Oral language use in the classroom has several characteristics which should be kept in mind as teachers deliver instruction. Oral language can be adjusted by amplifying, clarifying, or modifying individual words or chunks of language when teaching content. Not only English Language Learners (ELLs), but all learners merit a teacher’s awareness and sensitivity towards productive language use. This will help to maximize the learner’s comprehension of content.

This Bulletin briefly examines characteristics of oral language delivery and provides recommendations for teachers to consider.

1. Rate of Delivery. The speed with which teachers use oral English may affect learner comprehension.

Recommendation: At least initially, speak more slowly when using unfamiliar content-specific words or when using complex sentences (e.g., Although I was very tired, I stayed up late to prepare for the exam). Aim, however, for normal speech rate.
2. **Utterance Length.** The length of sentences determines the complexity of language use.

*Recommendation:* Be prepared to tailor your speech by repeating phrases, paraphrasing, and summarizing what you said.

3. **Pronunciation.** More careful attention to your pronunciation will aid learner comprehension.

*Recommendation:* With content-specific language, pronounce new terms and concepts clearly and provide support by writing them on the blackboard for visual support.

4. **Rhythm and Intonation.** Meaning is conveyed by appropriate and specific stress of English words and phrases (e.g., "Come in"..."COME IN!"..."Come iiiin!")

*Recommendation:* Be aware of meaning that is conveyed by your use of rhythm and intonation in English speech. Model this and encourage similar attention to this among learners.

5. **Grammatical Forms.** Words often have differing grammatical functions and multiple forms, such as noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, and conjunction.

*Recommendation:* Especially with unfamiliar vocabulary, alert learners to the varying functions and forms of a word (e.g., speech/speak/spoken; hypothesis/hypoth-esize/hypothetical/hypothetically).

6. **Language Forms.** Idiomatic expressions (e.g., *It’s raining cats and dogs*) and phrasal, or two word verbs (e.g., *put in/put on/put out/put over/put down*, etc.), as well as transition signals (e.g., *however, unless, nevertheless, etc.* ) and connectors (e.g., *and, but, after, while, even though, etc.* ) can be obstacles to comprehending oral language.

*Recommendation:* Be conscious of how you use idioms and phrasal verbs; provide alternative language or phrases to clarify meaning if you suspect lack of learner comprehension.

7. **Collocational Bundles.** Many words in English have natural partners (e.g., *in the middle of; sibling rivalry; dry wine, etc.* )

*Recommendation:* Point out these natural word partnerships whenever possible, to expand learners’ repertoire of vocabulary knowledge and use of language.

8. **Lexical Bundles.** Teachers use a variety of expressions and phrases as a part of instruction (e.g., *I think it might be... The way in which... If I were you, etc.* )

*Recommendation:* Maintain a log of these expressions for two purposes: a) to be aware of not overusing them; b) to encourage learners to use some expressions as they describe, paraphrase, or summarize information.

9. **Formal/Informal Language Use.** Classroom conversation about content is different from conversational language with friends. Word choice and appropriateness of expressions vary in each setting (e.g., *Yo! vs. Good morning!; I gotta go! vs. May I go to the bathroom?, etc.* )

*Recommendation:* Be aware of your personal use of formal and informal oral language. When appropriate, make learners aware of how context dictates appropriate usage.

10. **Strategy Use.** Teachers’ oral language can be reinforced through a variety of strategies to aid comprehension.

*Recommendation:* The following strategies can be useful:

a) Write key words to highlight important, content-specific vocabulary;

b) Rephrase, as necessary, to simplify, reword, or underscore the importance of what is being said;

c) Define, as you use them, important or unfamiliar words (e.g., *It was a tsunami. The wave was several feet high and came rolling into the beach village, causing death and destruction.* )

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The ways teachers use oral language can enhance comprehension of content. Understanding the above aspects of language will support greater listening comprehension among all learners.