CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

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- Theoretical Perspectives on Language Skill
- Studies Related to Language Skill
- Studies Related to Oral Communication Skill in Pedagogical Research
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CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

3.0 Introduction

The survey of related studies implies locating, studying and evaluating reports of relevant researches, study of published articles, going through related portions of encyclopedias and research abstracts, study of pertinent pages out of comprehensive books on the subject and going through related manuscripts if any. It is a crucial step in research and this inevitably minimizes the risk of dead ends, rejected topics and worthless efforts. It helps the investigator to have a clear perception of the problem in hand. Every investigator must know what sources are available in his field of enquiry which of them he is likely to use and where and how to find them” (Sukhia et al, 1991).

A review of related literature is a very important step not only in identifying a problem, but also in the formulation of hypothesis and in the selection of methods and tools to be employed. Besides it is essential development of a problem and to the derivation of an effective approach to this solution. According to Best (2003), “Review of related literature is a summary of writing of recognized authorities and of research provide evidence that the researcher is familiar with what is already known and what is still unknown and untested. Since effective research is based upon past knowledge, this step helps to eliminate duplication of what has been done and provides useful hypothesis and helpful suggestions for significant investigators”.

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Language Skills

Language is often a ‘skill’ rather than a subject. Though a skill does not altogether preclude intellectual activity, it is more a matter of ‘doing’ than of ‘knowing’. Therefore learning a language implies imbibing the different skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are interrelated as well. Good reading definitely depends upon a lot of practice in listening and speaking. If a person learnt to speak a language carefully, he normally does not face any problem in writing that language. As in the case of learning the mother tongue, the first skill that a child acquires will be the ability to understand the spoken word—i.e.; the skill of listening. Next, he tries to reproduce these sounds and sequences them to express his own desires and needs and thereby acquires the skill of speaking. For an illiterate person, these two basic skills constitute his language ability. The abilities to read and write are matters of literacy. But since we want our pupils to be literate in the language, the skills of reading and writing are also included as basic language skills in the school course. Language is therefore called a ‘complex skill’ comprising the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Out of these four skills, speaking and writing are productive skills.

Tidyman and Butterfield (1959) made a distinction between ‘skill elements’ in language abilities. They noted that pronunciation, phrasing, sentence structure, punctuation, paragraphing, spelling etc, are ‘skill elements’ which are determined by rule or by convention and require repetition or practice for proficiency. On the other hand, knowledge, understanding and judgement constitute ‘language abilities’.
3.1.1 Receptive-Expressive Categorisation of Language Skills

Modern linguists like Stork and Byrne (1976) have classified language skills into receptive and expressive productive aspects. Stork’s view was that the receptive skills may be acquired without the expressive skills, but the expressive skill presupposes the acquisition of the corresponding receptive skills. Byrne used a schematic diagram to illustrate the inter-relationship of the four basic language skills in English.

**FIGURE 3.1**

**Diagrammatic Representation of Language Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receptive Skills</th>
<th>Productive skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>speaking</td>
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<tr>
<td>reading</td>
<td>writing</td>
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**Chomsky’s Paradigm**

Chomsky’s (1966) transformational generative grammar paradigm for language education distinguished between two fundamental abilities of the language learner.

1. language competence and

2. language performance
Chomsky explained ‘competence’ as the ability to speak and understand a language, and ‘performance’ as the actual application of this ability in language behaviour. According to Chomsky, competence indicates what people are able to do, while performance indicates what people really do.

**Vygotskian perspective**

Vygotsky, a psychologist who studied child development in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s observed the social interaction of children in order to theorise how language contributes to the development of human consciousness. He posited that language develops through social practices, as it is a mediated interaction which cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out. (Wertsch 1991:18)

From his research, Vygotsky developed several theories which have stood the test of time and can be applied to different pedagogical environments (Fredericks 1974: 290). One of his theories which has implication in developing oral skills is his socio-cultural theory.

**The Socio-cultural Theory**

The socio-cultural theory (SCT) states that our cognitive development processes are products of the society, or culture in which we interact (Lantolf and Thorne 2007). Thus, in order to understand human cognition we need to analyse the social structures from which it derives (Wertsch 1980:161). Unlike the socio-cognitive approach which focuses on individual development in the context of social interaction, the socio-cultural approach focuses on the causal relationship between social interaction and individual cognitive change. (Dillenbourg et al 1996:5) This facet of SCT allows a deeper insight into the collaborative nature of the interaction
because the theory argues that cognitive development is a mediated process (Lantolf 2000:1), as it is a product of societal and cultural interactions.

In recent years, there have been several studies undertaken into collaborative interaction from a socio-cultural perspective (McCafferty, 1992; Brooks and Donato, 1994; Donato, 1994; Guerrero and Villamil, 1994 and 2000; Villamil and Guerrero, 1996; Brooks et al, 1997; Swain and Lapkin, 1998 and 2000a; Antón and Dicamilla, 1999; Buckwalter, 2001; Gánem Gutiérrez, 2007). These studies provide evidence that both communication and cognition are products of social interactions. For as Swain and Lapkin (1998) state Language use is both communication and cognitive activity. Language is simultaneously a means of communication and a tool for thinking. Dialogue provides both the occasion for language learning and the evidence for it. Language is both process and product. This is because one of the central tenets of SCT is that thought and speech are intertwined (Fredericks 1974:283; Lighbown and Spada, 2006:47). It is also evidenced that L1 has a function to play in SCT because it facilitates cognitive and social functions in the interaction of L2 learners (Antón and Dicamilla 1999:240). This is the reason to use SCT as a framework in my study as it enables to observe the cognitive and social processes L1 plays in the collaborative learning dynamic. Now turn to examine the intricacies which the theory involves.

3.1.2 The Zone of Proximal Development

According to Vygotsky's SCT, a child's development through social interaction occurs within a zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined
through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (ibid:86; emphasis in original) This concept is not only applicable to a child's acquisition, but also has relevance to all aspects of pedagogy, as throughout our lives we are all social beings as our learning path is continuous (Frawley and Lantolf 1985:40). Accordingly, the ZPD is also of relevance to second language acquisition and in this respect Ohta (2005) defines it as 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined through language produced collaboratively with a teacher or peer.' Thus, social interaction allows development to materialise within a learner's ZPD. L2 learners collaborating on a task can mutually assist each other within their ZPD. In this regard one could argue that they help each other develop with both their L1 and their L2. The processes by which they do this is turn to examine.

**Outer and Inner Development**

Vygotsky (1978:57) states that each function in a child's development appears on two psychological planes. First it appears between people on the social level, which he terms the inter-psychological plane; and then it appears inside the child on the individual level, which he refers to as the intra-psychological plane. This development occurs within the ZPD and it is the result of mediation (Frawley and Lantolf 1985:21). Vygotsky argued that in the process of mediation we use signs, or symbolic tools to influence the interaction (Lantolf 2000:1). Thus, within SCT, language is viewed as "the primary mediating tool" (Belz 2002:75). However, learning to speak a new language is in many cases far from satisfactory simply
because the speakers feel they need to cope with many different aspects at one time, and that seems to be impossible in real conversations.

3.1.3 General Nature, Scope and Constituent Sub-Skills of Oral Skill

It is obvious that there are marked differences between child learners and adult learners and that they cannot acquire the second language under the same circumstances. Consequently, the results will also be different. Concerning children at the early age in which they learn to speak, we can say that they enjoy certain advantages that make them outstanding learners. They have surprising linguistic abilities due to optimal moment in which they find themselves for language learning, this is to say, at this moment their brain is characterized by a certain plasticity that allows some abilities to develop with ease during a period of time, after which it becomes really difficult for these abilities to be developed (Fleta, 2006), or using Klein’s words ‘between the age of two and puberty the human brain shows the plasticity which allows a child to acquire his first language’ (Klein, 1986). Therefore, children are special learners for their natural and innate abilities to acquire a language. According to Fleta, one of these special abilities is ‘filtering sophisticated information about language properties from birth’ (Fleta, 2006), in other words, children have an enormous ability to integrate difficult information in an easy and unconscious way from the beginning of their development. They are able to acquire and integrate complex data without being aware of it, whereas other learners, at other ages, would find it arduous to achieve. Moreover, apart from this special gift, children have for assimilating difficult information, we can mention some of their other qualities, such as their capacity for perceiving and imitating sounds. Some studies have showed that 'young infants are especially sensitive to acoustic changes at the phonetic boundaries
between categories' (Kuhl, 2004: 832). Also, children are especially good at predicting syllable chunks: ‘infants are sensitive to the sequential probabilities between adjacent syllables’ (Kuhl, 2004: 834) which make children with a surprising instinct as far as language knowledge is concerned. Finally, students also acquire the ability of ordering words within a sentence (grammar rules) unconsciously: ‘there is some evidence that young children can detect non-adjacencies such as those required to learn grammar’. All in all, we can say that children learn the language without being aware of it when they ‘are exposed to the right kind of auditory information’ (Kuhl, 2004: 836), this is, children learn the language through communication and interaction and thanks to that they acquire all the abilities they can potentially develop.

On the other hand, concerning adults, we observe how difficult is that they can acquire certain native sounds; their pronunciation will be, on many occasions, foreign-like which is due to their difficulty in distinguishing and producing some sounds after the so called ‘critical period’. In that respect, some authors claim that adult learners cannot acquire a phonological development (Lightbown and Spada, 2006: 69).

However, other researchers defend the opposite. Wolfgang Klein, in his book Second Language Acquisition (1986) stated that ‘the apparent facility with which children learn a second language is often attributed to biological factors, but an alternative explanation might be that, unlike adults, children have no need to fear the loss of their social identity’ (Klein, 1986: 6). Authors such as Klein argue that phonological facilities of children are not bound to biological reasons, but to psychological ones. In that respect, adults feel attached to their native identities, to
their original social identities, which is what prevents them from achieving perfection in L2 pronunciation.

Klein confirmed that 'suitably motivated adults are capable of mastering to perfection the pronunciation of the most exotic languages' (Klein, 1986: 10). Therefore, conclude that although the cases of adults speaking a second language without any accent are not very common, this does not mean that it is impossible to acquire a native-like pronunciation. In that sense, there are authors that doubt the validity of Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) by assuring that even adults have access to the well known Universal Grammar. While Lenneberg claimed that only before puberty, learners had UG available, authors such as S. W. Felix defended by evidence that adult L2 learners also benefit from the UG principles: 'If child and adult learners use different modules for the purpose of language acquisition, then we would expect adult learners to be unable to attain grammatical knowledge that arises only through the mediation of UG. If, in contrast, adults do attain this type of knowledge, then, we have reason to believe that UG continues to be active even after puberty' (Felix, 1988: 279). Therefore, we can conclude that adults are also able to master a proficient use of the second/foreign language, not only in grammatical issues but also in phonological of the second/foreign language, not only in grammatical issues but also in phonological ones, which makes us believe that we can improve adult learners' speaking skills.

On the one hand, consider the first question: what if we need to improve speaking skills we need to know which skills or which features learners need to develop. In that respect, there are several authors that stated different goals or different dimensions that speakers needed to achieve. Goodwin, (2001) for instance, established several goals for a proper pronunciation. She called them 'functional
Review of Related Studies

intelligibility, functional communicability, increased self-confidence, and speech-monitoring abilities'. She argued that learners should be able to speak an intelligible foreign language, that is to say, listeners need to understand the learner's message without huge efforts; learners also need to be successful in a 'specific communicative situation' (Goodwin, 2001: 118); they need to 'gain confidence in their ability to speak and be understood' (Goodwin, 2001: 118); and finally, they need to monitor and control their own production by paying attention to their own speech. Goodwin specified those abilities that learners need to acquire through certain linguistic features that can be practiced: Intonation, rhythm, reduced speech, linking words, consonants and vowel sounds, word stress, etc. These are concrete speaking aspects in which learners should be trained in order to improve their speaking skills.

Similarly, other authors such as Anne Lazaraton suggest that oral communication is based on four dimensions or competences: grammatical competence (phonology, vocabulary, word and sentence formation...); sociolinguistic competence (rules for interaction, social meanings); discourse competence (cohesion and how sentences are liked together); and finally, strategic competence (compensatory strategies to use in difficult situations), (Lazaraton, 2001: 104). According to Lazaraton learners should develop all these abilities to acquire a high oral level of the foreign language, but she adds that in recent years, with the influence of the communicative approach, more importance is given to fluency, trying to achieve a balance with the traditional accuracy.

Moreover, apart from what pedagogically and theoretically should be taught, many researchers are presently analysing real problems that learners face: 'fluent speech contains reduced forms, such as contractions, vowel reduction, and elision, where learners do not get sufficient practice' (Lazaraton, 2001: 103); use of slang and
idioms in speech since students tend to sound 'bookish' (Lazaraton, 2001: 103), stress, rhythm, intonation, lack of active vocabulary, lack of interaction pattern rules...

Once speaking goals have been determined, next step consists of questioning how they are going to be achieved. For designing a concrete methodology teachers need to adopt a theoretical perspective, they need to reflect on the linguistic approach that will be used in their teaching. Many authors, following the up-todate trend of the Communicative approach, defend the interactive role of speaking and promote its teaching from a communicative perspective stressing meaning and context.

In Goodwin’s words: in “Teaching Pronunciation” the goal of instruction is threefold: to enable our learners to understand and be understood, to build their confidence in entering communicative situations, and to enable them to monitor their speech’, also ‘pronunciation is never an end in itself but a means of negotiating meaning in discourse, embedded in specific socio-cultural and interpersonal contexts’. If we think of how this theoretical background will be applied in real teaching, we find that in traditional classes they focused speaking practice on the production of single and isolated sounds, whereas within the communicative approach, ‘the focus shifted to fluency rather than accuracy, encouraging an almost exclusive emphasis on suprasegmentals’ (Goodwin, 2001: 117).

There is the key word, when communication is the main goal linguistic practice turns into longer structures, at the suprasegmental level; therefore, the training on individual sounds makes way for macro structures that affect interaction directly. The second part of how to teach, moves away from theory to approach real problems and their solutions. Several authors have stated that when learners face
problems in speaking they need practical and concrete solutions to know how to behave and respond in order to overcome those difficulties.

Mariani, (1994), in his article ‘Developing Strategic Competence: Towards Autonomy in Oral Interaction’, recalls L1 strategies that native speakers use when they encounter communication problems, and suggests teaching those strategies to L2 learners: ‘just think of how often, in L1 communication, we cannot find the words to say something and have to adjust our message, or to ask our interlocutor to help us, or to use synonyms or general words to make ourselves understood’. He classifies those strategies according to the speakers’ behaviour: learners can either avoid certain messages because they don’t feel confident with their speaking skills (‘reduction strategies’), or make the most out of their knowledge and modify their message bearing in mind their weaknesses and strengths (‘achievement strategies’: borrowing, foreignizing, translating... (Mariani, 1994: 3). The author praises the latter by saying that achievement strategies are a very interesting way of developing learners’ language domain. Speakers who opt for this option make huge efforts to transmit a message by playing with the language to the extreme, which only brings beneficial consequences. In the second or foreign language classroom context, teachers should train learners to use and practice the different strategies that can help them face difficult situations. The only way of training students in this direction is by means of a bank of activities in which they become aware of the different possibilities that they can put into practice. Authors such as Goodwin or Lazaraton offer a varied list of exercises to be used in class: poems, rhymes, dialogues, monologues, role plays, debates, interviews, simulations, drama scenes, discussions, conversations...

Therefore, coming back to the initial question proposed above, it is absolutely feasible to teach adults strategies to improve their speaking skills. Of course, that
objective depends on many different factors that will affect the degree of acquisition, let us think of age, motivation, or even the context in which the language is learned: ESL versus EFL. In that respect, learners in a second language context will have numberless occasions to practice the language and that will undoubtedly influence their skills development. With reference to the foreign language context, authors such as Lazaraton admitted the difficulties learners normally face: 'homogeneous EFL classes, where all students speak the same first language and English is not used outside the classroom, present certain additional challenges for the teacher' (Lazaraton, 2001: 110). As she said, teachers have considerable limitations in EFL classes such as lack of opportunities to use the language, lack of motivation in the learners, the number of students in the class, curriculum restrictions... (Lazaraton, 2001: 110), but there are solutions and strategies, as the ones previously mentioned, that should be put into practice.

Mariani, in his article mentioned above, also makes a reflection on whether communication strategies should be teachable or not. He states the pros and cons by saying that training students on specific strategies can provide them with certain limitations and consequently hamper fluent communication: 'we can hardly force them into a straightjacket of pre-selected strategies [...] Most of us would agree that we should encourage spontaneity, creativity and originality in language use' (Mariani, 1994: 7). However, on the other hand, he argues that if learners become aware of the different strategies they can flexibly use, they will finally integrate them either consciously or unconsciously, which will stretch their possibilities for communication.
Learning and Knowledge

The child has the inborn ability to learn and construct knowledge as the product of the activities that she/he is engaged in. The education that the children receive should provide opportunities for them to experiment with knowledge, do activities by themselves and to correct their own mistakes. It should equip the learners to interact with the society around. The new curriculum which is based on the constructivist paradigm views learning as a process of constructing knowledge. According to it, true knowledge is a process that transforms information into wisdom. Skills, attitudes, values, concepts, proficiency are all parts of knowledge.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. This perspective is closely associated with many contemporary theories, notably the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, and social cognitive theory of Bandura (Shunk, 2000).

Assumptions of Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is based on specific assumption about reality, knowledge and learning. To understand and apply models of instruction that are rooted in the perspectives of social constructivists, it is important to know the premises that underlie them.

Reality :- Social constructivists believe that reality is constructed through human activity. Members of a society together invent the properties of the world (Kukla
2000). For the social constructivist, reality cannot be discovered: it does not exist prior to its social invention.

**Knowledge:** To social constructivists, knowledge is also a human product and is socially and culturally constructed. Individuals create meaning through their interaction with each other with the environment they live in.

**Learning:** Social constructivists view learning as a social process. It does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours that are shaped by external forces (Mc Mohan, 1997). Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities. Social constructivists see as crucial both the context in which learning occurs and the social contexts that learners bring to their learning environment. There are four general perspectives that inform how we could facilitate the learning within the framework of social constructivism (Gredler 1997).

**(α) Cognitive tools perspective:** Cognitive tools perspective focuses on the learning of cognitive skills and strategies. Students engage in those social learning activities that involve hands-on project-based methods and utilization of discipline-based cognitive tools (Gredler 1997). Together they produce a product and, as a group impose meaning on it through the social learning process.

**(β) Idea-based social constructivism:** This sets education’s priority on important concepts in the various disciplines (eg: Part-whole relations in Mathematics and point of view in literature. These “big ideas” expand learner vision and become important foundation for learner’s thinking and on construction of social meaning.
(c) Pragmatic or emergent approach: Social constructivists with this perspective assert that the implementation of social constructivism in class should be emergent as the need arises. Its proponents understanding of the world can be addressed in the classroom from both view of individual learner and the collective view of the entire class (Cobb, 1995; Gredler, 1997).

(d) Transactional or Situated Cognitive Perspectives: This perspective focuses on the relationship between the people and their environment. Human are a part of the constructed environment (including social relationships); the environment is in turn one of the characteristics that constitute the individual. When a mind operates, its owner is interacting with the environment. Therefore, if the environment and social relationship among group members change, the tasks of each individual also change. Learning thus should not take place in isolation from the environment.

Social constructivist approaches can include reciprocal teaching, peer collaboration, cognitive apprenticeships, problems based instruction, webquests, anchored instruction and other methods that involve learning with others (Shunk, 2000).

3.2 Strategies for Teaching and Learning Language

The curriculum designers have set new standards that are extremely flexible, and offer schools and teachers freedom to determine the appropriate methodology to be used and the priority of the elements of the curriculum (Amara and Marai, 2002). They added that the aim of the new curriculum is to raise standards in the four domains of language learning: access to information, social interaction, presentation
and appreciation of literature, culture and language. It is hoped that by the end of grade twelve students will be able to use English freely in all skills of language in their social interactions, in obtaining and presenting information, and in developing appreciation of the English language and its literature. Language teachers have paid little attention to the way sentences are used in combination to form stretches of connected discourse. They have tended to take their cues from the grammarian and have concentrated on the teaching of sentences as self-contained units. It is true that these are often presented in ‘contexts’ and strung together in dialogues and reading passages. Basically the language teaching unit is the sentence as a formal linguistic object. The language teacher’s view of what constitutes knowledge of a language is essentially the same as Chomsky’s: a knowledge of the syntactic structure of sentences, and of the transformational relations which hold between them. Sentences are seen as paradigmatically rather than syntagmatically related. Such a knowledge provides the basis for actual use of language by the speaker-hearer. The assumption that the language teacher appears to make is that once competence is acquired, performance will take care of itself. This assumption is very doubtful validity. Students entering higher education with the experience of six or more years of instruction in English at the secondary school have considerable difficulty coping with language in its normal communicative use. Widdowson suggested a new orientation in English language teaching. Language teaching materials which derive from a description of discourse are needed. The materials are needed which affect the transfer from grammatical competence, a knowledge of sentences, to communicative competence, a knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of communicative acts of different kinds.
Language does not occur in stray words or sentences but in connected discourse. Advances in our understanding of our discourse have come from the sociology of language and the philosophy of language. Labov (1972) has pointed out that there are certain rules of discourse which cannot be described without reference to social context. Discourse rules have to do with the sequence of actions which are performed in the issuing of utterances.

There are two ways of looking at language beyond the limit of the sentence. One way sees it as text, a collection of formal objects held together by patterns of equivalences or frequencies or by cohesive devices. The other way sees language as discourse, a use of sentences to perform acts of communication. Text analysis and discourse analysis are different but complementary ways of looking at language in use.

The applied linguist Cook (2004) presents an alternative approach to the teaching of discourse. According to him social relationship can be seen in terms of three factors: office, status and role. Office is a relatively permanent position within the social structure to which someone is appointed or qualified. Status is a general term for social importance influenced by facts like age, wealth, education. Role is a temporary interactional stance, involving the performance of certain types of perlocutionary and illocutionary acts. Shared knowledge involves hypotheses about the degree of knowledge that are shared with people we are communicating with and the degree to which the schemata they are operating correspond to our own. This assessment affects every level of discourses, from the quality and ordering of information to cohesion, the use of the article and grammatical structure Discourse type is not in academic abstraction but something that are used everyday in order to
orient towards the communication in which everyone is involved. Discourse types range from recipes and jokes to reports and essays. Discourse structure is the equivalent of generic structure or interaction sequence, while discourse function is the string of rhetorical function that make up a ‘move’ in discourse structure. Conversational mechanisms include the gaining, holding and yielding of turns, the negotiation of meaning and direction, the shifting of topic, the signalling and identification of turn type, the use of the voice quality, face and body. Cohesion includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

The first component of the model is social relationship with its constituents office, status and role. Only one task is presented here. It involves examining a dialogue from a language teaching text book to determine whether it has successfully captured some of the effects of social relationship. For the second component, shared knowledge, two tasks are worth mentioning. The first takes a short biographical sketch and expands it with information that learners are likely to share with the teacher, then asks the learners to cut out the unnecessary shared knowledge. The second task takes the same short biographical sketch and changes many of the articles, then asks learners to make any necessary corrections. The third component is discourse type. The students should be alerted to different discourse types so that they may classify the interaction they are involved in. The fourth component is discourse structure. Here Cook refers to task such as recognizing and understanding various parts of a text book or associating discourse parts with their discourse types. The fifth component is discourse function. The sixth is conversational mechanism. The last is cohesion. Here Cook proposes to take a passage and replace reference or ellipsis with the full form.
The present study is intended to find out the ways of enhancing the competence in oral communication skill of secondary school pupils in English. The studies reviewed relating to the present study are arranged under the following heads:

2.2 Studies related to language skills
2.3 Studies related to oral communication skills in pedagogical research
2.4 Studies teaching strategies for developing oral skills

3.3 Studies Related to Language Skills

The learning of language skills is one of the variables which determine achievement.


Southgate (1972) identified the role of the four basic language skills in the general educational performance of the pupils. It was shown that the four skills of literacy, i.e., Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are basic to success in education.

Charles (1981) prepared an auto instructional and support material in English for the development of language skills. The major findings of the study were 1) the course, in general, with all the particular techniques used there in was found the effective in terms of learner's reactions. 2) Highly intelligent as well as less intelligent adults gained significantly from the course 3) Both graduates and undergraduates gained significantly from the course. However a comparison between their
gains revealed that the graduates gained significantly more than the under graduates.

4) Both the SES groups grade I and grade II gained significantly, but the gains were relatively more on the part of grade I SES group.

Subramanian (1981) made a linguistic analysis of language skills, attained in the English medium schools in India. The major objective of the study was to present a linguistic analysis of the various skills acquire by the students of English medium schools.

According to Smith (1983) language, written or spoken is directly involved in the activity of learning, whether be the subject and it is also used for communicating what has been learned.

A study conducted by Cherian (1988) on the consistently high correlations that the basic language skills have with different forms of achievement makes it clear that the language skills have a decisive role in determining a pupil’s level of achievement.

Emphasizing the all permeating nature of language, in the curriculum, Fillion (1985) points out, that language has a powerful heuristic function, and is in extricably involved in all school learning and in cognitive development generally.

Stroller (1988) recommended commercially produced films and videotapes as effective tools for developing speaking, listening and writing skills in English as a second language. It is concluded that careful video selection, purposeful lesson planning and the integration of pre-viewing, viewing and past-viewing activities into the content based lesson encourage natural language use and language skill development.

Asha (1990) conducted a study on the teaching strategies for developing written communication skill in English of the secondary school pupils of Kerala. She
stressed the need of improving the spoken and written expression of students by various teaching strategies.

Heaton (1990) has said, “Composition writing provides the students with an opportunity to demonstrate that ability to organize language material using their own words and ideas and communicate.

In this way composition tests provide a degree of motivation which many objective tests fail to prove. The writing test should be such that it ensures they have something to say and a purpose for saying it. They should also have an audience in mind when they write. In short whenever possible meaningful situations should be given in composition test. In this connections

Rubin (1990) a classroom in which children can spontaneouly interact with one another and teachers, is necessary for oral communication. A good classroom should not be silent, it should be one in which children’s ideas are heard, respected, encouraged and shared. Children need many opportunities to express themselves to try out ideas and to get feedback. When children interact with adults they are testing their own language. Children’s language grows when it receives reinforcement from adult and children’s self concepts are enhanced when they feel what they have to say is valuable.”

Louis (1992) in her study on the relationship between certain basic language skills in English and creativity of higher secondary students is Kerala, found that the correlation between fluency and basic skills are significant in most cases, 0.1241 (Boys), 0.2991 (Girls), 0.2095 (Urban students), 0.2385 (Rural Students), 0.3554 (Government institutions) and 0.0177 (private Institutions) where correlation is significant at 0.01 level except for boys and private institutions.
Huda (1993) by writing is not meant writing like a standard author but being just able to arrange a few ideas on anything and on any matter of common interest into an ordinary written form with a reasonable grammatical correctness. It is well known that the great majority of our pupils in later life will take up a pen only to write a letter or to fill in a simple form or as a clerk write small reports every now and then for their superior officers.

Hill (1995) made a comparison of the effects of traditional and non-traditional grammar instruction methodologies on upper elementary students’ language use, writing performance and attitude towards English instruction. The major findings of the study were the treatment by grade interaction to which writing performance contributed significantly.

Venkateswaran (1997) Writing is a skill in which we produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. It is productive skill, which involves manipulating, structuring and communicating. Writing helps to solidify the students grasp of vocabulary and structure and comprehension and other skills. “Appropriacy can be developed only through writing. The goal of writing is to develop the student ability to write upto the point at which home work can be given.”

Ahuja (1998) conducted a study. More or less equitable findings emerged out of the study.

Suma (2000) studied the errors committed by II standard students in writing the letters in Malayalam. Survey method and observation method were used. The tools were dictation test in Malayalam for the students of standard II and questionnaire for primary school teachers. The study revealed that the coastal and
tribal students committed more errors in writing. Several measures were suggested for improvement of handwriting.

Joseph (2001) studied the writing skills in English of Higher Secondary school students in Science, Commerce and Humanities. Normative Survey Method was used. The sample comprised of 600 students. The study revealed that a higher proportion of private school students belonging to high S.E.S. compared to their counterpart have better writing skills in English.

3.4 Studies Related to Oral Communication Skills in Pedagogical Research

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns and Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also they understand when, why and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence) (Cunningham, 1999). Of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important. People who know a language are referred to as 'speakers of that language, as if speaking included all other types of skills, and many, if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak (Ur, 2006).

Brown and Yule (1983) began their discussion on the nature of spoken language by distinguishing between spoken and written language. They pointed out that for most of its history; language teaching has been concerned with the teaching of
written language. This language is characterized by well-formed sentences which are integrated into highly structured paragraphs. Spoken language, on the other hand, consists of short, often fragmentary utterances, in a range of pronunciations. There is often a great deal of repetition and overlap between one speaker and another, and speakers frequently use non-specific references. Brown and Yule (1983) also pointed out that the loosely organized syntax, the use of non-specific words and phrases, and the use of fillers such as 'well' and 'ahuh' make spoken language feel less conceptually dense than other types of language such as expository prose. They suggested that, in contrast with the teaching of written language, teachers concerned with teaching the spoken language must confront the following types of questions:

- What is the appropriate form of spoken language to teach?
- From the point of view of pronunciation, what is a reasonable model?
- How important is pronunciation?
- Is it any more important than teaching appropriate handwriting in the foreign language?
- If so, why?
- From the point of view of the structures taught, is it all right to teach the spoken language as if it were exactly like the written language, but with a few 'spoken expression' thrown in?
- Is it appropriate to teach the same structures to all foreign language students, no matter what their age is or their intentions in learning the spoken language?
- Are those structures which are described in standard grammars, the structures which our students should be expected to produce when they speak English?
- How is it possible to give students any sort of meaningful practice in producing spoken English?  
  (Brown and Yule, 1983: 3)
They also drew a useful distinction between two basic language functions. These are the transactional function, which is primarily concerned with the transfer of information, and the interaction function, in which the primarily purpose of speech is the maintenance of social relationships.

Swain (1985), an important contributor of immersion-based evidence, was led to consider whether other factors beside input might affect language competence. In particular she proposed the "comprehensible output hypothesis", that is, to learn to speak we have actually to speak. Swain argued that knowing that one will need to speak makes one more likely to attend to syntax when one is listening.

Levelt (1989) identified three autonomous processing stages in speech production: (1) conceptualizing the message, (2) formulating the language representation, and (3) articulating the message. Wilson (1997) claimed that children who can translate their thoughts and ideas into words are more likely to succeed in school. Students who do not develop good listening and speaking skill will have lifelong consequences because of their deficit. He also pointed out that speaking skills do not need to be taught as a separate subject. These skills can easily be integrated into other subject matter. This is because, students learn talking, clarify thoughts by talking, comprehend better with discussion of reading, write better after talking during writing conferences, develop confidence by speaking in front of peers, and provide a window to their own thinking through their talk.

Nunan (1992) mentioned another basic distinction when considering the development of speaking skills: distinguishing between dialogue and monologue. The ability to give an uninterrupted oral presentation is quite distinct from interacting with one or more other speakers for transactional and interactional purposes. While all native speakers can and use language interactionally, not all native speakers have the
ability to extemporise on a given subject to a group of listeners. Brown and Yule (1983) suggested that most language teaching is concerned with developing skills in short, interactional exchanges in which the learner is only required to make one or two utterances at a time.

The interactional nature of language was examined by Bygate (1996). He distinguished between motor-perceptive skills, which are concerned with correctly using the sounds and structures of the language, and interactional skills, which involve using motor-perceptive skills for the purposes of communication. Motor-perceptive skills are developed in the language classroom through activities such as model dialogues, pattern practice, and oral drills and so on. Bygate (1996) suggested that, in particular, learners need to develop skills in the management of interaction as well as in the negotiation of meaning. The management of the interaction involves such things as when and how to take the floor, when to introduce a topic or change the subject, how to invite someone else to speak, how to keep a conversation going and so on. Negotiation of meaning refers to the skill of making sure the person you are speaking to has correctly understood you and that you have correctly understood them.

Nunan (1996) added that one can apply the bottom-up/top-down distinction to speaking. The bottom-up approach to speaking suggests that speakers start with the smallest unit of language, i.e. individual sounds, and move through mastery of words and sentences to discourse. The top-down view, on the other hand, suggests that speakers start with the larger chunks of language, which are embedded in meaningful contexts, and use their knowledge of these contexts to comprehend and use correctly the smaller elements of language. Nunan (1996) claimed that a successful oral communication should involve developing:
- the ability to articulate phonological features of the language comprehensibly;
- mastery of stress, rhythm, intonation patterns; an acceptable degree of fluency;
- transactional and interpersonal skills;
- skills in taking short and long speaking turns;
- skills in the management of the interaction;
- skills in negotiating meaning;
- conversational listening skills (successful conversations require good listeners as well as good speakers);
- skills in knowing about and negotiating purposes for conversations;
- using appropriate conversational formulae and fillers.

Skehan (1998) distinguished three aspects of production: (1) fluency; (2) accuracy and (3) complexity. This may also involve a greater willingness to take risks, and use fewer controlled language subsystems. This area has also taken a greater likelihood of restructuring that is development in the inter-language system. Speaking in L2 has occupied a peculiar position throughout much of the history of language teaching, and only in the last two decades has it begun to emerge as a branch of teaching, learning and testing in its own right, rarely focusing on the production of spoken discourse (Bygate, 2002).

Brown (2001) asserted that a review of the current issues in teaching oral communication will help to provide some perspective to moral practical considerations as the following:

a) Conversational discourse

Brown claimed that when someone asks you "Do you speak English?" they are usually implying: "Are you able to carry on a reasonably fluent conversation?" The benchmark of successful language acquisition is almost always
the demonstration of an ability to accomplish pragmatic goals through interactive discourse with other speakers. The goals and the procedures for teaching conversation are extremely diverse, depending on the student, teacher, and overall context of the class. Recent pedagogical research on teaching conversation has provided some parameters developing objectives and techniques.

b) Teaching pronunciation

There has been some controversy over the role of pronunciation work in a communicative, interactive course of study. Because the overwhelming majority of adult learners will never acquire an accent-free command of a foreign language, the language programs should emphasize whole language, meaningful contexts, and automaticity of production should focus on these tiny phonological details of language.

c) Accuracy and fluency

Accuracy and fluency are both important goals to pursue in communicative language teaching. While fluency may be an initial goal in many communicative language courses, accuracy is achieved to some extent by allowing students to focus on elements of phonology, grammar, and discourse in their spoken output.

d) Affective factors

One of the major obstacles learners have to overcome in learning to speak is the anxiety generated by the risk of blurt ing things out that are wrong, or incomprehensible. Because of the language ego that informs people that "you are what you speak", learners are reluctant to be judged by listeners.

e) The interaction effect

The greatest difficulty that learners encounter in attempting to speak is not the multiplicity of sounds, words, phrases, and discourse forms that characterize any
language, but rather the interactive nature of most communication. As Nunan (1996) notes, Conversations are collaborative, which presents a further complication in interactive discourse. He calls this the interlocutor effect or the difficulty of a speaking task as gauged by the skills of one's interlocutor. In other words, one learners' performance is always colored by that person (interlocutor) he or she is talking to.

Graham- Marr (2004) mentioned many reasons for focusing on listening and speaking when teaching English as a foreign language, not least of which is the fact that we as humans have been learning languages through our ears and mouth for thousands upon thousands of years, far longer we as humans have been able to read. Although not a set curriculum in most schools, speaking skills have been found to be a fundamental skill necessary for a child success in life.

**Microskills of Oral Communication**

Brown (2001: 272) mentioned these Microskills of communication,

1. produce chunks of language of different length.
2. orally produce differences among the English phonemes and allophonic variants.
3. produce English stress patterns, words in stress and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, and intonation contours.
4. produce reduced forms of words and phrases.
5. use an adequate number of lexical units (words) in order to accomplish pragmatic purposes.
6. produce fluent speech at different rates of delivery.
7. monitor your own oral production and use various strategic devices- pauses, fillers, self-corrections, backtracking- to enhance the clarity of the message.
8. use grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, and pluralization), word order, patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.

9. produce speech in natural constituents — in appropriate phrases, pause groups, breath groups, and sentences.

10. express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms.

11. use cohesive devices in spoken discourse.

12. accomplish appropriately communicative functions according to situations, participants, and goals.

13. use appropriate registers, implicature, pragmatic conventions, and other sociolinguistic features in face-to-face conversations.

14. convey links and connections between events and communicate such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.

15. use facial features, kinesis, body language, and other nonverbal cues along with verbal language to convey meanings.

16. develop and use a battery of speaking strategies, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, providing a context for interpreting the meaning of words, appealing for help, and accurately assessing how well your interlocutor is understanding you.

3.5 Studies Related to Strategies for Developing Oral Skills

Strategies for second language (L2) oral communication are commonly known as communication strategies (CSs). Despite widespread disagreement in the research literature about the exact nature of CSs (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, for a comprehensive review), problem-orientedness has been identified as a primary defining criterion for
identifying CSs (Bialystok, 1990). Speakers use CSs to “resolve difficulties they encounter in expressing an intended meaning” (Tarone, 2005, p. 488). In the present study, CSs are defined as tactics taken by L2 learners to solve oral communication problems. The responses to Oral Communication Strategy Teaching (OCST) have been rather mixed (Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 1998; McDonough, 1995, 1999, 2006; Oxford, 2001). There are broadly two diverging schools of thoughts on CSs (Foster-Cohen, 2004). One approach focuses on the cognitive processes involved in selecting one or another strategy, and proponents of this approach (e.g. Bialystok, 1990; Bongaerts & Poulisse, 1989; Kellerman, 1991; Poulisse, 1993) believe that cognitive processes are unaffected by instruction and that CSs are therefore not teachable. The other approach, however, focuses on the linguistic expressions used in identifying types of CSs, and proponents of this approach (e.g. Dörnyei, 1995; Gallagher Brett, 2001; Konishi & Tarone, 2004; Lam, 2005) advocate the necessity to teach these linguistic expressions needed for effective L2 communication language use.

In view of the arguments over the value of OCST, the number of interventionist studies remains small. The few recent studies are now briefly reviewed to identify outstanding issues that require further investigation. Dörnyei (1995) relates a pilot 6-week training experiment with 109 students in Hungary in the use of three CSs, namely, topic avoidance and replacement, circumlocution, using fillers and hesitation devices. The results showed that there was improvement in measures related to both the quality of circumlocutions and the frequency of fillers and circumlocutions in the oral post-test which consisted of topic description, cartoon description and definition formulation. Dörnyei's (1995) study provides some
Review of Related Studies

evidence for the views that CSs may be teachable and that patterns of students' strategy use may be altered by training.

Salamone and Marsal (1997) report an experiment which aimed to investigate the impact of communication strategy instruction on two intact French classes of 12 undergraduates each. The treatment class received instruction in the use of circumlocution as well as strategies to cope with lexical difficulties, and the comparison class served as a control class. All participants completed pre- and post-tests that elicited explanations of concrete nouns, abstract nouns, and shapes. The findings showed that both groups showed significant improvements over time, but there were no significant statistical differences between the two classes in the post-test. The tests administered in this study were, however, written rather than oral. This puts the validity of employing a written test to assess the impact of CSs for oral communication into question.

More recently, Scullen and Jourdain (2000) examine the effects of the explicit teaching of oral circumlocution on undergraduate learners studying French as a foreign language in an American university. The treatment group was explicitly taught to use super-ordination, analogy, function, and description strategies immediately prior to the first, second and third practice session, respectively. Participants in both the treatment class (17 students) and the comparison class (eight students) completed a pre-test, three practice sessions, and a post-test. The results indicated that both the treatment and comparison classes made significant gains in successful identification over time, but the between-group difference on the post-test was not significant. Given the short period of training and the small group sizes, further investigation is no doubt desirable.
Rossiter (2003a) reports the effects of communication strategy instruction on strategy use and on second language performance. Two classes of adult immigrants in Canada participated in this study. One class received 12 hours of direct communication strategy training, and the second served as a comparison group. Two oral tasks (picture story narratives, object descriptions) were administered in Week 1, Week 5, and Week 10. The post-test results showed a direct effect in favour of the communication strategy condition on a range of strategies used in the object description task, which was more effective than the narrative in eliciting communication strategies. Nonetheless, the author concludes that strategy training appeared to have little overall impact on learners in terms of task performance.

Regarding the effects of OCST on task performance, Nakatani’s (2005) study produced rather different findings from Rossiter’s (2003a). Nakatani (2005) focuses on awareness-raising training on oral communication strategy use. In the experiment, 62 Japanese female learners of English were involved and divided into the strategy training group and the control group. Over 12 weeks, the former received metacognitive strategy training whereas the latter received only the normal communication course. The strategy group was also taught CSs that could help students learn more of the language such as asking for clarification, checking for comprehension, and paraphrasing. The effects of training were assessed by speaking test scores, transcription data from the tests, and retrospective protocol data for their task performance. The findings revealed that participants in the treatment group improved their oral proficiency test scores but those in the control group did not.

This necessarily brief review of studies provides a good justification for the present study in terms of a lack of adequate work on investigating the impact of OCST on strategy use and task performance, and an apparent lack of consistent
findings across studies conducted in different contexts. In fact, strategy training is still unheard of in very many ESL classrooms (Lam, 2004). Continuing uncertainty about the effectiveness of strategy instruction on strategy use and task performance provides a further general rationale. Last but not least, the studies reviewed did not adopt a multi-method approach to investigating the effects of strategy instruction on learners’ strategy use. It has been argued that a synthesis of approaches to investigating the impact of strategy training may offer a more comprehensive and fuller picture of learners’ strategy use (Chamot, 2004; Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Scott, 1996; Oxford, 1996a; Wigglesworth, 2005). Hence, the fact that previous studies have tended to be relatively uni-dimensional in research approach provides yet one more good justification for a multi-dimensional study.

On the basis of the theories of on-line speech processing and the problem-solving mechanisms in L2 speech (Levelt, 1989), Bygate, 2005; Kormos, 2006; eight strategies that might enable learners to overcome potential communication problems at different stages of speech production for teaching were proposed in this study (see Lam, 2005, for a detailed discussion).