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CONNECTED SPEECH DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS IN PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The comprehensive and harmonious development of all linguistic components, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, is essential for the formation of coherent and contextually appropriate connected speech in preschool-aged children. Connected speech functions as a salient indicator of a child's acquisition of their native language, integrating vocabulary expansion, grammatical competence, phonological processing, and the ability to use language pragmatically within social contexts.

Proficiency in connected speech reflects not only surface-level linguistic fluency but also deeper cognitive and communicative capacities, including narrative structuring, inferential reasoning, and the ability to adapt language to suit the context and audience. As such, it serves as a critical marker of linguistic competence and overall language development. The ability to produce connected discourse underscores the successful internalization and functional application of linguistic rules, thereby positioning connected speech as a pivotal milestone in the ontogeny of language acquisition.

Keywords: *connected speech, preschool-aged children, language acquisition, speech components, vocabulary development, logical and coherent speech, rich vocabulary, early speech therapy intervention.*

INTRODUCTION

Preschool education represents a multi-tiered and holistic process aimed at ensuring the comprehensive development of young children. This process is designed to support the child's abilities and capacities, aligned with their individual, psychological, and physical characteristics (Florian, 2014; Ainscow, 1994). Preschool education promotes not only cognitive development but also emotional, social, and communicative growth, forming the foundation for lifelong learning and participation in society.

In line with the Republic of Armenia's national policy on inclusive education, the National Assembly adopted significant amendments to the Law on Preschool Education on May 6, 2020. These amendments ensure the realization of the right to equal access to preschool education for all children in

Armenia. The revised law also sets forth the principles of accessibility, availability, and equity in early childhood education (RA National Assembly, 2020).

Given these legal and policy shifts, the role of multidisciplinary teams in preschool institutions has become increasingly significant. These teams are responsible for delivering pedagogical-psychological support services, which include both psychological counseling and targeted educational interventions. The ultimate goal is to promote optimal development and inclusion for each child, especially those with developmental or learning difficulties (UNICEF, 2012).

The functions of the multidisciplinary team are diverse, ranging from needs assessment and diagnostics to the design of Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs), collaborative planning, and direct support. Among the core elements of this support structure, speech-language therapy (logopedic services) occupies a crucial place. The speech therapist's role includes identifying communication disorders early, implementing evidence-based interventions, and contributing to the child's educational success within inclusive settings (Shipley & McAfee, 2020; Paul & Norbury, 2012).

Closely integrated into this system are Regional Psychological-Pedagogical Support Centers (RPPSCs), which serve as territorial-level hubs for child development services. These centers are responsible for coordinating interdisciplinary evaluations, delivering specialized interventions, and supporting both children and educators across preschool and school institutions. Their functions include conducting multifactorial assessments of children's developmental needs, offering expert recommendations to educators and parents, and ensuring the continuity of support services within inclusive educational settings (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018; Bartolo et al., 2007).

Specifically, RPPSCs often provide or coordinate logopedic services, psychological counseling, special pedagogy, and developmental therapy, adapting their methods to both the cultural and linguistic context of the region. Their role is especially vital in preschool education, where early identification of speech and communication challenges can significantly influence future academic success. By working in tandem with school-based multidisciplinary teams, RPPSCs bridge gaps between diagnosis and educational planning, offering tailored interventions that align with national education standards and individual child profiles.

The fundamental principle of early diagnosis and prevention of speech disorders in preschool-aged children guides modern speech-language pathology (logopedics). Early identification is crucial to mitigate the progression of speech impairments and to support the child's comprehensive communicative development (Shipley & McAfee, 2020; Paul & Norbury, 2012). In this context, regional psychological-pedagogical services are not merely diagnostic bodies but active agents of inclusion, empowerment, and developmental support playing a central role in ensuring every child's right to quality, equitable, and accessible education from the earliest stages of life.

DESK REVIEW

Both age-related norms and individual characteristics such as temperament, cognitive style, and neurodevelopmental maturity influence the development of children's speech. As such, the trajectory of speech acquisition differs across children. Speech evolves in the context of interactive communication with the surrounding environment, making it essential for caregivers, educators, and family members to model grammatically correct, fluent, and enriched language (Yairi & Ambrose, 2013).

Among the various strategies for fostering verbal expression, natural communication is considered the most effective. Creating authentic communicative contexts, such as play, storytelling, or daily routines, encourages children to express themselves spontaneously. During any child-centered activity, it is important to stimulate their desire to speak, provide opportunities for unrestrained verbal expression, and reinforce their communicative attempts. The more motivated a child is to speak, the more robust and complete their speech development is likely to be (Grigoryan, 2017; Paul & Norbury, 2012; Conture & Curlee, 2007).

In the process of speech development, special emphasis is placed on ensuring the full communicative competence of children, the ability to regulate interpersonal relationships, and the development of phonemic culture, an area where modern children are particularly in need of support.

Speech serves as a primary tool for communication, vocabulary enrichment, cognitive development, and expanding children's understanding of the surrounding world. To support the natural development of speech, it is essential to create motivational conditions, maintain a linguistically rich environment, encourage children's attempts at communication, and actively engage them in conversations and dialogues.

By preschool age, a child's speech reaches a particular developmental milestone, which is achieved through active participation in communicative activities. The need for social interaction and communication serves as a driving force for this development. The social environment and interaction with surrounding adults play a crucial role, as children rapidly internalize and model the adult patterns of speech through these exchanges (Nishcheva, 2021; Zhulina, 2019).

It has been well established that insufficient speech development can have a negative impact on a child's communication abilities, behavior, academic performance, and overall learning progress. Empirical evidence supports that speech difficulties identified and addressed during the preschool years are more effectively and rapidly corrected. This early intervention creates favorable conditions for the full development of both speech and cognitive processes at this critical developmental stage.

During the preschool period, a child's speech must reach a level of development that reflects the integrated functioning of all speech components, in alignment with the norms and structures of the native language. Mastery of the native language, along with the development of linguistic and communicative competencies, is considered a prerequisite for the holistic formation of the child's personality. It

significantly contributes to overcoming intellectual, moral, and aesthetic development challenges that may arise during early education (Alekseeva & Yashina, 2000).

Speech is a fundamental cognitive and logical tool, and the development of a child's thinking abilities is mainly dependent on their mastery of language. It provides extensive opportunities for communication, idea exchange, reasoning, labeling objects and phenomena, and understanding their meanings. Through speech, children move beyond sensory-based learning to develop abstract thinking, allowing for generalizations and more profound, more holistic comprehension of reality. Speech facilitates knowledge acquisition about the world, nature, and the conceptualization of past, present, and future events.

In this context, the development of linguistic competence encompassing both oral and written expression and logical thinking is considered a core challenge of pedagogy. During the preschool years, children should be able to formulate and express their own thoughts clearly and respond to questions with grammatically correct sentences. Several key components are essential for the successful development of oral speech at this stage: correct articulation of native phonemes, a rich vocabulary, and the use of semantically nuanced words, including synonyms, antonyms, and polysemous expressions.

Notably, the preschool period culminates in the formation of grammatical structures in the native language, marking a critical milestone in speech development. Complete mastery of the native language and communication skills is regarded as a prerequisite for the development of a child's personality, laying the foundation for overcoming intellectual, moral, and aesthetic educational challenges (Zhulina, 2019; Grigoryan, 2017).

Characteristics of Fully Developed and Correct Speech in Preschool-Aged Children

The development of clear and accurate speech in preschool-aged children is a complex and multi-layered process, encompassing several critical linguistic competencies. Fully formed and correct speech is characterized by:

- Accurate articulation of the phonemes and words of the native language;
- A well-developed and contextually appropriate vocabulary;
- Semantically correct use of words, reflecting an understanding of meaning;
- Grammatically accurate transformation and structuring of words according to the rules of the native language;
- The ability to produce cohesive and coherent connected speech.

The development of the phonological system is particularly emphasized during the preschool years. It is during this developmental stage that children typically complete the acquisition of correct phoneme pronunciation. According to developmental norms, by the age of 5 to 6 years, children are expected to accurately articulate all phonemes of their native language (Zhulina, 2019; Grigoryan, 2017).

Phonemic awareness and articulation form the foundation for effective communication, academic readiness, and further cognitive and linguistic development. Delays or inaccuracies in this process may indicate the need for timely speech-language intervention to ensure the child's successful adaptation to educational environments and social interaction contexts (ASHA, 2023).

Development of the Phonological Aspect of Speech in Preschool-Aged Children

Two fundamental processes characterize the development of the phonological system of speech in preschool-aged children:

- The development of phonemic (speech) hearing;
- The formation of accurate sound articulation.

In addressing the phonological aspect of speech development, it is essential to emphasize the role of speech prosody, the melodic features of speech such as intonation, pitch, tempo, and rhythm. These components play a critical role in the expressive quality and clarity of spoken language.

Key elements in prosodic development include:

- Expressiveness of speech, reflected in vocal tone, pitch, timbre, intensity, and intonation;
- Development of phrasing and natural pauses (i.e., rhythmic structuring of speech).

Children begin to perceive and differentiate intonational variations (e.g., strict, soft, angry, calm) from an early age. As their speech develops, they learn to adjust their voice's pitch and intensity in accordance with communicative needs.

Moreover, mastering a natural speech tempo is crucial. Both excessively slow and fast speech can lead to omissions of phonemes, syllables, or even entire words, making speech unclear or unintelligible.

By the senior preschool age (approximately 5-6 years), children should be able to use intonation to:

- Signal the beginning and end of sentences,
- Express incomplete thoughts or questions,
- Create natural pauses for meaning and clarity.

Narrative forms such as children's poems, folktales, and fables are especially effective tools for supporting the development of intonation and expressive speech during this period (Paramonova, 2021).

The Development of Prosody in Preschool Children's Speech

When addressing the phonetic aspect of speech development, it is essential to emphasize the role of prosody, specifically intonation, which plays a significant role in ensuring the proper development of expressive oral speech. Key components of prosody include:

- The development of expressiveness in speech (including tone, tempo, timbre, pitch, and intonation), and

- The development of modulation and emotional coloring of speech.

From an early age, children begin to perceive and distinguish between variations in vocal tone such as harsh, soft, angry, or calm intonations. According to their communicative intent, children can adjust their vocal pitch and intensity to match the required emotional tone. Maintaining a natural speech tempo is also critical for the expressive development of preschoolers' speech. Both slow and fast speech rates may result in omissions of sounds, syllables, or even entire words, making the child's speech difficult to understand (Paramonova, 2021).

Older preschoolers should be capable of using intonation to indicate sentence boundaries, incomplete thoughts, and pauses. To foster prosodic development at this stage, engaging children with nursery rhymes, folk tales, and fables has proven to be highly effective due to their rhythmic and expressive nature (Paramonova, 2021).

However, as previously noted, not all preschool-aged children achieve complete speech development. In addition to phonetic articulation difficulties, children may also experience delays or disruptions in vocabulary growth, connected speech, and the grammatical structure of their language. These issues highlight the need for early detection and targeted intervention to support comprehensive language development during the critical preschool period.

Disruptions in Speech Development and the Role of Connected Speech in School Readiness

Children with speech difficulties often use semantically inappropriate words and exhibit word order errors within sentences, leading to distorted meaning. These errors render their speech unclear and developmentally inappropriate for their age. Additionally, disruptions in voice modulation, tempo, and timbre, as well as other prosodic elements, negatively affect effective communication with peers and adults (Paramonova, 2021).

Such deficiencies in speech development during the preschool years unambiguously present significant barriers to successful communication and overall development. This underscores the critical role of speech therapy services within preschool institutions, early childhood education centers, and multidisciplinary support teams. Early assessment of children's speech development levels and the provision of timely, specialized support services form the foundation for successful school readiness interventions (Zhulina, 2019; Borodich, 2016).

A crucial component of this readiness is the development of connected speech, which integrates all the fundamental components of speech phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics. Connected speech reflects the child's mastery of their native language and supports independent, coherent, and contextually appropriate communication (Nischeva, 2021).

Connected speech is defined as meaningful, structurally complete, and semantically coherent language that adheres to the norms of literary language. It transcends immediate communicative contexts and is understood independently of the surrounding speech situation. This type of speech, often monologic in form, enables children to communicate extended thoughts and narratives (Glukhov, 2016; Arsenyeva, 2014).

The development of connected speech occurs gradually, shaped by both higher-order cognitive processes and increased opportunities for social communication. As connected speech matures, preschool children become more adept at using lexically and grammatically appropriate forms, aligning nouns and adjectives, pronouns and numerals, and adjusting verb tense and aspect to reflect syntactic rules. They also develop the ability to construct narratives, express emotions and opinions, and draw conclusions relevant to communicative situations (Paramonova, 2021; Alekseeva & Yashina, 2000).

Patterns and Mechanisms in the Development of Connected Speech in Preschool-Aged Children

The development of connected speech in preschool-aged children follows predictable patterns that begin forming during early childhood. By approximately 1 to 1.5 years of age, children begin to exhibit the foundational prerequisites for connected speech. At this stage, it is essential that the child actively communicates with both peers and adults. Through such interaction, children accumulate vocabulary and begin constructing semantic networks (Borodich, 2016; Arsenyeva, 2014).

Connected speech starts to emerge more clearly around 1.5 to 2 years of age, when children begin forming two-word utterances, typically consisting of a subject and a verb. These utterances frequently accompany daily activities and reflect the child's efforts to verbally engage with their surroundings (Alexeeva & Yashina, 2000; Glukhov, 2016).

The principal function of connected speech is communication, which develops through both dialogic (two-way) and monologic (one-way) forms. Dialogic speech arises from direct interaction and is often stimulated by external situational factors. In contrast, monologic speech is driven by internal motives, content-specific intentions, and the speaker's independent selection of linguistic tools. Due to its complexity and organization, monologic speech requires specific pedagogical support for its development (Paramonova, 2021; Zhulina, 2019).

During the preschool years, it is critical to engage children in active dialogue, encourage their ability to listen and comprehend speech addressed to them, and teach them how to formulate appropriate questions and responses. Such developmental efforts must always be contextualized in real-life social interactions (Grigoryan, 2017).

Through participation in dialogic exchanges, children learn to:

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- Attentively listen to and understand the speech of others;
 - Articulate their thoughts clearly and coherently;
 - Monitor and regulate their own speech behavior;
 - Formulate and respond to questions appropriately (Glujov, 2016; Niščeva, 2021).

A significant portion of children's dialogic speech is characterized by a colloquial style, which emerges in everyday communication with family members and peers. This style tends to be emotionally expressive and spontaneous, incorporating a wide variety of sentence types such as declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory. It is also marked by the frequent use of informal vocabulary and occasional deviations from normative literary language (Zhulina, 2019; Borodich, 2016).

In connected speech, it is essential to maintain speech culture, including:

- Polite forms of address;
- Socially appropriate greetings and farewells;
- Expressions of apology or gratitude;
- Congratulatory remarks.

These elements not only facilitate effective communication but also support the child's social integration and emotional development (Paramonova, 2021; Arsenyeva, 2014).

Development of Dialogic and Monologic Speech in Preschool-Aged Children

Importance of Joint Activities in Developing Dialogue

In preschool years, joint activities play a crucial role in fostering dialogic speech. During such activities, children engage in situations that require discussion, coordination, or evaluation of actions, leading to the establishment of mutual communication, exchange of opinions, and shared understanding. These interactions promote communicative activity and highlight the necessity of mastering dialogic skills (Borodich, 2016; Grigoryan, 2017).

To develop children's communication culture during play, educators can apply methods such as role-playing games, dramatic interpretations of literary works, and guided discussions based on a variety of content. Such approaches create natural communicative environments where children understand the social value of dialogue (Paramonova, 2021).

Complexity of Entering into Dialogue

Entering into dialogue can be more challenging than engaging in monologue, as it involves a more complex form of social interaction. In this process, children must simultaneously formulate their own

thoughts while processing and interpreting the speech of others. This cognitive multitasking demands higher-order mental functions (Glukhov, 2016).

To support dialogic development, adults should frequently engage children in meaningful conversations, addressing topics that interest them and responding to their questions with care. These conversational exchanges become intentional pedagogical tools, facilitating self-expression and enhancing self-regulation in speech (Alexeeva & Yashina, 2000).

Conversations also help children:

- Develop goal-oriented thinking;
- Reflect on and articulate personal experiences;
- Listen attentively and understand others;
- Ask meaningful questions and express opinions;
- Communicate desires, impressions, and emotions (Niščeva, 2021).

Moreover, the cultural norms of polite conversation must be cultivated alongside verbal skills. Children must learn to listen patiently, avoid interruptions, and respond respectfully skills that contribute to both social-emotional and linguistic competence (Zhulina, 2019).

From Dialogue to Monologue

The development of monologic speech is grounded in dialogic competence. As children master conversation, they gradually transition to producing extended, coherent, and logically structured monologues. This form of speech requires not only verbal fluency but also mastery of linguistic resources, topic organization, and content sequencing (Arsenyeva, 2014).

Monologic expression includes the ability to:

- Convey ideas with clarity and logical order (beginning, middle, and end);
- Use chaining of phrases to structure complete thoughts;
- Select appropriate vocabulary and intonation to match the context.

Situational vs. Contextual Speech

Connected speech can be either situational or contextual. Situational speech is anchored in the immediate communicative context and is understandable only within that framework. In contrast, contextual speech relies on language structures alone, without external cues, and requires the use of various grammatical and lexical tools for meaning to be conveyed (Paramonova, 2021).

Although these two forms differ in origin and manifestation, they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Mastery of both enables children to adapt their speech according to communicative circumstances, thereby strengthening overall language competence (Grigoryan, 2017).

By the ages of 5-6, children should be able to:

- Participate actively in conversation;
- Retell fairy tales or short stories;
- Express ideas using varied sentence structures;
- Demonstrate growing control over emotional expression and intonation.

However, many children at this stage still face difficulties with idea formulation, question construction, and intonation usage, often requiring adult scaffolding to communicate effectively (Borodich, 2016; Glukhov, 2016).

Development of Descriptive, Narrative, and Analytical Speech in Older Preschoolers

By the time children reach the older preschool age, they begin to master various forms of connected speech, including descriptive, narrative, and analytical speech (Arsenyeva, 2014; Borodich, 2016).

Descriptive Speech

Descriptive speech involves characterizing an object or phenomenon by enumerating its attributes. This form of expression heavily relies on the use of adjectives to specify features such as shape, size, color, texture, and more. Speech therapists often apply the “radiating principle” in descriptive language instruction. In this method, the child begins with a central object, and then attributes like rays of light branch out from it to create a complete description (Nishcheva, 2021; Alexeeva & Yashina, 2000).

Practical tools for developing descriptive speech include:

- Thematic illustrations (pictures with plots);
- Toys and manipulatives;
- Children’s own drawings;
- Observation of natural phenomena, animals, and people.

These activities help children internalize the basic structure of descriptive speech, promoting both vocabulary enrichment and syntactic development (Grigoryan, 2017).

Narrative Speech

Narrative speech entails a structured retelling of events that unfold in a temporal sequence. Events may be presented in the present or past tense, and narrative coherence depends on the child’s ability to distinguish the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Violating this order often leads to a loss of meaning (Borodich, 2016; Glukhov, 2016).

To support the development of narrative skills, educators can use:

- Graphic models representing stories as colored segments: green (beginning), red (development), and blue (ending);
- Sequential picture cards to help structure storylines;
- Dramatic play with puppets or toys, encouraging emotional expression through intonation, gestures, and facial expressions;
- Personal storytelling about the child's own experiences, which requires abstract thought and the absence of external visual aids.

Narrative speech often blends with descriptive elements, especially when children recount personal experiences. This integration deepens their expressive capacity and logical sequencing (Zhulina, 2019).

Analytical (Reasoning) Speech

Analytical or reasoning-based speech represents the most complex form of connected speech for preschoolers. It is built upon a cause-and-effect structure and typically includes a hypothesis, reasoning, and a conclusion. Unlike narrative and descriptive speech, analytical discourse is less constrained by fixed order and may include multiple viewpoints or justifications (Paramonova, 2021).

Teaching children to construct analytical texts promotes the development of:

- Logical reasoning;
- Explanation and justification skills;
- Ability to formulate arguments and support conclusions.

This kind of speech training not only enhances communication but also lays the groundwork for later academic success by cultivating critical thinking (Niščeva, 2021).

Integrative Development of Connected Speech

In natural contexts, children rarely use these speech types in isolation. Connected speech typically integrates descriptive, narrative, and analytical components, depending on communicative intent and situational demands (Glukhov, 2016). Instructional strategies to support this development include:

- Dialogues;
- Self and peer speech evaluations;
- Retelling with feedback;
- Modeling and reconstructing stories.

Developing connected speech is a core objective of preschool language education. It directly supports:

- Vocabulary expansion;
- Grammatical accuracy;

- Phonological awareness;
- Pragmatic competence.

However, if children lack age-appropriate vocabulary, semantic knowledge, or basic word-formation skills, their ability to construct coherent connected speech becomes limited (Grigoryan, 2017; Arsenyeva, 2014). Early intervention and structured speech development programs are essential to support children in reaching these milestones before entering school.

Primary Methods for Developing Connected Speech in Preschoolers

The development of connected speech in preschool-aged children is a central objective in early language education. Several key methods are used in this process, each contributing to different aspects of speech competence (Borodich, 2016; Arsenyeva, 2014):

1. Forming grammatically and syntactically correct sentences
2. Developing coherent dialogue (dialogic speech)
3. Developing coherent monologue (monologic speech)
4. Retelling (reproduction of content)
5. Creating descriptive stories
6. Composing stories based on a single plot picture
7. Composing stories using a sequence of plot pictures
8. Fostering independent storytelling abilities

Among these, the development of retelling and independent storytelling skills plays a significant role. Although they are closely related, these two forms of expression are based on different principles. In independent storytelling, the child selects and formulates the content on their own, while retelling involves reproducing the meaning of a literary text using their own words and understanding (Paramonova, 2021; Zhulina, 2019).

Retelling

Retelling is the oral reproduction of a literary work's meaning, often using simplified structures and personal interpretation. The child organizes their speech based on the structure of an existing author's text, allowing them to develop sequencing, memory, and expressive skills.

Independent Storytelling

In contrast, independent storytelling is a self-directed monologic expression that involves more complex cognitive processes. The child constructs an original story, selecting language and organizing

events freely. This fosters creativity, autonomy, and the ability to apply different forms of speech (Alexeeva & Yashina, 2000).

Holistic Approach to Connected Speech

All instructional methods and activities aimed at developing connected speech in preschool institutions should serve the comprehensive development of the child's speech. At this age, well-developed connected speech is characterized by:

- Correct pronunciation
- Rich and active vocabulary
- Grammatical accuracy
- Controlled tempo, intonation, and pitch
- Adherence to the rules of the native language

Language acquisition at this stage must be systematic, contextually embedded, and developmentally appropriate to enable the child to communicate fluently and meaningfully, preparing them for the demands of formal schooling (Grigoryan, 2017; Nishcheva, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be confidently stated that the formation and development of connected speech during the preschool years is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring that a school-aged child possesses a sufficiently developed oral language system. This capacity is essential not only for effective communication with peers and adults but also for understanding and evaluating the events and phenomena in their surroundings and for expressing their own thoughts clearly, logically, and grammatically accurately.

In this regard, the continuous support of RPPSCs to preschool educational institutions through their localized assessments and services should be recognized as a significant factor. Nevertheless, early speech intervention provided by speech and language therapists occupies a unique and indispensable position within the broader system of pedagogical and psychological services.

There is a growing need to implement systematic and structured professional intervention at an early stage, aimed at the timely identification, prevention, and correction of speech development disorders during this sensitive age period. By addressing these challenges proactively, many difficulties can be resolved before the child enters the formal school environment, when neuroplasticity and linguistic adaptability are still at their peak. Moreover, the development of a high level of connected speech is a critical foundation for:

- mastering written language skills,
- successfully navigating academic curricula, and

- fostering the comprehensive, harmonious, and holistic development of the individual.

Achieving this objective necessitates a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach among professionals in early childhood education, particularly speech therapists, psychologists, and educators, who must employ evidence-based methods, culturally and developmentally appropriate practices, and a strong emphasis on the functional use of language in communication contexts.

Ultimately, connected speech is not merely a linguistic construct; it is a gateway to cognitive, social, and emotional growth, laying the groundwork for confident self-expression, academic success, and lifelong learning.

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