

The image features four black silhouettes of people in conversation against a white background. From left to right: a man in a suit with his hand to his chin, a woman in a dress with her hands raised, a man in a suit gesturing with both hands, and a woman in a dress with her hands open. The text 'What is conversation?' is centered in a bold, pink font.

# What is conversation?

# What is conversation?

- Spoken
- Spontaneous
- Shared context
- Jointly constructed
- Interpersonal
- Informal
- Expresses feelings, attitudes, judgments

(Thornbury & Slade 2006: 8)

# The 4 Skills

- In Japanese schools and universities, what percentage of time is spent focusing on each of the 4 skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in English language classes?
- Is the balance right in your opinion (bearing in mind the reasons why students need English)?
- Why is there often less focus on speaking skills in English language classes?

# Problems with speaking activities

- Students are often shy to speak in English
- Students are worried about making mistakes
- Students feel that they have nothing to say
- Since only one person can talk at a time, each student has very little 'talking time'
- Better students will dominate the conversation
- In monolingual classes, students use their L1
- Difficult for the teacher to control
- Testing problems

# Band descriptors for IELTS speaking exam

- **Band 6:** Generally communicates effectively on general topics and other matters relevant to own immediate academic, vocational or leisure interests. Can use complex sentence forms and a wide range of modifiers, connectives, and cohesive features to convey most meanings fairly precisely though errors in grammar and vocabulary may occur and occasionally interfere with communication. Is generally able to use circumlocution to cover gaps in vocabulary & structure.

# Band descriptors for IELTS speaking exam

- **Band 3:** Can convey only simple meaning on very familiar topics. Can answer simple questions & respond to simple statements. Has only limited ability to take the initiative with original statements & questions. Basic sentence forms appear to be used though grammatical errors are numerous except in memorised utterances. Essentially no ability to link sentences or use modifiers. Frequent pauses may occur as the candidate searches for words. Pronunciation is likely to be strongly influenced by the LI and to significantly impede communication.

# Designing successful speaking activities

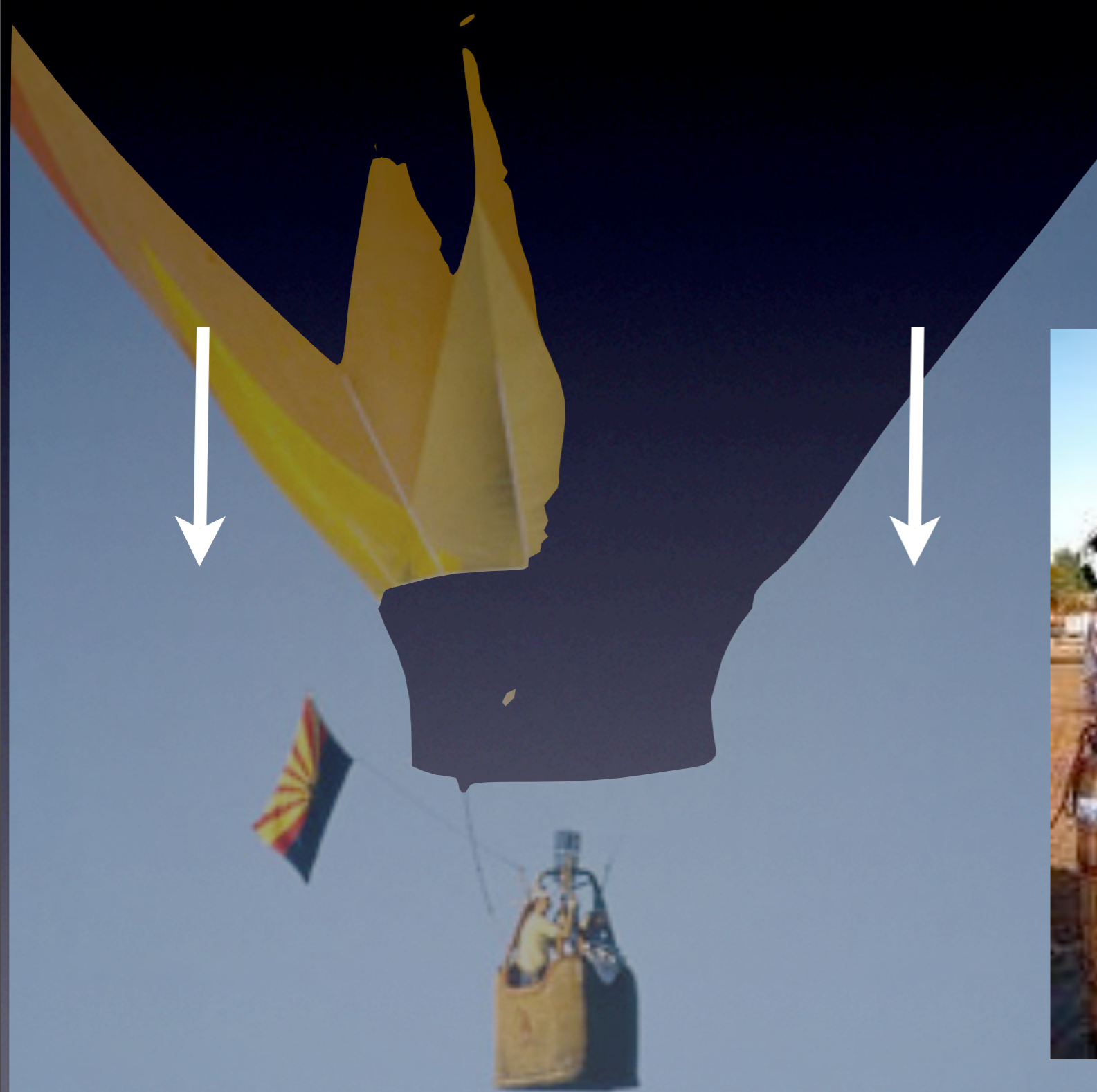
- You are going to try out 2 speaking activities: In your opinion, which one is more successful and why?

# Task 1: Discussion Question

- What are the effects of oil pollution on the environment and what can we do to avoid this damage?



# Task 2: Balloon debate



# Designing successful speaking activities

- Use pair/group work
- Base activities on easy language (productive capability is lower than receptive capability)
- Pre-teach any essential vocabulary
- Choose topics that will stimulate learners' interest
- Make tasks goal-oriented and achievable
- Develop interest in the topic (with pictures, texts, etc.) when setting up activities
- Teacher's role: facilitator & monitor

# Problems with group work

I've got too many students in my class!

It takes up a lot of time!

I can't move the desks in my classroom

# Problems with group work

The best students do all the work!

The students won't talk in English!

The students make mistakes but I can't correct them!

# Types of speaking activities

- Roleplays or simulations
- Information gaps
- Presentations or speeches
- Description tasks
- Problem solving
- Debate or discussion
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Storytelling

# Types of speaking activities

- Roleplays or simulations (8, 14)
- Information gaps (2, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13)
- Presentations or speeches (6)
- Description tasks (4, 7)
- Problem solving (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14)
- Debate or discussion (1, 3, 6, 10, 14)
- Surveys or questionnaires (11)
- Storytelling (5, 12)

# Types of speaking activities

- Which types of speaking activities are more/less likely to succeed in Japanese classrooms? Why?

# Approaches to teaching conversation

- Can conversation be taught or is it learned by 'doing'?



# Approaches to teaching conversation

- **Indirect approach:** Uses communicative activities to generate conversational interaction
- **Direct approach:** Addresses specific aspects of conversational management

(Richards 1990: 84)

# Why use a direct approach to teaching conversation?

Awareness raising  
(noticing)



Acquisition

“No noticing, no acquisition” (Ellis 1995: 89)

# Conversational Features

- Topic shift (tennis vs. ten-pin bowling)
- Opening up or closing down conversation
- Register (formal vs. informal)
- Hesitation devices (erm, er)
- Listener responses (wow! oh no, how awful!)
- Vague language (thingie, something like that, kind of)

# Conclusions

- Casual conversation is an essential part of human behavior: “[...] despite its sometimes aimless appearance and apparently trivial content, casual conversation is, in fact, a highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity. Motivated by interpersonal needs continually to establish who we are, how we relate to others and what we think of how the world is, casual conversation... is concerned with the joint construction of social reality.” (Eggins & Slade 1997: 6)

# Conclusions

- Conversation skills are often undervalued in the Japanese education system
- It **is** possible to develop students' speaking skills with appropriate task design and classroom management
- There are a wide variety of task types to choose from with speaking activities
- Students can benefit from a focus on specific features of conversation management as well as fluency practice

Thank you!