plays differ from stories that we read? Form groups and discuss. Choose a group leader to report back to class.

Advancing English Skills, 2006, p. 57

There were two debates and three pronunciation practice activities. Also, there were two role plays and four interview activities where students were asked to interview each other on their personal experiences.

Features of spoken discourse were similar to the 1998 and 2001 editions, but in one dialogue there were situational ellipses (Cullen and Kuo, 2007) and non-sentence fragments (Biber et al., 1999) as can be seen from a dialogue (that students have to complete before role-playing) of which only the first part is quoted here (ellipses and fragments are in bold face):

Waiter: **A table for**?

Khalil: Yes, **a table for two, please**

Farzana:

Waiter: **Near the window?** Certainly. (Shows them to their table. Pulls out chair for Farzana). Would you like to order some drinks or would you like to order straight away?

Farzana: **Some** for me please.

Waiter: **Water?** Certainly. Would you like some in it?

Farzana: No, thank you. **No ice.** Just cold water would be fine.

Waiter: And **you, Sir?**

...

Advancing English Skills, 2006, p. 108

The book did not contain any tasks that fall within the strict definition of task as discussed by Richards (2001). More specifically, there were no information gap, problem solving, decision-making or any other tasks.

Endeavour: An Introductory Language Coursebook: 2014, 2015

The textbook for teaching English to first year students at the Department of English was re-designed and face-lifted in 2014 by a team of five authors from the department who modified some of the existing units while scrapping a number of them. The old units were replaced by newly written original units that used authentic or semi-authentic texts. The textbook got a new name: *Endeavour: An Introductory Language Coursebook* and was revised in 2015. The book focused heavily on reading and writing with longer and genre-rich texts for reading and an intensive coverage of writing with several units solely dedicated to this skill. The coverage of speaking, however, does not seem to have suffered greatly from this focus on reading and writing, but listening was still not incorporated in the materials. This book contains 33 units that are usually longer than the units in the

previous editions. While more than one third of the units (13) still do not include speaking, the nature of activities and spoken discourse has been reconstructed. This textbook includes activities greater in number and variety than the previous editions. There are 52 speaking activities of which 16 are discussion, seven are social interaction and five are interview activities. There are a number of role-plays, debates, presentations, awareness-raising activities and pronunciation activities. Unlike the previous books, this version contains a few tasks that can be called information gap and decision-making task. The following is one of the tasks that are used.

GIVE DIRECTIONS AND DRAW A ROUTE <i>Work in groups of three students.</i>		
Student A Give directions from the Arts Faculty Building to your home. Use expressions from the box below.	Student B Based on the directions given by A, draw a map/route	Student C Listen to the directions and check whether the map/route matches with the directions. Check whether the directions were correctly given and/or understood.
Sinha, Mahboob, Bashir, Basu & Akhter, 2015, p. 5		

This version of the textbook includes more features of spoken discourse than the previous versions. There are examples of situational ellipses (Well, did you. . .?), discourse markers (well, oh, you know), vagueness tags (and stuff like that), fillers (Er...), heads (The shopping – we take turns to do the shopping) and non-sentence fragments (Got back late from the library) as can be seen from the excerpt of a dialogue from Unit 3 of the book.

Zahid: What's up, Tareq?
Tareq: Oh , it's my landlord again.
Zahid: You're always in trouble! What's it this time?
Tareq: Well , just read this.
Zahid: Not another note! Well, did you. . .?
Tareq: Did I what?
Zahid: Leave the front door open?
Tareq: Er... I honestly don't remember. Got back late from the library, you see. Anyway, the landlord is always complaining. First, I play music too

loudly and **stuff like that...**

...

Tareq: What about food?

Zahid: Oh, we share food expenses too. **The shopping – we take turns to do the shopping.** It works out fine. And you can make as much noise as you like! We do! hahaha! There's just one thing.

Sinha et al., 2015, p. 8

In this activity a procedure like the I-I-I (illustration-induction-interaction) advocated by McCarthy and Carter (1995) is followed in which steps such as exposure to the features of spoken discourse through semi-scripted conversational discourse, a task to check global comprehension, attention drawn on the target features and short controlled practice activity to use the features are used. However, these steps would be difficult to follow properly as the texts are not presented as listening texts but rather as written text only. No explanation of the features of spoken text is given. Moreover, the presence of the features of spoken language is far from widespread across units. This book, nevertheless, has introduced a few units that mostly deal with informal English. These units contain awareness raising and vocabulary activities to highlight the difference between formal and informal English. Here is an example to illustrate the case:

Group work:

Form groups of four or five students. Identify some of the 'informal expressions and structures as used in both passages. Examples: 24/7, hook up. Now compare your list with another group's.

Sinha et al., 2015, p. 129

Thus the syllabus and materials for teaching speaking in the Department of English show a clear pattern of evolution in the last two decades.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to trace the evolution of teaching spoken English in the Department of English at the University of Dhaka through a qualitative document analysis, which involved the analysis of syllabus and materials used in the department for nearly

two decades. The findings indicate that Department of English has modified its syllabus and materials from time to time, if not on a regular basis. The textbook used for teaching the first semester language course has gone through three major modifications in the last two decades: in 2001, 2006 and 2014. While the department started remedial language courses in the 1980s, in the early years speaking did not use to get importance. This vital skill gradually made its way into the materials though it has never been as important as writing or reading. The materials analysed above show a clear pattern: materials for teaching spoken skills evolved from mechanical drills on functions and formulas to more creative and autonomous use of language. While the 1998 textbook included dialogues in abundance, the 2006 textbook and the 2014 textbook had few such dialogues. On the other hand, while recent textbooks included what Thornbury (2005) calls “autonomous language use”, they lack in “awareness-raising” and “appropriation” activities such as dialogues and drills.

Mismatch between the syllabus and the materials is worth mentioning. Although the syllabus has been changed into a detailed one since 2007, the textbook was the 2006 edition till 2013. As a result there was a mismatch between the syllabus and the textbooks. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers often used supplementary materials for making up for this mismatch. Some of the activities mentioned in the syllabus such as role-plays and simulations, storytelling, and presentations have hardly been emphasized in the textbooks until recently. As ‘discussion’ was by far the most common activity, there was a lack of balanced coverage of activities.

The nature of spoken English was not a big concern in the textbooks used between 1998 and 2006. In those textbooks, features of spoken English were hardly highlighted save for the rudimentary inclusion of discourse markers such as ‘well’ and ‘oh’ or a few vagueness tags. Other common features such as heads, tails, non-sentence fragments, ellipsis etc. were not represented. These findings are congruent with Basu (2014) who reported that there were only a few features of genuine conversation in the texts used in the 2005 version of the textbook that he examined. The 2015 textbook – though on a small scale – includes these features of spoken language. There are also a few awareness-raising activities that attempt to focus on the unique nature of spoken discourse. However, this effort is very limited as the

latest textbook, like the previous ones, uses 'discussion' as the major category of activity. The 2015 textbook, nevertheless, offers more variety in terms of activities than the previous ones. It contains a number of role-plays, debates, and information gap and decision-making tasks. This book also includes units that focus mainly on informal English, a marked difference from the previous versions of the textbook which mostly emphasized formal English. In none of the textbooks, however, was there any audio or video text to help learners with authentic spoken English.

All in all, the textbooks for teaching language skills in the Department of English seem to have evolved to encourage learners "to move from reproductive to creative language use" (Nunan, 2004, p. 37).

Conclusion

This paper has reported the findings of an in-depth document analysis on the teaching of spoken English skills in the Department of English at the University of Dhaka. It has been found that the department has been actively involved in designing textbooks for teaching language skills to its students rather than adopting global materials available in the market. Moreover, it has periodically modified the syllabus and materials for teaching language skills. A marked gap between syllabus and textbooks was noted. The nature of activities used for teaching speaking seems to have changed over time, but open-ended 'discussion' seems to be the most common type of activity used in most of the materials. While materials from the 1990s and early 2000s use dialogues in abundance, the later textbooks used fewer dialogues. In the later textbooks, that is, the ones from 2006 and 2014/2015, use more variety in activities than the previous ones. Spoken discourse was not represented separately from written discourse until recently. The unique characteristics of spoken language were featured in the 2015 textbook though not extensively. Overall, this historical analysis of the teaching of speaking in the Department of English has attempted to offer a picture of how teaching speaking has been approached over the years. The findings indicate a need for a balanced inclusion of 'awareness-raising' and 'appropriation' activities and activities that foster autonomy (Thornbury, 2005). In other words, a good combination of 'direct' and 'indirect' activities (Richards, 1990) should be achieved in the materials in the future.

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