

## *Introduction*

This book explores authentic examples of contemporary spoken English. Its main aim is to provide learners and students of English with the opportunity to see, hear and understand conversational English in a range of different contexts of use. During the past ten to fifteen years there has been an explosion of interest in the analysis of extended stretches of spoken and written language, and increasing reference to and use of real language in English language teaching materials. To the best of our knowledge this book is the only publication since Crystal and Davy's *Advanced Conversational English* (1975) to collect such extensive samples of naturalistic conversational data and to describe and comment on that data in ways which will be of maximum value to teachers and students of English. And in several important respects *Exploring Spoken English* breaks new ground.

### Spoken English Data

There is spoken English and there is spoken English. During the 1990s there have been a number of projects designed to collect large quantities of spoken data. Such projects (see, for example, Crowdy 1993; Rundell 1995a & 1995b) have involved sophisticated computational technologies and methodologies and will continue significantly to inform pedagogic projects, particularly in the field of learners' dictionaries of English and related lexicographic materials development.

However, it is one of the paradoxes of spoken data collection that the more interesting and valuable the data, the more difficult they are to obtain. It is important therefore that too much data are not obtained from a single category of talk; for example, large quantities of broadcast talk can be collected relatively easily by recording TV and radio output and it is similarly relatively unproblematic to record lectures, discussions, meetings in formal settings or speakers narrating or reporting straight into a microphone. Such data is unlikely to be representative of typical conversational interaction if speakers always know that they are being recorded or have too many opportunities to plan or to rehearse in advance what they are going to say and how they are going to say it.

The data in this book are drawn almost exclusively from a research project based in the Department of English Studies, at the University of Nottingham, Great Britain, and funded with the support of Cambridge University Press, the publishers of this book. The project has been named the CANCODE project (Cambridge-Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English). The database for the CANCODE project consists of five million words (as of 1996) constructed mainly from spontaneous, everyday English speech in a variety of

social contexts and interaction environments. The speakers reflect a full social, cultural and geographical range (within the British Isles) with samples which are also representative of age and gender differences. The corpus is designed to enable the study of spoken discourse in general, and spoken grammar in particular in relation to different genres of speech. Although it is the most difficult to obtain, the emphasis is on informal speech genres rather than on more formal varieties. This is a dimension which has not always been prominent in previous projects. For example the data collected in Crystal and Davy's *Advanced Conversational English* are largely personal anecdote and monologue in form; in this book we have collected data which are monologue and dialogue in form (though mainly dialogic) and which contain examples in which participants engage in both symmetrical and asymmetrical conversations. That is, in some units speakers are equals and in other units they have encounters in classrooms, restaurants or shops in which different social relations obtain.

## Speech genres

This is not the place to articulate a fully formed theory of speech genres and, indeed, a more detailed illustration can be found in McCarthy and Carter (1994: eh 1). However, it is important to recognise that different types of talk produce different types of language and that the broad distinction between formal and informal or between public and private conversational discourse is not the only categorial distinction. In this book we have assembled CANCODE data from a variety of sources and we demonstrate, for example, that a key grammatical structure such as situational ELLIPSIS, which is particularly associated with informal English, occurs in most genres but not very commonly in **narrative** genres; we demonstrate that in **service encounters**, stretches of conversation often rely very heavily on DISCOURSE MARKERS; we demonstrate that in **language-in-action** genres there can be extensive interaction without reference to the main objects in front of the participant and with a constant reliance on DEIXIS such as *this* and *that* and *here* and *there*.

Genres are episodes of speech of which participants (if interaction is successful) have a shared view of their nature as social encounter. Hence, after a conversation, we can usually say, with confidence, things such as 'Jo told me an amazing story', or 'Oh, we just chatted about this and that', or else 'We had a bit of an argument'. Equally, we reflect our frustration at unsuccessful engagement in genres with remarks such as 'It was more like an interrogation than an interview', 'I didn't realise it was just a joke ... I thought it was a true story', or 'It was a very one-sided conversation'. Genres vary in the surface grammatical manifestations such as ELLIPSIS and DISCOURSE MARKERS, but these merely mark the socially-determined differences of purpose, degree of

shared knowledge, institutionalised 'rules of speaking' (e.g. in classrooms, debates, etc.), roles and relationships between the participants, and so on. Finally, we bring to every genre our previous experiences in that same genre; every genre carries its own history with it, and there is a constant historical tension between the repetition of experience in encounter after encounter, and the freshness and uniqueness of each new conversational encounter.

The CANCODE project has from the beginning attempted to obtain data in a range of different genres so that a wide range of contextual features can be seen to influence the talk, and research can therefore pinpoint differences between different forms of language and the types of conversation conducted. Such a principal design feature is felt to be of especial value and benefit to learners of English who above all need to appreciate the kinds of choices of language available in different contexts. If there is an insufficiently sharp differentiation between different varieties of talk then learners are unable to develop any real sensitivity to which forms of language create which meanings (and, crucially, which sorts of social relationships) for which purposes and in which situations.

Most importantly, too, such a project design allows insights to be developed concerning differences and distinctions between spoken and written language use, with particular reference to grammar. The major contemporary grammars of the English language are largely based on written examples; the new data are exemplifying common, 'standard' patterns of use alongside patterns more familiar from written-language-based grammar. For example, new data, illustrated in this book, reveal key interpersonal functions in the use of tense, modality, ellipsis, deixis and clause structure; the crucial role of spoken discourse markers, acting as a kind of conversational punctuation, is also illustrated. Additionally, variations in canonical (written) word order can be shown to be common across a wide range of genres of speech.

#### Note on language and gender

The GANCODE project has tried to keep a good balance of the genders (as it has done of social classes, geographical distribution and age-groups). We have tried to do the same in this book, with 32 adult female speakers and 28 adult males, though it has been impossible to match the numbers exactly. Much debate has taken place as to whether there are differing styles of discourse between males and females, and whether males, for instance, unfairly dominate talk, interrupting more than females. The transcripts in this book present no firm evidence of differences of these kinds. For example, features such as HEDGES and TAGS (sometimes thought to be 'female' characteristics) are used by both genders (see for example the table of TAGS in Unit 4). However, users are invited to approach these transcripts with a view to observing gender-distinguishing features if they are present, and to analyse the

texts in a way that is beyond the scope of this book. The authors certainly do not view themselves as experts in the field.

## The design of the book

There are twenty units in this book and there is a balanced distribution across a range of speech genres. There are eight main genres as follows:

***Narrative:*** A series of everyday anecdotes told with active listener participation.

***Identifying:*** Extracts in which people talk about themselves, their biography, where they live, their jobs (or job aspirations), their likes and dislikes.

***Language-in-action:*** Data recorded while people were doing things such as cooking, packing, moving furniture, etc., where the language is generated directly by the actions being carried out.

***Comment-elaboration:*** People giving casual opinions and commenting on things, other people, events, etc. around them and in their daily lives, without any set conversational agenda.

***Service encounters:*** Extracts in settings involving the buying and selling of goods and services.

***Debate and argument:*** Data in which people take up positions, pursue arguments and expound on their opinions on a range of matters, with or without some sort of lead-figure or chairperson.

***Language, learning and interaction:*** Language in use in the context of institutionalised and informal learning.

***Decision-making/negotiating outcomes:*** Data illustrating ways in which people work towards decisions/consensus or negotiate their way through problems towards solutions.

There is no claim to comprehensiveness here and other speech genres could have been included. It is further recognised that no speech genre can be entirely discrete; for example, **narrative** is such a core genre that narratives can be embedded within other main generic categories, and overlap occurs between and across other genres. The genres represented in the book are, however, important genres for speaking in use in educational and pedagogic contexts and towards conversations involving students in ways with which it is hoped language learners will be able to identify.

## Using the book

The book is designed as a practical guide to the study of spoken English and can be used in the classroom or for self-study purposes. Each unit begins with a task which normally involves students in an activity-based exploration of some aspect of language; however, completion of the task is by no means

essential. Each unit provides a brief description of the social setting and the participants, and includes detailed commentary on the transcript(s) with line-by-line notes pointing out significant linguistic and related cultural features. Useful references are provided at the end of each unit for readers who are interested in further analysis and research.

It should be recognised that the commentaries are by no means exhaustive. While aspects of pronunciation and intonation are noted, such an orientation is not a main focus in this book. Instead there is a particular concentration on those aspects of grammar, vocabulary and discourse patterning judged to be of significance for learners of English. However, even though there is no explicit guidance, the accompanying tape allows students and, where appropriate, their teachers to explore the articulation of the text in phonetic and phonological terms.

The provision of a tape has presented us with problems. As we noted above, it is a paradox of the study of authentic, 'real', spoken English that the clearer the quality of the recording the less likely it is that the tape will have been produced in completely naturalistic conditions with the speakers interacting unselfconsciously. From the pedagogic point of view of English language learning it is obviously important that the tapes should be as clear and undistorted as possible; yet at the same time it is important that exposure should be to data which is as natural as possible. Accordingly, we have left as many of the tape-recordings as possible in their original form even if some remain difficult to decipher. Where, on account of the impossibly poor quality of the recording, learners of English may have real difficulty in studying the text in relation to the tape, we have undertaken to re-record the tape using actors. However, the actors have themselves listened extensively to the original recordings and based their own versions faithfully on the originals. For Units 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12 both the original recordings and the re-recorded versions have been included on the tape.

The book also has a glossary of terms. An explanation of the terms in SMALL CAPITALS can be found in the glossary. The fields of discourse analysis and conversation analysis have expanded rapidly in recent years and the glossary provides an opportunity to introduce definitions and exemplifications of new terms. It also allows an opportunity to redefine some grammatical and related terms in the light of their provenance within particular speech genres and according to their actual grammatical use in a range of different contexts. The glossary is not exhaustive but concentrates and elaborates on the terms used most frequently in the commentaries.

The units may be studied in any order and are not graded for difficulty.

## Audience for the book

The intended audience for this book includes: teachers and teacher trainers (both native and non-native speakers of English), undergraduates and postgraduate students of language and linguistics, advanced learners of English as a second or foreign language, materials developers, language researchers, especially in the fields of grammar, vocabulary and discourse analysis and A-level English language students.

## *Glossary of important terms*

### Adverbs

Adverbs are a major class of words. Many adverbs are adverbs of manner such as *quickly* and *happily*; other adverbs (such as *extremely* or *rather*) operate as intensifiers and modify adjectives; others express place (*here*) and time (*now*, *afterwards*). Adverbs also occur as adverbial phrases or adjuncts (e.g. *in a moment*, *in the corner*, *with pleasure*). In spoken English certain adverbs play an important part in marking these relations but also in modifying whole propositions so that words like *basically*, *usually*, *literally*, *possibly*, *certainly*, *of course* are used frequently by speakers to indicate personal attitudes and judgements.

### Back-channel

This refers to noises (which are not full words) and short verbal responses made by listeners which acknowledge the incoming talk and react to it, without wishing to take over the speaking turn. Typical back-channels in English are *Mm*, *Uhum*, *Yeah*, *No*, *Right*, *Oh*, etc. In our transcripts they are shown as occurring during the speaker's turn, though sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between back-channels and full speaking turns, and the decision to transcribe one way or the other is ultimately subjective. Here is an example with back-channels from speaker <S 02>, shown within square brackets [J:

<S 01 > Oh yes, yes, yes mind you my parents were really quite well-off when we lived in Ireland but the education in England was very expensive [*<S 02> mm*] and I can remember my mother had jewellery and silver and she used to keep selling it [*<S 02> Really*] to pay for our extra music lessons and tuition in this and that [*<S 02>Mm*] and er I it was, must have been difficult

### Binomials

Binomial expressions are a sub-category of FIXED EXPRESSIONS. As the term suggests, they occur in a paired relationship and are fixed in that the order of

the words cannot normally be altered or reversed. Examples of binomials include: *spick and span*; *ups and downs*; *swings and roundabouts*; *cash and carry*; *hit and miss*. Such expressions occur in both written and spoken discourse but are more extensive in spoken English (see McCarthy and O'Dell 1994, unit 77, for more examples and exercises). Trinomials also exist (e.g. *ready, willing and able*; *this, that and the other, morning, noon and night*), with three elements, but these are much rarer than binomials.

## Deixis

This term describes what may be termed the orientational features of language as deixis involves words which point backwards and forwards in a text as well as outside the text to a wider extra-textual context. For example, words like *these/that/this/those* locate an utterance in relation to space and to the speaker's sense of closeness or involvement with something, words like *now* and *then* relate to the current moment of utterance and words like *we /you/they /him /I* relate to who is speaking, who is present, included, excluded, etc. Thus, 'I'd like to pop in to that little shop over there before we leave' contains deictics which orientate a listener interpersonally temporally and spatially in relation to the proposition of the sentence. Certain contexts of language, such as language used to do things like packing, cooking, moving furniture, etc. involve a lot of deictics because the objects and other phenomena being dealt with are normally immediately visible to all speakers and thus forms of language such as 'Could we just move that into this corner here?' are relatively commonplace.

## Delexical verbs

In general, the more frequent a word, the more likely it is that it combines with other words and that it therefore has less independent meaning. For example, the primary function of many common verbs such as *have* or *take* or *give* is to carry other nouns and adjectives: for example, *take a long walk*, *have a swim*, *have a good look*, *give someone a ring*. Delexical verb combinations such as these are common in informal language and in spoken discourse in particular.

## Discourse markers

Discourse markers are words or phrases which are normally used to mark boundaries in conversation between one topic or bit of business and the next. For example, words and phrases such as *right*, *OK*, *I see*, *I mean*, help speakers to negotiate their way through talk indicating whether they want to open or close a topic or to continue it, whether they share a common view of the state of affairs, what their reaction is to something, etc. In telephone and other conversations the discourse marker *anyway* usually serves to indicate that the

speaker wishes either the current stretch of talk or the whole exchange itself to be brought to a conclusion. In much informal talk the word *like* can be used to signal that some kind of exemplification is to follow. In conversation in general phrases such as *as you know* or *I mean* or *you know what I mean* serve to check understanding and to soften and personalise the interactive style, keeping the listener(s) involved and on the same wavelength. *Right* often serves to indicate that participants are ready to move on to the next phase of business.

Discourse markers do not primarily carry information or propositional content and have, as a result perhaps, been regarded as examples of careless or lazy speech. For example, the word *then* can frequently signal the closing of a stretch of talk and have no obvious connection with the temporal meaning of *then*. However, all speakers use them to perform the essential task of structuring what they say and of signalling to their listener(s) how they wish it to be taken. Such is the importance of signalling and signposting discourse that speaking turns can sometimes consist entirely of a discourse marker or markers. For example:

- A: OK then?
- B: Right.
- A: That's it then.
- B: Fine.
- A: Bye.
- B: Bye.

## Ellipsis

Ellipsis is pervasive in spoken discourse. It occurs in writing but functions textually to prevent repetition where structures would otherwise be redundant. For example, in the sentence 'We ran for the bus but missed it' where it is clear that 'we' remains the subject of both clauses; or in the sentence 'The chair was broken and the table too' where it is clearly unnecessary to repeat the verb phrase 'was broken'. Ellipsis in spoken English is mainly **situational** (i.e. affecting people and things in the immediate situation), and frequently involves the omission of personal subjects, where it is obvious that the speaker will remain unambiguous. This feature is especially common with verbs of mental process: for example, *think so*, *wonder if they'll be coming to the party*, *guess they won't be ringing after all* (with /omitted in each case), and so on. Such ellipsis also occurs with main or auxiliary verbs where meaning can be relatively easily reconstructed from the context. For example:

- A: What's the matter?
- B: Got an awful cold. (ellipsis: *I've*)
- A: Just seen Paco. (ellipsis: *I've*)
- B: Did he say anything?
- A: Nothing.
- B: Interesting isn't it? (ellipsis: *It's*)

Ellipsis only rarely occurs in this form, however, with modal auxiliary verbs so that, while pronoun subjects are omitted, the force of the modal is normally retained (e.g. *must be difficult, might be the right thing to do*). Several elliptical structures are almost **FIXED EXPRESSIONS**, occurring as frozen lexical routines (*sounds strange, seems worth it, absolutely right, good job you did that* and so on).

Collectively, ellipsis of this kind is situationally rooted but is not random. It occurs across many speech genres and in almost all cases marks a degree of informality between speakers. Ellipsis of this kind is especially prominent in service encounters so that a perfectly normal utterance can be to ask for 'two first class [stamps] please' in a post office or '[a] cheeseburger, please' or 'two ham and one cheese [sandwiches]' in a restaurant, and without the speaker feeling it necessary to include a phrase such as 'I'd like' or 'Could I have', though such a choice always remains possible and could impart a greater formality or possibly politeness, if the speaker wished to communicate this.

### Fixed expressions

The term **fixed expression** describes language which is in some way preformulated or prefabricated, that is, language forms which are routinised and patterned. A significant proportion of all language comes into this category and, indeed, speakers would find it difficult to communicate if everything that was said had to be inventive and original. Fixed expressions play an important part in spoken language in particular in maintaining and stabilising relationships and in reinforcing shared knowledge and social conventions, and referring to common cultural understandings. Examples of fixed expressions include: *as a matter of/act, once and for all, at the end of the day, a good time was had by all, honesty is the best policy, carry the can, an open-door policy, as far as I am concerned*, as well as proverbs, quotations or cultural allusions such as 'A rose by any other name (would smell as sweet)' (a reference to Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Sc. 2,1.43).

The expressions have varying degrees of fixity, some being collocationally fixed (e.g. *a fat salary*), some operate within frozen syntactic patterns (e.g. *have forty winks*), and some are quite fixed in discourse position or are semantically indecipherable (e.g. *carry the can* which means 'to carry responsibility'). Other fixed expressions allow greater internal modification and are more 'open' forms syntactically, lexically and discursively (e.g. *take a chance*, which could occur as *I took the first chance I got*).

### Fronting (or front-placing)

Fronting refers to the movement of an element from its 'canonical' position and its relocation as the first element in a construction. Taking the sentence 'I dedicated my life to that man and his music', we can front the indirect object

as follows: 'To that man and his music I dedicated my life'. The process allows a focus or emphasis to fall on the fronted element (see also **Heads**).

### General words

General words allow vague and indefinite reference. In the following examples the words *thing* and *business* are general words:

The video's broken down again. That thing's driving me mad.  
The neighbours are complaining about the noise. I don't want to get involved with that business.

General words are normally nouns and are a subcategory of VAGUE LANGUAGE. General words enable a speaker to express attitudes and feelings without needing to locate an exact or precise referent. They are widely used in spoken discourse and as general words *thing* and *stuff are* among the most frequent words in spoken English. They frequently have an evaluative feel to them (as in the examples above).

### Heads (or topics)

Heads perform a basically orienting and focusing function, identifying key information for listeners and establishing a shared frame of reference for what is important in a conversational exchange. Heads are a subcategory of FRONTING and normally involve placement at the front of a clause of a noun(s) or noun phrase(s) which anticipates a structure which then forms the main subject of the clause. Heads are in *italics* in the following examples:

*That chap over there*, he looks like your brother.  
This *friend of ours*, Carol, *her daughter*, she decided to buy one.  
The *women in the audience*, they all shouted in protest.

Heads are almost exclusive to informal spoken English. They parallel TAILS, although tails generally serve a much more affective purpose.

### Hedges

Hedging is a general term used to describe the strategy when a speaker or writer wishes to avoid coming straight to the point or to avoid speaking directly. Hedging can include the use of a wide range of language, including VAGUE LANGUAGE. Hedges occur commonly when a speaker expresses an opinion about somebody or something:

He was kind *of* begging us to write but I *probably* won't do it.  
Well, *I mean*, I have, *you know*, never *actually really* liked her as a teacher  
She was sort *of somewhat* mixed up in her feelings about him.

The hedges (in *italics*) allow speakers to personalise or otherwise soften the force of what they say, all in different ways, either because they have no wish to sound definite and authoritative, or because they believe the speaker not to be fully acquainted with their propositions or, very simply, because they do not know or are searching for the right word or expression. In most cases there is sensitivity to 'face', either for purposes of self-protection or because the speaker does not want to put the listener(s) or reader(s) in a face-threatening situation.

Hedges and modality in language are closely linked. Many modal verbs contribute to hedging (e.g. *may, might, could*) and there is an extensive range of adverbs which mitigate the force of what is written or said: for example, *perhaps, probably, generally, normally, slightly, basically, at least*.

## interactional

Interactional language is language which is primarily personal and social in orientation. Its effective use normally allows social and interpersonal relations to be maintained. In some contexts, such as service encounters or even sometimes in formal interviews, it is combined with TRANSACTIONAL language to soften and make less forbidding the business of getting certain tasks done.

## Tags

Tags are described as strings of words consisting of an auxiliary verb and a pronoun with or without 'not' which are normally added to a declarative statement. The polarity of the tag is sometimes the reverse of that found in the main clause, that is, a positive clause takes a negative tag and vice versa. The following examples of tags (in *italics*) all meet this broad definition:

Frascati's nice, it's nice to drink *isn't it!*

She's a lovely girl *she is*.

A: Have you noticed it always disappears?

B: Yeah, it does, *doesn't it!*

A: I've got two now, yes, it does always disappear *doesn't it!*

B: Yeah right

He isn't coming *is he?*

Sound really bossy *don't !!*

In these examples there are also other features of tags to note, particularly in the longer extract: there is a general clustering of tags, together with a repetition and re-statement of propositions in tag-like forms; and words like *right* are, as it were, variants on tag forms. In the second example, two positive clauses are found together. Such forms do not necessarily demand a reply; instead they often serve just to establish a shared, mutual view of things. All

## Vague language

Vague expressions are more extensive in all language use than is commonly thought and they are especially prevalent in spoken discourse. When we interact with others there are times when it is necessary to give exact and precise information (for example, concerning departure times for trains); but there are occasions where it would not be appropriate to be precise as it can sound unduly authoritative and assertive. In most informal contexts most speakers prefer to convey information which is softened in some way by vague language, although such vagueness is often wrongly taken as a sign of careless thinking or sloppy expression. Examples of vague language include phrases such as *or something, or anything, or whatever*, all usually in clause-final position:

Can you get me a sandwich *or something!*

Have they got mineral water *or anything like that!*

Vague expressions are common when factual information is given and where approximations seem more appropriate. Number approximations are common with times and dates and figures (e.g. 'They're coming in six weeks *or so*'; 'We'll arrive *around* eight in the evening'). Vague expressions such as *sort of* and *kind of* also serve to allow the speaker not to commit themselves completely to the truth value of a proposition:

A: Do you think she's interested?

B: Well, she's *sort of* interested.

Vagueness can also be created by adjectives carrying a '-y' suffix so that to describe hair as 'a bit wispy and straggly' is to be deliberately and expressively vague.

*Note:*

## English and Englishes

The features noted above are recurrent forms in spoken British English and it is not claimed that they are prevalent in other Englishes. At the time of writing the CANCOUE corpus mainly comprises British English but plans are already laid for developing the corpus to include other World Englishes and to undertake comparative analyses of such Englishes.

the above data are taken from informal conversational interchanges. Tags are an essential feature of grammar in use in informal and intimate contexts of interaction and are particularly appropriate to contexts in which meanings are not simply stated but are negotiated and re-negotiated.

### ails

The term **tail** describes the slot available at the end of a clause in which a speaker can insert grammatical patterns which amplify, extend or reinforce what (s)he is saying or has said. These may be TAGS of the type exemplified above, or full noun phrases. Examples of tails include:

She's a really good actress, *Clare*.

Singapore's far too hot for me *it is*.

They haven't mended the road yet *haven't those workmen*.

They complain about it all the time *they do*.

He's quite a comic *that fellow*, you know.

It's not actually very good is it *that wine?*

They do tend to go cold, don't they, *pasta*.

We should note also the extent to which such patterns (in *italics*) cluster with different kinds of tags, hedges and modal expressions and how they often serve to express, on the part of the speaker, some kind of affective response, personal attitude or evaluative stance towards the proposition or topic of the clause.

### Transactional

Transactional language is language used in the process of conducting business and generally getting things done. It contrasts with INTERACTIVE language.

### dality

This is a term used in grammatical and semantic analysis to refer to contrasts in meaning, signalled mainly by verbs but also by associated forms. The reference is basically to unrealised states and possible conditions of everyday situations, and covers verb phrases such as *must be, could be, ought to be, might have* and so on. Typical modal meanings are obligation, option, permissibility, possibility. A modal verb may express more than one kind of modality: for example, the sentence 'He must be in bed' can either be a conjecture (he must be in bed because he can't be found anywhere else) or an order/obligation (he must be in bed by nine o'clock). Modality can also be signalled by modal adverbs such as *possibly, probably, presumably, definitely*. Modal forms are an interpersonal aspect of grammar and are central to all spoken and written language use; in conversational discourse they serve to mark out personal relationships and to some extent to frame the nature of the interaction between speakers.

## *Notes on transcription*

Any piece of spoken language can be transcribed in a variety of ways, depending on what level of detail one is interested in. Consider the following stretch of talk between a group of young female students, who are having tea together (see Unit 9 for the full transcript). In this book we have just transcribed the girls' words in normal, standard orthography, but in addition have indicated that speaker 3 <S 03> begins her reply before speaker 2 <S 02> has finished hers - a typical overlap in this situation, since speaker 1's question is addressed to 2 and 3, therefore either or both of them may answer. We have also distinguished between *yeah* and *yees* as two common forms of the affirmative reply:

<S 01 > Does anyone want a chocolate bar or anything?

<S 02> Oh yeah yes please

<S 03> I Yes please

We could have done a number of other things too. We might have been concerned as to whether speaker 1 fully articulated *does*, or whether it may have been more accurate to write it as *d's* or phonetically as [daz] or even just as [zeniwan] to represent *does anyone* spoken quickly and informally. Equally *want to* could be transcribed as *wanna* to indicate its reduced, informal pronunciation. We could have transcribed all the conversations with full intonation markings, so that every line in the book might look thus:

<S 02> /oh yeah/ /yes please/

or with phonetics and intonation:

<S 02> /au jea // jes plhz/

Then what of the affective elements signalled in speech, such as exaggerated lengthening of sounds or a sudden raising of the pitch level:

<S 02> /au jea :: // jes plk:z/

What we decided in the end was to adopt a fairly broad, simple transcription which would be easy to read, since the book also has a tape with it. It is therefore rather like ordinary written text, with some exceptions. These are:

- 1 Overlaps are indicated by extra indentation and a connecting line L,
- 2 Utterances that are butt-ended (i.e. when there may be just a very slight or no overlap at all, and no pause between speakers) are indicated with extra indentation and a connecting line [ .

### 3 Punctuation

Speakers do not use punctuation in the way writers do, but punctuation is very useful in transcripts such as these. We have used punctuation items in the following way:

- , comma indicates that the speaker has re-cast what she/he was saying, e.g.:  
I went to, into town the other day
- three full stops indicates a pause longer than one second
- [8 sees] times in brackets indicate long pauses in the talk
- [laughs] other items in square brackets include things like laughter, coughing and other sounds on the tape, or when the tape is simply inaudible

We have also used question marks and exclamation marks where we feel these may be helpful.

- 4 Each speaker is numbered <S 01>, <S 02>, etc. These types of labels are often used in the study of language corpora using computers, since the computer can distinguish that these are not people's words and can locate a particular speaker if need be.
- 5 Every language has a series of sounds which are not full words, but which are used by the listener to acknowledge the speaker's words while she/he is speaking or after. These are difficult to transcribe, but we have tried to represent the variation found in English between acknowledgements such as *Mm*, *Uhum*, etc., and variants of 'yes' such as *asyeah*, *yep*, etc. Also, sounds indicating hesitation or thinking-time may be transcribed as *er*, *erm*, etc., in order to try as faithfully as possible to render what can be heard on the tape.

We hope you will find the type of transcription offered in this book sufficient to enable you to follow the tape and to get the full flavour of the conversations. However, transcription is an extremely difficult and imperfect art, and the willing ears and hands that have helped us with transcribing the tapes may occasionally have missed something or been uncertain as to what they could hear. Even the original speakers themselves are not always sure what it was they said when they hear the tape! Our aim has been to produce a transcription that will not distract you from the conversation nor increase your difficulty in hearing what is already difficult enough, given that our tapes are recorded naturally, and (with the exception of broadcast data and the additional re-recorded versions of Units 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12) without the benefit of studio surroundings and high-tech equipment.



unit

## Dangerous childhood pranks

### General: conversational story-telling

People often tell stories in conversation, and the ability to tell a good story is universally admired. All stories share certain basic ingredients, but a good story needs something extra. The basic ingredients are:

- 1 References to times, places and settings.
- 2 Characters involved in the events.
- 3 Some sort of plot or series of unusual, strange, funny, etc., events which make the story interesting.
- 4 Some outcome or conclusion to the events.

But a good, entertaining story often has, in addition:

- 5 Embellishments or decorations by the teller, for example, exaggeration, intensification, suspense, amusing details.
- 6 Features which make the story more vivid, such as dialogue, changing the tense from past to present.
- 7 Comments on the events, telling us how people felt, what their attitude to the events was.
- 8 Some sort of relevance to the conversation in which the story is told, for example linking it to an earlier story or something someone has just said.

What is more, the teller has to **begin** the story appropriately (the opening) and **end** it in a suitable way (the closing). This means that telling a good story in a foreign language requires a good deal of language skill.

## Activity

While listening to the extract for the first time, and before reading the commentary, try to identify which of the features 5-8 you think occur in these stories.

## Speakers and setting

- <S 01> male (48)
- <S 02> female (42)
- <S 03> male (47)
- <S 04> male (47)

<S 01> and <S 02> are brother and sister. <S 02> and <S 03> are wife and husband. <S 04> is an old childhood friend of <S 01> and <S 02>. The extract was recorded at <S 02> and <S 03>'s home. The speakers are reminiscing about dangerous childhood pranks.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Anyway
- 2 <S 02> So anyway
- 3 <S 01> So anyway
- 4 <S 03> So anyway erm my cousin Mervin that was in the REME er got me a 38
- 5 <S 01> Gun
- 6 <S 03> Wesson, Smith and Wesson special and Benny's, no it wasn't it was
- 7 Rick Holman's shed and Benny, Brian Beddingfields knew his dad had
- 8 some ammunition from the war and he found it and they were 38s
- 9 so we erm took it over the marshes and shot a couple of rounds off
- 10 that was great and then one day we were in, up Prospect Road near
- 11 the scout hut in a shed in a pre, erm Rick Holman's shed so there was
- 12 four of us in this sort of eight by six shed ... and
- 13 we were playing about with the thing and and we messed about with
- 14 it and did the usu, you know and sort of said oh we'll put a cross in it
- 15 make a dum-dum of it and fired it in the shed at at the bit of wood
- 16 [laughs]] and this bullet went round the shed about three
- 17 times and we all just froze this bullet went round and round and
- 18 round [laughs] was absolutely outrageous we had no concept of
- 19 what could have happened
- 20 <S 04> Yeah
- 21 <S 01> God
- 22 <S 02> Dear God

23 <S 01> Remember that kid  
 24 <S 03> And then the other one right the other one  
 25 <S 04> You said he was in the REME  
 26 <S 03> Yeah  
 27 <S 04> What's that  
 28 <S 03> Royal Engin, oh  
 29 <S 01> Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers  
 30 <S 03> Engineers  
 31 I'm sorry, the other thing that we used to do that Bernard  
 32 mentioned when I was a little kid, before erm the sea-front was all  
 33 different it was just open we used to cycle down  
 34 especially on foggy days was the best cycle straight  
 35 down Canute Road and straight off the prom into the sea because  
 36 we erm we'd make sure the tide was sort of in and, but you had to  
 37 get rid of your bike in mid-air  
 38 <S 02> ' But didn't you do that dreadful thing to that boy  
 39 <S 03> Oh yeah  
 40 <S 02> 'Where you were all kneeling down as if to say come in  
 41 <S 03> ' It's about  
 42 an eight or ten foot dive in and you could dive at high  
 43 tide and Guss Hughes came along one day and we were always  
 44 taking the Mickey out of him he was you know he was one of these  
 45 the lads that always got taken, so we all knelt down  
 46 [laughs] Patsy] with the water up to about there he stood on the  
 47 top and said is it okay to dive we said yes but of course it was only  
 48 knee-deep and he dived [ and he stuck and he just  
 49 went crunch  
 50 <S 02> Somebody actually broke their neck That sounds like] down  
 51 there didn't they  
 52 <S 03> Oh that yeah [<S 02> yeah I suppose] that's since they put the new  
 53 brick part of it though but basically you know how we didn't kill each  
 54 other and all things like that I don't, it's incredible

### Line-by-line commentary

II. I —4 Anyway occurs four times, here used in a rather jokey way. The speakers are returning to their story-telling after a brief interruption. *Anyway* is a common DISCOURSE MARKER in English, used to indicate a boundary in the talk, either, as here, when getting back to an interrupted topic, or, often, to indicate that

the speaker feels the conversation is coming to an end. This often happens in phone calls, e.g.:

Anyway, it's been good talking to you. I'll give you a ring again at the weekend.

14 *that was in: that is* frequently used in informal speech as an alternative to *who* in relative clauses.

14 The *REME*, a branch of the military forces in Britain, is explained later, in 1.29. Here the initials are pronounced like a word, which is usually called an **acronym**. Other common acronyms in English include:

NATO /neitau/ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OPEC /supek/ Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

But not all sets of initials are acronyms, and most are pronounced letter-by-letter:

She gave me an IOU for £20. (I-O-U: I owe you: a written promise to pay back money owed)

Her brother joined the ANC. (A-N-G: African National Congress)

The use of co-ordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *so* is a frequent feature — of spontaneous oral narrative.

*Smith and Wesson*: A world-famous gun-manufacturing company.

*the war* here is the Second World War (1939-45).

18 The switch in pronouns here is from *it* (ammunition) to *they* (bullets).

18 *38s*: a size of bullet.

19 *over the marshes*: *over* is often used in informal speech with motion verbs such as *go* and *drive*, and simply indicates movement to a different place (not necessarily crossing anything). It occurs both with and without *to*:

Let's go *over* to my place for a drink.

I usually go *over* the park with the dog before breakfast.

1.10 *up Prospect Road*: The speaker is probably using *up* here in a personal sense, corresponding to his idea of his town as having some parts which are *up* from where he lives, and some which are *down*. This may correspond to north and south of where he is, but not necessarily, and there is no necessary implication that there are hills, with some streets going, literally, 'up'.

For further discussion and examples of these informal, often idiosyncratic uses of prepositions, see Unit 6, e.g. ll. 18 and 65.

11.1t *There was four of us*: Two things should be noted here:

— 12 *There's I There was* are increasingly used in spoken British English with plural complements, though traditionalists would probably object to such usage. Even highly educated people, including politicians and journalists, can be heard using *there's* on radio and television instead of *there are* with plurals.

Non-native speakers are often tempted to say 'We were four' in this situation. This is possible, but sounds terribly formal and literary. The usual informal construction is with *there is /are /was /were + {number} of*.

There were six of us at the meeting.

There are five of us in my family.

- 1.12 Note the use of *sort of*, which is frequent in informal spoken language when a speaker hesitates, or is searching for the right word, or wants to be a bit vague in the word chosen. The word does not have to be a noun; it can be any part of speech:

It was sort of hanging in the air. (+ verb phrase)

She lives sort of behind the shop. (+ prepositional phrase)

See 1.14 for another example.

- 1.12 *eight by six*: Eight feet long and six feet wide (approx. 2.5 X 2 metres).

- 1.13 *the thing* here is not just a pro-form or substitute for *the gun*, but also tells us something of the attitude of the speaker towards the gun (somewhat dismissive/satirical). Other examples:

Don't ask me to use the computer; I hate the thing.

My car broke down and I had to push the thing all the way home.

- 1.14 *did the usual*: This is an informal FIXED EXPRESSION meaning 'what we always/typically did'. For example:

A: Any holiday plans for this year?

B: Oh, we'll probably just do the usual, you know, a package to Spain or somewhere.

*Usual* occurs in other expressions and with personal pronouns, e.g. 'I'll have my usual, please' (said to a barperson, describing the drink you usually order in a bar where you are a regular customer).

- 1.15 By cutting an 'x' shape in the head of a bullet, it can be made into a *dum-dum*, a lethal type of bullet that splits as it enters its target, causing terrible injuries.

- 1.17 *this bullet*: Note how the story-teller uses *this*, even though the events were a long time ago in the past. *This* is very frequent in stories and jokes, when characters and places are referred to. It brings them to life, making them more immediate and 'present' rather than distant and past. Other examples:

There was this man, and he goes into this pub,... (a typical way of beginning a joke)

Suddenly, we saw this huge dog coming towards us.

- 1.17 *round and round and round*: This is an intensified version of the usual BINOMIAL construction *round and round*. Intensification of structures is part of the function of making the story more engaging and entertaining.

1121 *God* and *dear God*: These are typical reactions in conversation to startling or  
-22 shocking information. *Dear God* is the stronger of the two. Other alternatives  
include *my God*, *my goodness*, *goodness me*, *Christ almighty*, the last expression being  
the strongest of all those listed here. It is important to note that expressions  
containing the word *God* or *Jesus* and *Christ* may be very offensive to Christian  
listeners. Swear words (e.g. *bloody hell*) will also be heard in such contexts.

1.23 *Rememberis* an example of situational ELLIPSIS. (See also Unit 7, 1.2.) Here the  
subject and auxiliary verb (*do you*) are understood. This often happens in  
informal conversation in questions in the second person, with verbs such as  
*want*, *see*, *think* and other verbs of 'mental processes':

Seen my glasses anywhere?	(Have you seen ...?)
Think she's missed the bus?	(Do you think ...?)
Want another drink?	(Do you want...?)
Know where to go when you get there?	(Do you know ...?)

1.24 The speaker here is trying (unsuccessfully) to introduce his next story, which  
he refers to as *the other one*. The DISCOURSE MARKER *right* is often used to mark  
the boundary between the introduction to a joke or story and the actual  
beginning of the story itself:

Let me tell you this joke I heard, right, there's this vicar, and he goes  
into a pet-shop ...

The *right* may also occur just after the first piece of orientation information in  
the story:

Oh, I've got a story about camping, we were in France, right, and we  
were putting up our tent one day when ...

1.34 *especially onfoggy days was the best*: Note here how the speaker changes his  
syntactic plan as he goes along: the prepositional phrase *onfoggy days*,  
originally 'planned' as an adjunct suddenly takes over and becomes the  
subject of the clause.

1131 Note the pattern of verb forms here. The speaker uses the *used to* form twice  
-37 (*used to do* in 1.31 and *used to cycle* in 1.33). After that, he changes to *would* (*we'd*  
*make sure* in 1.36). This is typical of stories about regular or repeated events.  
*Used to* comes first, to set the general scene, and then subsequent typical events  
are told with *would*.

1.41 *about* is common in approximations involving numbers and times, especially in  
spoken English. It is another example of VAGUE LANGUAGE.

1.35 *the prom*: An informal clipping of 'the promenade' (the road running along the  
sea-front).

138 The story-teller's wife uses *that* twice here (rather than saying 'a dreadful thing to a boy') because she has heard the story before. *That* signals the 'shared knowledge' between her and her husband.

144 *taking the Mickey out of him*: An informal idiom meaning 'to mock/to tease'. Notice here the use of *always* with continuous verb form. Continuous form acts as a marker of personal comment or attitude with adverbs of frequency, though the precise attitude expressed can usually only be identified in the particular context. Some examples:

She's always giving me presents, (could be associated with surprise, irritation, suspicion)

He was constantly upsetting everyone, (could be associated with reproach, exasperation)

145 *got taken* here means roughly 'was the victim/object of tricks and pranks'. Speaker <S 01 > then interrupts with the word *Patsy*, which is a slang name for pathetic people who are easily teased or are frequently the object of ridicule.

149 *went crunch*: The verb *go* is frequently used in conversation to describe movements, actions, noises and so on in a vivid way; *crunch* here describes the noise of the boy hitting the sea-bed. Other examples:

The wind blew and the door went 'bang'.

I lit the gas and the flames went 'whoosh' and burnt my eyebrows.

1152 Note how *though* comes at the end of the clause here. This is common in spoken language, but far less common in written language, where it would tend to come at the beginning. Clause-final *though* is an ADVERB here and has the meaning of 'however' and as such can also appear in a medial position e.g.

The south of England though will be much cooler than in the past few days (weather forecast).

In most written usage though in clause-initial position is a conjunction and usually has the meaning of 'although'.

1152 Stories normally close with some sort of comment or general reflection on the -54 events, with evaluative words like *incredible*, *amazing*, *horrendous*, *hilarious*, *disgusting*, *appalling* frequently occurring at such points, the choice of word depending on the type of story told.

153 *basically* is an extremely common ADVERB in spoken English, and usually means something like 'put simply'. (See also Unit 20,1.75)



## Flying over Budapest

### Activity

Imagine that you are describing to others a particularly memorable experience. You will be reporting your experience in the form of a narrative. What would you need to concentrate on in order to make your narrative effective? What parts of your experience would you need to highlight and why? (See **General commentary** below.)

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> female (78)
- <S 02> female (30s)
- <S 03> male (47)
- <S 01> is <S 03>'s mother-in-law
- <S 02> is <S 03>'s cleaning lady

recounts how she was invited onto the flight deck during a return flight to the UK from a holiday in Cyprus.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Well, I don't know how I got this honour really I had all the badges in
- 2 you know, I used to be in the air force and I'd spoken to two or three
- 3 but when we got on the plane they took me on first because er er
- 4 they'd had to lift me on you know [<S 02> yeah] with that lift and er
- 5 the pilot was sat in one of the seats there were nobody on the plane
- 6 but me and er I don't know, I must have said, either said something

7 funny about flying or he'd said some, noticed me badges I don't know  
8 which it was, anyway that  
9 <S 03> He saw your badges I think.  
10 <S 01> Yes I think he did ... erm that, I never thought anything more about it  
11 ... well we'd, how long had we been flying, about half way weren't  
12 we?  
13 <S 03> Yeah it was about an hour or hour and a half  
14 <S 01> About hal fway up, home  
15 and the loo was just behind the, where the pilot  
16 <S 03> The cabin  
17 <S 02> 'Yeah  
18 <S 03>  
19 The cabin  
20 <S 01> And er I went down there queued up [<S 02> uhum] and then  
21 when I came out somebody said to me the pilot says you can go in  
22 the cabin you see, well me mouth dropped open [<S 02> [laughs]]  
23 no idea you see now I thought oh, I'd had a joke with one of the er  
24 girls you know [<S 02> yes] the stewardess girls and er maybe it was  
25 her or there was a young man with us that had been in our hotel  
26 maybe he'd said something somebody had anyway so they took me and  
27 Jeanne went with me of course in case I fell [<S 02> yeah] right into  
28 where the two pilots were it was absolutely fantastic  
29 <S 03> Marvellous  
30 wasn't it  
31 <S 02> Was that the first time you've ever been  
32 <S 01> in the cabin  
33 <S 02> 'Yeah  
34 <S 01> 'Yeah  
35 <S 03> -Yeah  
36 normally they only take children and V-I  
37 <S 02> 'That's right  
38 <S 03> And V-I-Ps  
39 <S 01> Yeah  
40 <S 03> ISo  
41 I don't know which  
42 <S 01> Well this was a V-I-P  
43 <S 02> Yeah [laughs]  
44 <S 03> [laughs]  
45 <S 01> And er I went through this door and below was a city

46 all all the lights and that and it was fantastic  
47 <S 02> What was the city  
48 <S 01> Er I was just you know  
49 <S 02> Oh you're coming to that  
50 <S 01> And I kept thinking I wonder where we are  
51 now just you know and er one of the pilots said you're looking down  
52 on Budapest he said the top side of that river is Buda  
53 and at this side is Pest that's why they call it Budapest  
54 <S 02> Oh is it? I didn't know  
55 <S 01> Well I'd never heard that before  
56 <S 03> -Yeah it is two  
57 <S 02> No I hadn't  
58 <S 03> Two towns  
59 <S 02> Oh  
60 <S 01> I was absolutely transfixed with that [<S 02> mm] it was like looking  
61 on Fairyland.  
62 <S 03> It was lovely wasn't it  
63 <S 01> And of course we talked about the air force he said oh all up,  
64 you know I've been in a plane but not up er [<S 03> yeah] [<S 02>  
65 yeah] during the war [<S 02> ah right] I'd missed out on that and er  
66 it was absolutely [<S 02> mm] fantastic [<S 03> mm] I felt like a V-I-P  
67 [<S 02> [laughs]] when I came out everybody were looking  
68 at me  
69 <S 03> When she came [<S 02> yeah] when she came out people  
70 were looking at her and said to one or two people it's all right she  
71 said I've, they've just let me drive for a while [<S 02> [laughs]]  
72 <S 01> I said I've I've just taken you through Budapest you'll be all right now  
73 [<S 03> yeah] shown them the way  
74 <S 03> It was nice [<S 02> yeah] wasn't it yeah  
75 <S 02> Ah  
76 <S 01> Oh it was  
77 <S 02> Finished the holiday off yeah  
78 <S 03> It was a lovely yeah lovely  
79 <S 01> Yes it was lovely it was nice of them to do it [<S 02> mm] whoever  
80 done it  
81 <S 02> Mm it was yeah  
82 <S 03> Though though we were two and a half hours late weren't we  
83 <S 01> Yeah yes we were late setting off [<S 02> ah] and er they chatted to  
84 me like I'm chatting to you

- 85 <S 02> Yeah  
 86 <S 03> Great  
 87 <S 01> Yeah it was great

## General commentary

In order to make an oral narrative interesting and involving to listeners, certain aspects of personal experience need to be highlighted. In particular, listeners need to be oriented. That is, they need to be able to recreate in their imagination something of the time the narrative was taking place, they need information about the setting and, where appropriate, other participants and they need to be able to understand the point of the narrative, why it is being told. The latter requirement puts a responsibility on the tellers of a narrative to evaluate their experience (see also the general commentary to Unit 1).

In this narrative the initial action revolves around a key piece of information concerning which is that she wears, almost all of the time, WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) badges attached to her clothes. She served in the WAAF during the Second World War. The possibility that these badges might have been noticed by flight crew becomes a starting point for the story.

## Line-by-line commentary

12 *I'd spoken to two or three*, and 14 *because er er they'd had to lift me on* are both examples of past perfect tense (the form *had + past participle*). In spoken language, the past perfect is mostly used for background information and is frequently used when the speaker is giving reasons, excuses, justifications for events, and *not just* for ordering events one before the other. The speaker here is disabled; that is why she had to be lifted onto the aeroplane.

15 *The pilot was sat*: The speaker comes from the county of Yorkshire in the North of England and speaks in the dialect of that region. The standard English dialect equivalent would be *was sitting*.

115 *There were nobody on the plane but me*: In Yorkshire dialects *were* is used to —6 mark both singular and plural. See also 1.67.

7 *noticed me badges*: The use of *me*, where a standard English dialect alternative would be *my*, is common both in Yorkshire dialect as well as in several other non-standard English dialects (e.g. some Irish-English dialects). (See also 1.22.)

*about halfway weren't we*: The speaker gives her crucial orientation for the listeners concerning more general time, duration and place. This is then followed by more specific orientation in respect of the setting *I went down there and queued up for the loo* (toilet) which serves as a frame or main point of departure for the narrative.

- 1.21 *the pilot says*: The use of the present tense is relatively common in narrative. It is known formally as an 'historic present' and certainly adds a degree of immediacy to the narrative recount. The use of the present tense stands out here in contrast with the more extensive use of the more usual simple past and highlights and gives prominence to the words of the pilot.
- 1.22 *you see* is a frequent DISCOURSE MARKER used to signal explanations and things that the speaker assumes the listener does not know. Compare it *with you know* (e.g. 1.4; 1.24), and *of course* (1.27), which signal an assumption that the listener *does* know what the speaker is getting at.
- 1.23 *no ideayou see*: Ellipsis is not normally common in narrative, chiefly because the narrator cannot take too much for granted and has to be explicit throughout most of a narrative. Here a non-ellipted version would be 'I had no idea'. The presence of ellipsis adds a note of casualness and informality and also serves perhaps to establish a closer interaction with and involvement of the listeners. (See also 1.77, where the listener says *(It) finished the holiday off*.)
- 1.25 *a young man with us that had been in our hotel*: The use of *that* as a relative pronoun, as an alternative to the standard English dialect version *who*, is common in many non-standard English dialects.
- 11.24 *it was absolutely fantastic*: A positive evaluation of the experience which also serves to underline the point of the narrative. The evaluation is for the benefit of the listeners and, indeed, one of the listeners also contributes an evaluation (*marvellous wasn't it*), at the same time co-constructing the narrative (he was with the teller on the same flight).
- 1.38 *V-I-P*: An abbreviation which stands for Very Important Person.
- 1.46 *all all the lights and that*: The use of *and that* is quite common in spoken discourse; an appropriately vague piece of language, it allows the speaker to say that there were many other aspects involved without having to specify any more precisely. See also Unit 4, 1.28.
- 1.60 *I was absolutely transfixed with that*: The teller here offers an unequivocally positive personal evaluation of the experience of going on to the flight deck, underscoring the point of recounting a unique individual experience.
- 11.60 *it was like looking on Fairyland*: A concluding remark which generalises the experience so that others can better identify with it. It is a mark of a skilful narrator to move seamlessly from individual to more general, represented experiences.
- 1.63 The recounting of personal experience here is, as it were, collaboratively constructed. Informal spoken narratives are hardly ever 'monologues' and listeners do a lot of work, adding their own evaluations, asking for more details, helping the teller to finish the story and enabling all present to get out of 'story-world' and back to the 'conversational world' they were in before the story started. There is extensive BACK-CHANNELLING on the part of

and <S 03> (e.g. 1.62 *It was lovely*; 1.61 *mm*; 1.65; *ah right*, 1.69*yeah*). Such insertions into <S 01 >'s discourse are essentially supportive, encouraging <S 01 >, indicating their enjoyment of her narrative.

—80 *whoever done it*: Another feature of Yorkshire dialects (and many other British English dialects) is that there is often no significant difference between past simple and past perfect tense forms. *Done* here functions as a simple past. Likewise the past simple form of Standard English can be used as past participle in some other dialects, e.g. 'I've *wrote* to her' (instead of *written*).

*though we were two and a half hours late weren't we*: At this stage in the narrative there is a shuttling back and forth between narrative evaluation and a re-establishment of setting and context. The time reference here is a kind of retrospective orientation.

1186 *great*: A strongly marked evaluative comment, repeated across a speaking turn  
—87 brings the main narrative sequence to a conclusion.

### Further reading

See the references to Labov (1972) and Toolan (1988) in Unit 1.

Wolfson (1979) and Schiffrin (1981) are perceptive studies of tense and aspect in oral narratives. Schiffrin notes that speakers will often switch between *simple* historical present and present *continuous* tenses (with the *-ing* form) in order to give a focus to particular events or actions.

Silva-Gorvalan (1983) is a parallel study with particular reference to Spanish data.

Fludernik (1991) examines the functions of the historical present in narrative recounts.

There is extensive discussion of the discourse functions of language in narrative in McCarthy and Carter (1994: ch 3).



## Ken's mother

### Activity

Somebody is telling you a story about a person they knew. They say that he/she was:

- (a) 'a real character'
- (b) 'the terror of the neighbourhood'

What sort of person is this? What sort of behaviour would be typical of him/her? You will find some suggested answers in the **Line-by-line commentary**.

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> male: Canice (nicknamed 'Ken') (originally from Kilkenny, Ireland) (50s)
- <S 02> male (South Wales) (40s)
- <S 03> female (originally from Iceland, but has spent most of her adult life in Cambridge, UK) (50s)

The extract takes place at <S 03>'s house, Cambridge.

- 1 <S01> I'll tell you a little tale, er when me mother was alive in Cambridge
- 2 and erm we had some coal delivered, me mother was a terror if
- 3 anything was wrong you know and er it got some rocks and bits of
- 4 scale in it and I was going, I was quite young then and she said er get
- 5 a, get a, we had a a bag it was a, quite a strong bag she said fill it up
- 6 with some of the coal and stuff and we got it on the bus and we
- 7 went all the way to the bottom of Hills Road Bridge, was, er in fact
- 8 the building's still there the coal office and inside was an old table an

9 oak er front, was about as long as this room and er I didn't know  
10 what she was going to do with it, just take it back and probably tell  
11 them you know the coal's not very good and as she went she bent  
12 down picked it up and WHOOSH! straight across the counter dust  
13 coal everywhere take it back she said and come back and get the  
14 rest of it they couldn't believe it I can see their faces today they  
15 couldn't believe it [<All> laugh] mother was like that yeah [<S 02>  
16 was that, was that] if she sent, if she sent us up the road to get  
17 anything [<S 02> yeah] only the manager could could do it and you'd  
18 go up to the shop and er you'd want bacon and they'd, the fella'd  
19 shout out 'Mrs Dowling's bacon!' and the manager'd have to come  
20 out and cut it and if he didn't get it right he got it the next day she  
21 was terrible

22 <S 02> So Mrs Dowling was the terror of  
23 the neighbourhood was she

24 <S 01> Oh Christ yeah

25 <S 02> God

26 <S 03> She was a character she was really

27 <S 02> Did you know her

28 <S 01> I She had she had er pernicious anaemia and she went into er  
29 Addenbrooke's and me brother'd just come back from Australia and  
30 that particular Saturday he'd just got back she was coming out you  
31 see and erm he said oh I'll give her a surprise and go down and and  
32 and take her home and he went into the Spread Eagle for a drink  
33 first and cos he used to go in there years ago before he went to  
34 Australia and he met, funny enough he met some of the people he  
35 used to know and they were talking within a group and one of them  
36 was a nurse, a nursing sister he said I'm going in to pick my mother  
37 up and she said oh what ward is that and what name and when he  
38 said Dowling good God she said are we glad she's going today  
39 [<S 03> laughs] she's taken over the whole ward and the most  
40 hardened sister can't you know can't handle her [<All> laugh] once  
41 she got better she started to take over things [<S 02> yeah] and er  
42 telling them what to do and this and that

43 <S 02> She's dead now is she

44 <S 01> Yeah

45 <S 02> When did she die long time ago

46 <S 01> Eh

47 <S 02> A long time ago

- 48 <S 01> But she was a, oh yes twenty years ago ... but she was a  
 49 <S 02> Great  
 50 character eh  
 51 <S 01> Oh she was a terror in the shops  
 52 <S 03> [laughs]

## General commentary

This is another pair of connected, typical, everyday stories, this time centred round a particular person rather than an event or set of related events (compare Units 1 and 2). In a typical narrative, the main characters are 'evaluated' (i.e. commented upon, judged and appraised) by both the teller and the listener(s). Note here that the teller (Ken)'s mother is evaluated as a 'terror' at the beginning of the story, again after the first story, where she is also called 'terrible' and 'a character', and then again at the end of the second story, where both evaluations are repeated. The way Ken connects the events of his stories is very simple: note how many times he just uses *and*. Connectors such as *consequently*, *next*, *subsequently*, *therefore*, *later*, etc. are rare in informal everyday spoken narratives, and are strongly associated with written texts.

## Line-by-line commentary

- I. I *I'll tellyou a little tale*: The teller, Ken, announces that he is about to embark on a story. This gives him the right to be the main speaker, and it would be very difficult for anyone to interrupt and say 'No you're not', or 'Not now, Ken!' The others are socially obliged to behave as typical story-listeners, i.e. to laugh in the right places, to use BACK-CHANNELS and to join in the evaluation at the end of the story.
- 11 *me mother*. The use of *me* instead of 'my' is common in several English dialects in the British Isles. Here Ken shows his Irish origins with its use.
- 12 *was a terror*. This suggests that, when things went wrong, she lost her temper and terrified people around her, perhaps by shouting, being very assertive or aggressive. She was certainly not a calm, passive sort of person!
- 14 *scale*: Low-grade, non-burnable stony material mixed in with the coal.
- 16 *and stuff*" is a VAGUE LANGUAGE marker referring unspecifically to the waste materials mixed in with the coal, which Ken does not need to repeat in detail.
- 16 *we got it on the bus*: *got* here means something like 'managed to carry/load/lift it'. *Get is* extremely common in informal spoken language and it has many meanings (see Unit 20 for further examples).
- 19 Note the ELLIPSIS of *it* (referring to the table) before *was*.
- 1.12 *WHOOSH!* is an onomatopoeic word indicating something sweeping through

the air. It could be used, for instance, to describe a plane flying past very quickly and suddenly, or a strong gust of wind.

- 1.13 Note the position of *she said*, just after the first clause of the reported speech. This strategy (i.e. a few words of speech, the reporting clause, then more speech) is common in spoken narratives. It helps to dramatise the reported speech, isolating the key words at the beginning.
- 1.15 The use of *mother* without *my* gives a familiar, more personal tone to the word.
- 1.16 *up the road*: This does not necessarily mean up a hill. *Up* here could simply mean 'towards the town/towards where the shops were'.
- 1.17 Note the four uses of '*d*' (i.e. *would*) here, to refer to past habitual actions. It can only be used once a past time-frame is already established (often following 'used to'). Compare:

I used to love going to the beach as a kid. I'd spend all day building sandcastles.

When he lived locally, he'd come and see us every Sunday.

It cannot be used for past states:

I used to live in Johannesburg (not 'I would live ...')

- 1.18 *fella* is a typically Irish (and some other dialects') way of saying 'fellow', a colloquial word for 'man'.
- 1.22 *the terror of the neighbourhood*: It is clear that Ken's mother had all the local shopkeepers scared of her and her extravert, aggressive, bombastic behaviour.
- 1.24 *Christ* is a taboo word used in exclamations and reactions to things. It is offensive to many people, not only to people with strong Christian beliefs, and so it is best avoided. Less strong and less offensive alternatives include *God* (see 1.25) *Good God!* (1.38) *Crikey!* *Gripes!* and *Gosh!*
- 1.26 Note the reinforcing TAG [*she was*]; this type of tag is common in spoken language (see also Unit 12, 1.1).
- 1.29 *Addenbrooke's* is a famous hospital in the city of Cambridge in the UK.
- 1.30 *you see* is a DISCOURSE MARKER used when you believe the listener does not already know what you are telling them. It contrasts with 'you know', which projects an assumption that the listener will be familiar with the situation.
- 1.32 *The Spread Eagle* is the name of a local pub in Cambridge, known to all Ken's listeners.
- 1.34 *funny enough* is a colloquial version of 'funnily enough' or 'strangely enough'.
- 1.38 Note the word order here. Exclamations often have so-called 'question' word-order, with falling intonation. Some other examples:

Was my face red last night! (tells the listener it was)

Didn't I get a shock when I saw her!

- 1.42 *and this and that* is an example of VAGUE LANGUAGE which enables Ken not to specify further details (he can assume his listeners will understand now that they know what sort of character his mother was).
- 1.43 Note the affirmative tag here, indicating that the listener thinks this is the case but cannot be sure. If he had been more certain, he might have said 'She's dead now, *isn't she*'.
- 1.45 *long time ago*: Note the ELLIPSIS of *a* here. Ellipsis of the first element is common with everyday fixed expressions in informal conversation.
- 1.49 Here the listener and Ken re-affirm their evaluation of his mother. *A great character* suggests she was different, memorable, fun to observe and know, as well as a *terror*.

### Further reading

Bauman (1986) is a good source on spoken narrative in general.

On funny stories in particular, see Gardner and Spielman (1980).

Farrell (1986) also discusses story telling.

On speech reporting, see McCarthy (1997: ch. 6).

On *used to* and *would* for narratives of habitual events, see McCarthy (1997: ch. 3).

On evaluation in spoken narrative, see Labov (1972).



## unit 4

# Two old friends meet up again

### Activity

English has a system of tags which speakers can put at the end of what they say. For example:

You're French, *aren't you?*

He's coming tonight, *is he?*

What do you think these tags are for? Make notes and/or discuss with a partner why you think speakers use tags. Are there other types of tags apart from the two types in the examples above?

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> male (40s)

<S 02> male (40s)

Two old friends who haven't seen each other for a few years are 'catching up' with each other. They are in a village pub garden on an exceptionally hot summer's evening, talking about <S 01>'s children.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Are you still playing er
- 2 <S 02> Gui-tar
- 3 <S 01> Irish music, yeah
- 4 <S 02> No I don't play very much now, no, not at all
- 5 <S 01> I thought you were touring the

6 country at one point

7 <S 02> [laughs] No, I er... we go, we listen to it quite a lot, every time we

8 go to Ireland we erm, you know, seek out good musicians and er do

9 quite a lot of listening and of course we still buy a lot of records,

10 bought a lot of records over the last few years, but erm, there's not

11 actually anybody to play with around here, you know [

12 there's a there's a session every Sunday night in Cambridge in a pub

13 and that's erm about it... do you still listen to Scottish music?

14 <S 01> Ver... since this pair have arrived [<S 02> mm] very very little, cos

15 you just don't have the time, and with the new house, and with the

16 garden [<S 02> Mm] occasionally I take fits of putting stuff on, not as

17 much as before

18 <S 02> They do I s'pose take up a lot of time, don't they, kids?

19 <S 01> They take up a lot

20 of, I mean, normally, you get, if you're lucky they're all tucked up in

21 bed by eight-thirty [<S 02> mm] ... that's if you're lucky, and then er

22 <S 02> Do they sleep all night without erm waking up, did they wake up last

23 night, they didn't [<S 01 > no] did they, no, [<S 02> no] didn't hear

24 a thing

25 <S 01> Jamie normally, you put him in his cot and he's... he's gone

26 [<S 02> mm] he sleeps he's very good at sleeping [<S 02> mm]

27 Thomas is a bit of a pain [<S 02> ah] all sorts of things frighten him,

28 you know [<S 02> yeah] wakes up with nightmares and that

29 [<S 02> does he] yeah some nights we change beds about three or

30 four times, he comes into our bed and there's not enough room and

31 so I go into his bed and he comes back in so to my bed and his bed

32 and chopping and changing

33 <S 02> It's extraordinary to think they have bad dreams, well, I suppose they

34 dream of images they've seen during the day, probably dream of that

35 bloomin' duck or something

36 <S 01> Or it just might be a car, noisy car going past the window or

37 something, wakes them up

38 <S 02> Mm ... it's going to be hot tonight... in bed, isn't it

39 <S 01> **Mm**

## Line-by-line commentary

- 11 *Are you still playing...?* This suggests a more familiar, informal relationship with the speaker than the alternative 'do you still play ...?'. Note that <S 02> still feels able to reply using the simple form *don't play*.
- 12 *Gui-tar*: The way the speaker pronounces this suggests he is mimicking a stereotypical Southern USA accent, associated with country music.
- 17 *We go, listen*: Switches from one verb to another are common in spoken discourse. Such 'on-line' monitoring of language choices is, of course, normally edited out in most written texts.
- 19 *Do quite a lot of listening* is an example of a DELEXICAL VERB. Delexical verbs such as '**have** a smoke', '**take** a walk' are more common in spoken than in written discourse. The 'do', 'have' and 'take' in each case are lexically weak and operate only as adjuncts to the main lexical items of 'listen' and 'smoke' or 'walk'. In written discourse the main lexical verb usually operates independently.
- 19 *of course*: Note this DISCOURSE MARKER, which means that something is obvious between speaker and listener, and can be assumed to be known by all parties. Non-native speakers (especially those speaking Germanic languages) sometimes misuse it and can sound arrogant or pompous, as in:
- A: Where did you go in the summer?  
B: Oh we went to Paris  
A: Oh yeah, did you go up the Eiffel Tower?  
B: Of course
- B probably meant 'yes, sure' or 'yes, indeed' or 'yes, we did', but has given the impression of saying 'yes, how could you be so stupid as to ask me that?'. The English *of course* does not necessarily translate directly into its Germanic equivalents.
- 1.12 *a session* means an informal gathering of musicians where anyone can bring an instrument along and join in.
- 1.14 *since this pair have arrived*: *this pair* refers to 's two small boys; the use of the past perfect tense *have arrived* rather than the alternative simple past 'arrived' adds to the statement a degree of immediacy and relevance-to-the-moment.
- 1.15 *with the new house, and with the garden*: This use of *with* is very common in spoken English. It means roughly 'when you take into consideration ...'
- 1.16 *take fits of putting stuff on*: *take fits of* here means that now and again, the speaker plays music quite intensively, then has long periods without doing so. *Put on* here means 'play on the record player/CD player/tape player'. *Stuffs* is an extremely useful general word which can mean almost any type of thing; here it means 'music/records/tapes/CDs'.

1.16 *or something, all sorts of things, I mean, I suppose, normally, occasionally, sort of*: Such items have a certain propositional content but their main purpose is to establish and support a high degree of interpersonal and interactive exchange between the speakers as they talk about more immediate experiences and introduce both a more markedly affective and personal note into their conversation and a context (the sleeping habits of <S 01 >'s children) to which both can in different degrees testify. The extent of the hedging and mitigation may be surprising to learners of English whose text books would not normally use such naturally-occurring data but it is a more regular feature of casual conversation than is generally understood.

125 *Jamie, normally, you put him in his cot...*: The use of a HEAD or right-branching structure with a pronoun (*him*) that repeats the topic word (*Jamie*) is a common grammatical structure in spoken discourse. It serves, here, in particular to give emphasis to *Jamie* as the new (sub-) topic.

125 *He's gone*: a colloquial expression for 'he's fast asleep'.

127 *a bit of a pain*: a colloquial expression meaning 'a bit of a nuisance/problem'.

128 *wakes up with nightmares and that*: *and that* is frequently used in informal conversation to mean 'and such things' (see also Unit 2,1-46); it is a useful piece of VAGUE LANGUAGE.

132 *chopping and changing*: this is a BINOMIAL expression meaning 'constantly changing in an irritating/exasperating way'. Binomials are a relatively frequent type of idiomatic expression in informal speech. Other examples:

She's making *life and death* decisions.

We got there *safe and sound* in the end.

135 *that bloomin' duck* is a grotesque plastic toy duck in <S02>'s garage that the kids spotted earlier that day. *bloomin'* is a quite mild swear word, far less strong or offensive than *bloody*.

## Comments on activity

*Tags in this extract:*

1.18	They do I s'pose take up a lot of time,	don't they, kids?
11.22-23	Did they wake up last night	they didn't [no]
11.28-29	Wakes up with nightmares and that	<S 02> does he
1.38	It's going to be hot tonight... in bed,	isn't it

*Points to note:*

Tags have a very strong INTERACTIONAL effect in the conversation, reinforcing intimacy and informality. In the first case (1.18), the tag is followed by a lexical repetition (with *kids*) of the subject pronoun *they*. This is an example of a TAIL. Tails are frequent when speakers are commenting and evaluating states of affairs, and often accompany tags.

In 1.23, the speaker answers his own question (*they didn't*) and adds a checking tag (*did they*). Speakers often use tags to check or confirm information in this way.

In 1.29, note that tags often occur in the listener's response, to express the listener's reaction, or just to provide an acknowledgement or BACK-CHANNEL.

In 1.38, the speaker assumes agreement on the part of the listener, and signals this assumption with the tag.

## **Further reading**

**On delexical verbs** see Sinclair and Renouf (1988).

**McCarthy and Carter (1994: ch 3)**, discuss the function of tense and aspect across a variety of spoken and written texts, especially narratives, and consider the teaching implications of marked tenses and tense switching.

**For an extensive treatment of repetition in spoken discourse**, see Tannen (1989), especially chapter 3.

**On hedging markers in casual conversation** see Schiffrin (1987), which is the most comprehensive treatment of spoken discourse markers.

**On tags** see Hintikka (1982), Bennett (1989) and McGregor (1995).

**Brazil (1995)** is an extensive study of spoken narrative discourse.



unit  
5

## An elderly lady reminisces

### Activity

Before you read and listen, consider why the following remarks would normally be thought of as rather *formal*. How could you say them in a more *informal* way?

- 1 A number of my schoolmates to whom I still write also went to University
- 2 She used, in her younger days when she was a student, to spend her holidays in Norway.

Answers to the **Activity** will be found in the **Line-by-line commentary**.

As you listen and go through the transcript, underline structures similar to these.

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> Jen (late 20s) (Glasgow)

<S 02> Esther Hamilton (84) (Ireland/Somerset)

In this extract, Esther Hamilton, an 84-year-old Englishwoman brought up in Ireland, reminisces about her youth to her great-niece, who asks her questions about herself in an informal interview-style conversation.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> So what did you study at Oxford?
- 2 <S 02> Erm I got into Oxford on Modern Languages, French and
- 3 German but I was always much more interested in social affairs
- 4 and politics and I realised I would not want to spend three years

5 doing ancient French grammar or anything like that so I switched  
6 over to what Alan's reading now called the Modern Greats  
7 [<S 01 > mm] or PPE, politics philosophy and economics it was quite  
8 new I only knew about it because when I, Cicely was very good to  
9 me and used to have me up to stay at Somerville while I was still  
10 at school and one of her friends was sort of, pioneered this new  
11 school of study and I decided that was for me [<S 01 > mm] and  
12 very interesting it was too [<S 01 > mm were there] quite a number  
13 of my friends with whom I still keep up er also switched to that yes  
14 <S 01 > Mm were there many other women at Oxford with you?  
15 <S 02 > There were four colleges erm there were a hundred and  
16 fifty in Somerville it's grown enormously since then and it now  
17 takes men [<S 01 > right] but there was no thought of men at any  
18 of the four women's colleges in my day ... I don't think it made  
19 any difference as far as erm studying went, in fact I think I  
20 would have preferred it as it was because I'm sure I wouldn't  
21 have concentrated so well if it had been a mixed college  
22 <S 01 > [laughs] When you were living at home before you left  
23 while you were at, in Bristol and in Ireland did you erm did you erm  
24 did you have any help in the house or  
25 <S 01 > Oh yes, yes, yes mind you my parents were really quite  
26 well-off when we lived in Ireland but the education in England  
27 was very expensive [<S 01 > mm] and I can remember my mother  
28 had jewellery and silver and things she used to keep selling it [<S 01 >  
29 really] to pay for our extra music lessons and tuition in this  
30 and that [<S 01 > mm] and er I it was, must have been difficult  
31 for her because she was brought up in affluence you know and now  
32 she had to be a very economical housekeeper we had two maids in  
33 residence [<S 01 > mm] erm a cook and a house parlour-maid so we  
34 didn't really do anything ourselves in the house [<S 01 > mm] I  
35 suppose we must have had a gardener I don't remember that really  
36 we didn't have much of a garden in Clifton anyway, not like the  
37 one in Ireland  
38 <S 01 > Right and what did you do during your summer holidays when  
39 you were at school?  
40 <S 02 > Well first of all in the Easter holidays we always went  
41 to a farm in the Mendips [<S 01 > mm] and that was absolutely  
42 lovely we erm the farm people let us help with the animals you  
43 know we were very keen scouts and guides and we used to walk the

44 Mendip hills talking to each other in Morse [laughs] [<S 01 >  
45 [laughs]] erm and then we we sketched, mother used to set us little  
46 sketching competitions you know just for fun and then in summer  
47 holidays we very often went to Brittany cos the rate of exchange  
48 was in our favour and erm that was lovely er we would stay at a  
49 hotel and have bathing and see the local Breton regattas you know  
50 and erm Cicely was a great swimmer, and while we were on one of  
51 those Breton holidays she swam out so far that she met the only  
52 other person who could swim who turned out to be an Austrian and  
53 that was the beginning of our link with Austria and the next day  
54 Cicely went to Graz where this woman lived and er your grandfather  
55 and I followed I think the next summer and spent the summer there  
56 in Graz supposedly improving our German but er [inaudible] was  
57 only interested in playing cricket games on paper [<S 01 >  
58 [laughs]] oh we had a wonderful time climbing mountains and so  
59 on ..., and then you see we really began to split up we were  
60 terribly lucky because our parents were keen that we should have  
61 our own careers [<S 01 > mm] and not be tied to them ... mother  
62 said never let it be said of me that I tied my children to home  
63 and she used in her latter days when she was a widow to have  
64 Danish au-pair girls so that we could go out and have our own  
65 careers and [<S 01 > mm] not be tied to looking after her and I  
66 remember your grandfather going off on a bicycle tour when he was  
67 just about nine, he was at prep school, all by himself [<S 01 > goodness]  
68 round the abbeys and cathedrals of Southern England and then Emily  
69 and I were very keen guides and we went to guide camps *every year*  
70 erm Cicely being a language student went a lot to France on her own  
71 she ... erm and our elder brother Freddy who was destined for the  
72 army but he didn't get in because er it was after the First World  
73 War you see and they weren't recruiting many and it was very  
74 difficult to get in and he didn't pass his medical [<S 01 > mm]  
75 because of his eyesight er so he was sent out to New Zealand on  
76 a public school scheme which sent these young lads out at about  
77 the age of eighteen whole batches of them to learn farming in New  
78 Zealand [<S 01 > oh] and he never came back [<S 01 > mm] and  
79 your grandfather and I went out just once after fifty-three years to  
80 see him  
81 <S 01> Goodness me  
82 <S 02> Erm but all this was very untypical of er the people

83 among whom we lived, Clifton was a very pleasant leafy suburb of  
84 detached or semi-detached large houses and erm people didn't  
85 work, I mean the girls never thought of having careers the others er  
86 they just lived at home [<S 01 > mm] and I think they thought we  
87 were very strange [<S 01 > [laughs]] in fact I remember one of our  
88 [laughs] neighbours said to, who had two grown-up children you  
89 see well this was typical the girl stayed at home and the son  
90 followed into his father's business [<S 01 > mm mm] that was how  
91 they, most of them, and then some of them married the girl next  
92 door you know they were very conventional [<S 01 > mm] they  
93 always went either to Devon or Cornwall for their holidays  
94 [<S 01 > mm] they always trooped off to the same church on Sunday  
95 mornings you know then one of these neighbours said to my mother  
96 when your grandfather went off on his first Arctic expedition I  
97 can't think why Richard wants to go to the Arctic when he's got  
98 such a nice home [<S 01 >[laughs]] we thought this was hilarious  
99 <S 01 > Oh my [laughs]  
100 <S 02 > Our houses were built around a tennis court and my  
101 father arranged it that every family had a day you see in  
102 rotation er but after six o'clock in the evening er anybody could  
103 go out so we young ones all went out and we devised various games  
104 like erm six-a-side tennis [<S 01 > [laughs]] great fun and then  
105 after that we used to play bicycle polo [<S 01 > [laughs]] bicycle  
106 hockey in the street you see it was off a main road it was just  
107 a crescent [<S 01 > mm] but some of the neighbours disapproved of  
108 this and withdrew their daughters at that stage [laughs]  
109 <S 01 > Goodness  
110 <S 02 > We were the mad Irish [laughs] [<S 01 > [laughs]] and  
111 it really never entered the head of any of us that we should stay  
112 at home, [<S 01 > mm] I mean Cicely was very brilliant really and,  
113 and erm what did she do first oh she did teach for a year and then  
114 she went out to the States and had various jobs and went on the  
115 stage and married a erm  
116 <S 01 > So she was an actress she she acted?  
117 <S 02 > Yes  
118 <S 01 > I didn't know that  
119 <S 02 > Yes she joined a professional  
120 company she was always very good at acting as I say we did a lot

## General commentary

Esther, the main speaker, is an upper middle-class lady whose speech combines quite informal features with some rather formal, perhaps old-fashioned features. Notice, nonetheless, that even though her speech is often formal, and even though she speaks with an upper-class RP (Received Pronunciation) accent, she still uses a large number of DISCOURSE MARKERS, as indicated in the line-by-line commentary. Some people think discourse markers are a sign of 'lazy' or 'uneducated' speech, but this is not so, and they are just as common in the speech of people like Esther as in that of any other social class of speaker.

## Line-by-line commentary

- I, I and 16 Notice how Jen uses *study*, while Esther uses the verb *read* to refer to the same thing. *Read* in this sense of 'study a university subject' is very much associated with the prestigious universities of Oxford and Cambridge and is thus a social class marker. *Read with* this meaning is becoming increasingly obsolescent.
- 12 *I got into Oxford on Modern Languages*: An informal way of saying 'I was accepted to study ...'; it can also mean that she was admitted on the strength of past performances in modern languages.
- 17 *Greats*: This normally means at Oxford University 'Classics', i.e. Latin and Ancient Greek, but here it has a special meaning combined with Modern, which Esther explains.
- 19 *up to stay*: People who study at Oxford or Cambridge usually refer to travelling to those places as going *up* to Oxford/Cambridge, and going *down* as going home (at the end of term, for example). These are purely cultural uses of the prepositions. Somerville is a college of Oxford University.
- 1.10 Note the use of *sort of* as the speaker searches for the appropriate word. This is extremely common in conversation and is here a marker of hesitation after a 'false start'.
- 1.12 *and very interesting it was too*: Note the word order here (complement-subject-verb-adverb). Word order is quite flexible in conversation, and Esther puts the adjective complement at the front here to emphasise it. The structure is also distinctive in the placement of *of and at* the beginning of the clause and the stress which is given to the *too* at the end of the clause. It functions as a kind of parenthetical comment or afterthought and usually involves an evaluation, e.g. 'And very helpful she was too'.

11.12 This is one of the rather formal (typically written) structures in Esther's  
-1 3 conversation, with the preposition and the *wh-* word at the front. Normally, in  
informal speech we would expect:

A number of my friends (who/that) I still keep up with ...

(See **Comments on activity** below).

1.19 *as far as studying went*: the use of the verb *go* here is an informal version of 'was  
concerned'. Another example:

As far as holidays go, I'm quite happy to stay in this country

1.25 *mindyou* is a useful spoken DISCOURSE MARKER meaning roughly 'it's  
important to say' / 'we should not forget'.

1.26 Esther says *the education* here. She could have just as well said 'education'. The  
use of *the* here seems to suggest 'the kind of education that you and I know  
would have been suitable for people like us'.

1.29 *This and that*: A useful BINOMIAL expression meaning 'various unspecified  
-30 things', as in, for example:

A: What were you and Sandy talking about?

B: Oh, this and that, nothing special.

A similar expression is the TRINOMIAL idiom 'this that and the other'.

13 I Note how often the marker *you know* occurs (see also 11. 42, 49, 92, 95). *You know*  
as a signal that the speaker thinks the listener will share his/her view of the  
world contrasts with *you see*, where the speaker signals 'I am telling you  
something you may not be aware of', as in 11. 59, 73, 89, 101, 106.

1.36 *we didn't have much of a garden*: This construction is common in spoken language  
and it means 'not big/important/good, etc.', depending on the context.  
Other examples:

That wasn't much of a him, was it?

It wasn't much of an airport, just a runway and a few tin huts.

1.36 *Clifton* is a suburb of the city of Bristol.

1.36 *anyway* has the meaning of 'in any case' and functions here as an adverbial  
adjunct. In informal spoken English it is more commonly a discourse marker  
used to mark boundaries or different phases in the discourse. (See Unit 1 11.1 4.)

1.44 *the Mendip hills*: A range of hills in the south-west of England.

11.43 *walk the Mendip hills*: Verbs such as *walk* and *run* are sometimes used transitively  
—44 (and without the more 'normal' prepositions such as *along* or *in* or *through*) in  
connection with places or specific events. For example, 'they both ran the  
London marathon last year'.

- l.44 *Morse*: Morse Code, a system of wireless communication using long and short pulses, named after its founder.
- l.45 *mother* (see also 1.61) is a rather upper-class way of referring to one's mother. More socially neutral would be 'my mother', or very informally, 'Mum', 'My mum'. (See also Unit 11, extract 3 1.7.)
- ll.46 *in summer holidays*: This now sounds a little old-fashioned or formal, and we  
-47 would say 'in the summer holidays' usually.
- l.47 Note how even such a formal, educated lady as Esther still abbreviates *because* to *cos*. This is perfectly normal and correct in everyday conversation.
- ll.58 *and so on* has the meaning here of 'and that kind of thing'.  
-59
- l.63 *She used... etc.*: Interrupting *used to* in this way with two adverbial expressions is a very unusual construction for informal spoken language, and would normally be associated with rather formal written language. In conversation we would expect 'In her latter days when she was a widow she used to have ...'. (See **Comments on activity** below.)
- l.67 *prep school*: Preparatory school: a private school for younger children before they go on to public school (1.76), which is also a private (usually very expensive) type of school, some of which are very ancient and famous.
- l.67 *all by himself* is an informal way of saying 'all alone', as is *on her own* in 1.70.
- l.71 It is interesting to compare this narrative sequence (concerning Freddy) with other narrative sequences in Esther's talk (e.g. 11.28-32) or with narratives elsewhere in this book (e.g. Unit 1) and to explore the different use of conjunctions. The greater number of subordinating conjunctions (e.g. *who*, *because*) at particular points in narratives (which are linked mainly by co-ordinating structures (e.g. *and*, *but*, *then*)) seems to be connected with the need on the part of the narrator to set the scene or to provide background information relevant to a character.
- l.76 *These young lads*: The use of *this/these* in this way is very common in narratives. Esther could have omitted it. They are used to focus on *the young lads* and to make them more immediate to the narrative; 'this/these' are less distant than 'that/those'.
- l.81 *Goodness me* is an expression of surprise, as are *my!* in 1.99 and *goodness!* in 1.109. These would not normally be used by young people under the age of 25-30, who would probably say *wow!*.
- l.82 *all this*: Note the difference between *this* and *that* when we are talking about different sets of facts or ideas or arguments. If we wish to emphasise or highlight something, or focus on it as a new or important topic, we usually use *this* (as Esther does here and in 1.89); if we wish to distance ourselves from or dissociate ourselves from the facts or ideas, we use *that*, as Esther does in 1.90.

- 11.91 *If you marry the girl next door* (a FIXED EXPRESSION meaning to marry a next-door neighbour) you marry in a very safe, conventional (and by implication boring) way, which means you lack a broader perspective on life.
- 1.94 *trooped off in* an informal verb meaning roughly 'went along together, rather monotonously and regularly'.
- 1.110 Because the English are traditionally such stiff, reserved people socially, they often think of the more outgoing socially relaxed nature of the Irish as being 'mad'.
- 1.114 *out to the States*: This is another cultural use of a preposition; *out* is often used for going (usually for work) to the traditional centres of emigration from Britain (e.g. the USA, Canada, Australia, Africa, India, New Zealand). See Unit 11.12 and Unit 6 11.18 and 65.
- 1.120 *as I say*: Note the present tense here in this FIXED EXPRESSION, even though the speaker is referring to something she 'said' earlier.
- 1.121 It is worth noting in this narrative the use of verb forms for referring to  
 1.122 habitual past actions. As might be expected, the past simple tense is frequently used; but note too the regular use of 'used to' and 'would' plus main verb. Most of the narratives in this book provide valuable data for exploring such forms in actual use.

## Comments on activity

The answer to sentence 1 in the activity would be:

- 1 A number of my schoolmates (who/that) I still write to also went to University.  
*whom* becomes *who* or *that*, or is omitted, and the preposition stays at the end, after the verb. (See also 1.83)

The answer to the activity sentence 2 would be:

- 2 In her younger days when she was a student, she used to spend her holidays in Norway.

## Further reading

On the difference between *it/this* and *that* for referring to facts and ideas, see McCarthy (1994).

The most comprehensive work on discourse markers is Schiffrin (1987).

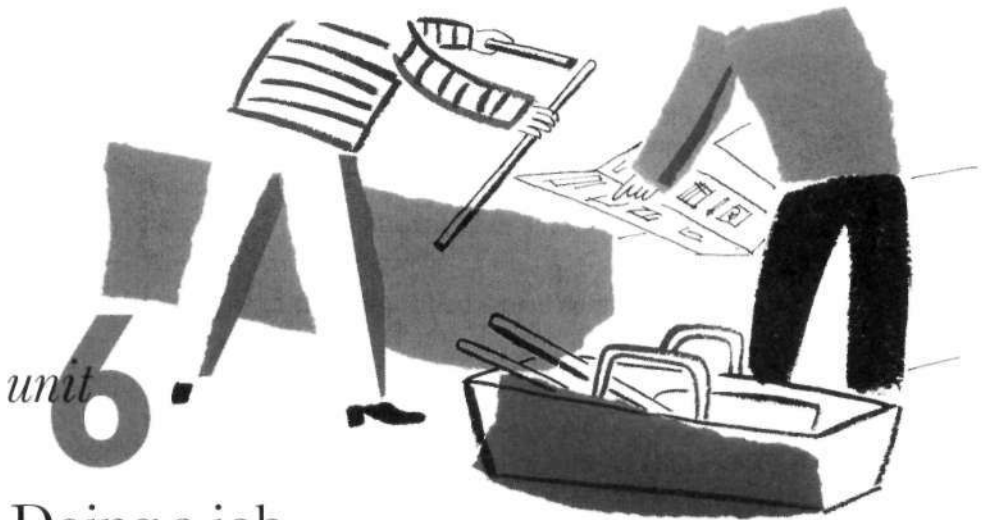
On the use of binomial expressions in everyday conversation, see Norrick (1988).

For a detailed study of fixed expressions see Fernando (1996).

## unit

# 6

## Doing a job



### Activity

Before looking at the commentary, listen to the tape while reading the transcript. What do you think these people are doing? Why is it difficult to tell just from listening and reading the transcript? What clues are there as to what they are doing in the language they use?

See **General commentary** below for answers to this activity.

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> female (25) (Yorkshire)
- <S 02> female (37) (Yorkshire)
- <S 03> male (30) (Yorkshire)
- <S 04> male (47) (South Wales)
- <S 02> is <S 01>'s aunt.
- <S 03> is <S 01>'s husband.
- <S 04> is <S 02>'s partner.

The extract was recorded in <S 02>/<S 04>'s house.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> It should fit there cos it's not that big I don't think
- 2 [7 secs]
- 3 <S 02> It's warm in here shall I turn that down?
- 4 <S 01> We've got the instructions anyway

5 [8 secs]  
6 <S 03> Just put it by the  
7 window or something  
8 [4 secs]  
9 <S 04> D'you want me to take that?  
10 [4 secs]  
11 <S 02> Ooh ... then there's bedding for about ten people here  
12 [laughs]  
13 [12 secs]  
14 <S 04> **Ah**  
15 <S 01> Oh I say, ah we've got some more instructions  
16 [12 secs]  
17 <S 01> That bit there's the bottom  
18 <S 02> D'you know you went up to erm Nottingham yesterday and  
19 you still didn't take Roger's duvet  
20 <S 04> Well... I wouldn't have had time to take it in any  
21 case, haven't seen him  
22 <S 02> Does he know we've got it?  
23 <S 04> No ... oh look at that  
24 <S 02> It's not [inaudible]  
25 <S 03> it's not as difficult as it first seemed  
26 <S 01> She says you've got to twist these round and it makes  
27 them solid or something  
28 <S 03> And all this just for you [<S 02> oh [laughs]]  
29 <S 01> There that's solid now  
30 <S 02> I think I've made it unsolid sorry I've done it the  
31 wrong way round have I  
32 [3 secs]  
33 <S 01> Solid  
34 [4 secs]  
35 <S 03> [laughs] [inaudible]  
36 <S 01> Right now it's your end now  
37 <S 02> Oh I see right okay  
38 [4 secs]  
39 <S 02> No too much  
40 <S 01> There ... what's that in the middle?  
41 [5 secs]  
42 <S 02> Oh it's  
43 [2 secs]

44 <S 03> Found some more legs  
45 <S 02> Mm ... is it legs or is it erm  
46 [2 secs]  
47 <S 01> It doesn't tell you what that is  
48 <S 03> [laughs]  
49 <S 04> Yeah that looks right surely  
50 <S 01> Yeah  
51 <S 03> Yeah well done  
52 <S 02> D'you like that?  
53 <S 03> Yeah  
54 <S 01> Oh aye  
55 [4 secs]  
56 <S 02> Is that our washing?  
57 <S 01> No that's the sheet  
58 <S 02> No right...  
59 <S 01> now I think this is the bottom of it  
60 [3 secs]  
61 <S 02> Now  
62 <S 03> Good grief  
63 <S 02> Pikelet  
64 [3 secs]  
65 <S 03> That's low down  
66 <S 01> Look at this Holly  
67 <S 02> Is that erm being used?  
68 <S 01> I'm gonna get back-ache  
69 lifting you in and out of here aren't I?  
70 [3 secs]  
71 <S 03> There now you'd better sleep in that [laughs]  
72 <S 04> Well I'm very impressed  
73 <S 02> Yeah it's incredible isn't it  
74 <S 01> [inaudible]... no I won't put that on the top cos she  
75 might be sick so I'll take that, mine's downstairs  
76 <S 02> D'you want d'you want the sheet from us?  
77 <S 01> No I've I've brought one  
78 [7 secs]  
79 <S 03> Amazing isn't it  
80 <S 02> How many er pillows do you have, one, two?  
81 <S 01> I have one Graeme won't have any [laughs]  
82 <S 02> You have one Graeme doesn't have any

83 <S 01> Yeah  
84 <S 02> Yeah right okay good job you said  
85 <S 03> They end up being thrown on the floor or Lindsey  
86 pinches them [<S 04> [laughs]] or used to propping, for propping  
87 babies up in the morning  
88 [3 secs]  
89 <S 04> What's that what's that eh [<S 03> oo] oo oh whoops-a-  
90 daisy [<S 03> [laughs]] what you looking for, tissue?  
91 <S 03> -Tissue or  
92 something  
93 <S 02> There was a tissue there there was  
94 <S 03> Errgh  
95 <S 04> You must get used to this  
96 <S 03> Yeah  
97 <S 04> [laughs]  
98 <S 02> Constant mopping up  
99 <S 04> Yeah  
100 [2 secs]  
101 <S 03> Should put her bib on to get to bed I think  
102 <S 02> ' Think it'll be too warm  
103 in here for her or is it going to be all right... can you take  
104 that off there?  
105 <S 01> It'll be all right  
106 <S 02> That's it  
107 <S 01> She only needs half of that anyway  
108 <S 02> It does get pretty hot in here actually ... no matter what  
109 [7 secs]  
110 <S 02> Couple of towels for you there she said chucking them  
111 on the floor  
112 <S 01> Right

## General commentary

This extract is what we call 'language-in-action'. That is to say, the language used is almost all dependent on what the people are *doing at* that moment. It is very tied to the immediate situation. Here, a group of people are assembling a portable baby's cot in the bedroom of a relative's house (<S 02>) where <S 01 > and <S 03> are staying for the weekend with their young baby.

It is difficult to decide exactly what they are doing because they do not mention the word *cot* at all. This is typical of language-in-action conversations, where people do

not need to mention directly things and actions which are obvious and right in front of them at that moment. Also, quite long silences are common while the speakers are doing things. On the other hand, the speakers use a lot of words like *that*, *there*, *here* and *it* to refer to the things around them.

In this type of talk, the speakers also use a lot of DISCOURSE MARKERS (especially the word *right*) to organise their activity and a lot of ELLIPSIS of personal subjects, since the people referred to are present in the conversation (see examples in the commentary below).

### Follow-up activity

Below is part of a word-frequency list for this extract prepared by a computer. It shows words which occur five times or more, and how often each word occurs.

Note the extremely high number of occurrences of *it* and *that*, referring to the cot and its parts. But *this* does not occur in our list, since it only occurs four times in the conversation. What could be the explanation for the difference between *this* and *that* here? Similarly, the definite article *the* occurs 12 times. The indefinite *a* only occurs once in the whole conversation. Why?

### Word-frequency list

Total number of words in the conversation: 482

Words occurring five times or more:

it	27	is	7
that	22	no	7
I	13	oh	7
the	12	or	7
there	9	now	6
to	9	do	6
yeah	9	here	5
in	8	take	5
right	8	think	5
have	7		

## Line-by-line commentary

- 11 Note how *because* is frequently reduced to *cos* (see also 1.74). This is informal but not 'incorrect'. Even highly educated native speakers do it regularly (see Unit 5), although they may not be aware of it.

Note also the use of *that big*, instead of *so big*. Using *that* in this way is very common in informal speech, especially after a negative. The use of *that* here is as a marker of degree; it premodifies gradable adjectives and adverbs. *Not that big here* has the meaning of 'not particularly big'. Other examples:

The water wasn't that cold that you couldn't swim.

I think I can afford it. It's not that dear.

A: How're you feeling?

B: Not that good actually.

<S 01 >'s turn ends with a double negative, which often happens when the phrase *I don't think* comes after its object. If we reversed the order, we would expect: I don't think it's that big.

The order here is frequent in informal conversation. Other examples:

It's not very warm out, I don't think.

He won't be late, I don't suppose.

- 13 *in here*: prepositions are often used with *here* and *there*, especially in informal conversation, for example 'up there', 'over here', 'out there':

Come and sit over here, why don't you.

There's a cat out there, is it yours?

- 17 *or something* is a useful phrase to make what you are saying a little more indirect or vague. If you say to someone:

Are you going to the shop? Could you get me a cold drink or something?

it sounds less direct, and gives the other person a certain amount of freedom to use their discretion. Note how <S 01 > uses it in 1.27 to make her report of what someone else said a little less precise. See also 1.92 for another example; *or whatever* is also used in some contexts with a similar meaning.

- 11 I The use of *then* here simply connects the different parts of the conversation. It is a DISCOURSE MARKER. It does not mean 'therefore' or 'afterwards'.
- 11 5 *I say* here is just an expression of surprise. Note the stress: /i SAY/. The expression is common in Yorkshire, where <S 01 > comes from, but is normally not used by young people. The phrase can also be used as an attention-getter, e.g. 'I say, excuse me, is there a taxi rank near here?'; as an attention-getter it has quite a formal and upper-class ring.

1.17 *that bit there: this/these* are often used together with *here* and *that/those* with *there* for more precise reference in spoken language, but are not normally found together in written language. More examples:

That girl there reminds me of Sandra.  
D'you want this book here, or the other one?

11 8 *up to Nottingham*: In Britain, when speaking informally, you normally refer to journeys to places to the north of where you live as going *up* (e.g. to Edinburgh, Manchester, etc. if you are in London), journeys to the south as *down* (e.g. from Manchester to Southampton) and journeys east-west or west-east often with *over* [e.g. 'I have to go over to Birmingham' if you are in Nottingham]. *Over* is also used for journeys across the sea (e.g. go over to France/Ireland for the weekend). Some people use *up* for journeys to London, wherever they are, because it is the capital city.

1120 Note how <S 04> uses the discourse marker *well to* soften the force of his  
-21 answer, and also how he omits the subject / before '(I) haven't seen him'. This is an example of subject ELLIPSIS, which is very common in informal conversation (see especially Unit 7). Note that *well can* function in this position in part to appeal for a listener's understanding when a speaker is making an excuse or giving a justification, or responding with something that diverges from the desired or predicted direction of the discourse. For example:

A: You shouldn't have given her the money.  
B: Well, she didn't leave me a lot of choice.

where the main meaning is one of 'that may be so, but...'

126 *she says*: The *she* here is the woman who has lent <S 01> the cot for the weekend. Observe that we often use present tense to report other people's speech when it refers to something factual or permanently true (in this case the instructions for the bed). Other examples:

Nick says the exams are starting on the 27th.  
Clare says Rio's quite a dangerous city.

1129 *solid here* means 'rigid/'inflexible', and refers to the way the frame of the cot  
-30 becomes rigid when the legs are twisted a certain way. *Unsolid* is not an established word. Speakers often create words for humorous effect using prefixes (here *un-*) or suffixes (see 1.63 below), as <S 02> is doing here. The normal word would be 'loose' or 'slack' for this situation.

136 *now* marks here a new stage in the action. It does not have a marked temporal meaning.

11.36 In language-in-action conversations we use a lot of DISCOURSE MARKERS  
-37 such as *right, I see, okay*, which accompany people's actions and mark the stages of the process they are trying to complete.

1.40 *there* is used as a discourse marker here, meaning roughly 'that's it / 'I've finished my task'. This is very common in spoken language (see also 1.71).

1.44 *found*: Here we have ellipsis of both the pronoun /and the auxiliary verb *have*. This is common with first-person singular:

(I've) Just bumped into Mark. I didn't know he was coming.

A: What's the matter?

B: (I've) Lost my glasses.

1.54 *Aye* is a common alternative to *yes* in many parts of Great Britain, especially Scotland and northern England. It is not normally used by middle- and upper-class speakers.

1.62 *Good grief* is a common exclamation indicating shock or great surprise. Other expressions with similar force include *Good God!*, *Good Lord!*, *Good Heavens!*. (See also Unit 111. 21-22.)

1.63 *Pikelet*, which means a kind of flat cake of dough usually eaten toasted with butter, is <S 02>'s affectionate name for speaker <S 04>, who is called Michael. Mike is the short form of Michael, and she creatively transforms *Mike* → *Mikelet* → *Pikelet*, playing on the sound patterns.

1.65 *Low down* is another example of 'doubling' in speech for emphasis (as we saw with *this here /that there* in 1.18, above). Similarly, people often say *high up*:

I don't like that picture where you've hung it, it's too high up.

1.66 *Holly* is the little baby girl's name. She was born on Christmas Day. The evergreen holly tree traditionally provides branches for decorating people's houses at Christmas.

1.79 *Amazing isn't it*: Note the ellipsis of ' (it's) *amazing*' here, followed by the tag *isn't it*. This is a very common structure in informal conversation with adjectives expressing evaluation. Other examples:

Interesting, wasn't it?

A bit scruffy, isn't he?

German, wasn't he?

Reads a lot for her age, doesn't she?

1.84 (It's a) *good job*: This is a very common FIXED EXPRESSION in conversation, used when you are glad something happened because if it had not, there would probably have been problems. It very frequently has ellipsis of *'it's/it was*:

Good job you booked a table, the place is packed! (if you hadn't, we may not have got into the restaurant)

Good job you speak Spanish! (if you didn't, there could be problems)

1.86 *pinches*: 'pinch' is an informal word for 'steal'.

1.89 *whoops-a-daisy!* is a very informal exclamation used when you or somebody else drops something, or when somebody trips or falls (but not a serious fall). It is often shortened to *whoops!* or *oops!* (See also Unit 11: extract 1, line 6.)

1.93 *There was a tissue there there was* is an example of a TAIL structure in which the repeated dummy subject 'there' and the main verb are repeated for emphasis and reinforcement at the end of the clause (see also Unit 11: extract 1, line 1).

II 101 Note further examples of ELLIPSIS here. In 1.101 /is omitted before *should*. This -102 is common with *must* and *should* in conversation:

(I) Must get my hair cut, it's got really long.

(I) Should ring my mother, I suppose, before she goes to bed.

(*Doyou*) *think* in 1.102 has ellipsis of the subject and auxiliary verb. This is common in second person singular with 'think', 'want', 'have got':

Think it's too late to call at Dave and Ida's? What time do they go to bed usually?

Want another drink?

Got any letters for the post? I'll take them if so.

1.108 Note the use of *pretty* instead of 'rather' or 'quite'. This is very common in spoken English.

II 10 Note the ELLIPSIS of 'there is' / 'there are', which happens often, and of 'a' before *couple*. Once again, this is typical of the high rate of ellipsis we find in this kind of conversation.

*she said is* used by the speaker here to mock herself: she sounds as if she's handing them the towels, but really they have fallen onto the floor.

## Further reading

On this kind of language-in-action text compared with other text-types, see Ure (1971).

On pronouns in spoken English, see Thavenius (1983).

On ellipsis in spoken English see Carter and McCarthy (1995a).



## Activity

The text examined in this unit was recorded in the kitchen of a family home; all the participants are members of the same family. Here are some brief conversational exchanges. Would you expect to find conversations such as this in a family kitchen?:

A: Would you like a biscuit?

B: I beg your pardon.

A: Would you like a biscuit?

B: Oh, yes please. Thank you very much.

A: I didn't know you used boiling water to make rice.

B: You don't have to use boiling water but it is reckoned to be quicker.

Write short notes explaining why you would or would not expect to find such styles of conversational exchange in the text examined in this unit.

## Speakers and setting

<S 01> female (45)

<S 02> male (19)

<S 03> male (46)

<S 04> male (49)

<S 02> is <S 01> and <S 04>'s son

<S 03> is <S 04>'s brother

This extract takes place in <S 01>, <S 02> and <S 04>'s house. <S 03> is visiting them.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Now I think you'd better start the rice
- 2 <S 02> Yeah ... what you got there?
- 3 [4 secs]
- 4 <S 02> Will it all fit in the one?
- 5 <S 01> No you'll have to do two separate ones
- 6 <S 03> Right... what next?
- 7 [17 secs]
- 8 <S 03> Foreign body in there
- 9 <S 02> It's the raisins
- 10 <S 03> Oh is it oh it's rice with raisins is it?
- 11 <S 02> No no no it's not supposed to be
- 12 [laughs] erm
- 13 <S 03> There must be a raisin for it being in there
- 14 <S 02> D'you want a biscuit?
- 15 <S 03> Erm
- 16 <S 02> Biscuit?
- 17 <S 03> Er yeah
- 18 [9 secs]
- 19 <S 04> All right
- 20 <S 03> Yeah
- 21 [10 secs]
- 22 <S 04> Didn't know you used boiling water
- 23 <S 02> Pardon
- 24 <S 04> Didn't know you used boiling water
- 25 <S 02> Don't have to but it's erm ... they reckon it's erm quicker
- 26 [5 secs]
- 27 <S 04> Tony was saying they should have the heating on by about Wednesday
- 28 <S 02> Just gonna put the er butter on
- 29 <S 04> What you making lan?
- 30 <S 02> Mm
- 31 <S 04> What's that?
- 32 <S 02> Oh er just gonna do some rice
- 33 <S 04> Mm
- 34 <S 02> Doing some rice in the micro
- 35 <S 03> So you put margarine with it
- 36 <S 02> Pardon yeah little bit don't know why cos otherwise it'll
- 37 <S 03> Separate it

38 <S 02> Mm not sure actually doesn't erm don't have to do it when you put it  
39 on the er on the stove  
40 <S 03> How long does it take?  
41 <S 02> Erm  
42 <S 01> Oh that'll make a noise  
43 <S 02> Makes about thirty-five minutes yeah that'll that  
44 that'll destroy your tape  
45 <S 03> Thirty-five minutes  
46 <S 02> Yeah  
47 <S 01> Yeah  
48 <S 03> I thought the microwave did everything in about two minutes  
49 <S 01> You may as well turn it off now then  
50 <S 03> Yeah you can do it on the cooker for thir, in thirty-five minutes  
51 <S 02> Then if you have to watch it... you just ignore it  
52 <S 03> Mm  
53 <S 04> You don't have to wash the saucepan either do you?  
54 <S 02> You don't have to wash the saucepan after [laughs] [<S 03> mm] you  
55 don't have to erm don't have to drain the water off either  
56 <S 03> I didn't know that microwaves ran that long  
57 <S 02> Yeah you don't have to erm drain the water off either cos er  
58 <S 03> I'll switch it off when you turn that on  
59 <S 02> When Sahib used to come out and make rice and your saucepan  
60 used to be it'd be thick about an inch thick on the bottom it would  
61 and that was the best part of the rice  
62 <S 03> [laughs] I'll turn this off

## General commentary

The family are cooking rice for a family meal. Different activities are involved: cooking, helping, or simply acting as an onlooker. But the main focus of the talk at this point in the recording is on the cooking of the rice and on the procedures involved in its cooking. In this respect the language activity is essentially one of **language-in-action**: language used in the execution of a task in which the participants are directly and materially involved. It is noteworthy, however, that during this process the members of the family feel free to introduce other more

## Line-by-line commentary

12 *What you got there?* In this recording ELLIPSIS is pervasive. The ellipsis takes, as we shall see, many different forms. In this example the main auxiliary verb *have* is ellipted. Ellipsis is pervasive for a number of reasons: chief among these reasons are that the speakers, as members of the same family, normally conduct conversations with one another which are highly informal. Ellipsis is a linguistic concomitant of informality and easy-goingness in conversation. More specifically, the speakers are performing actions or are making references which are easily visible and apprehensible by all the participants. This kind of grammatical shorthand is perfectly appropriate, therefore, as the speakers have no need to elaborate; indeed, if they were to elaborate, much in their discourse would become unnecessarily redundant.

14 *in the one:* In most standard written grammars this structure does not occur. *One* is not normally cited as allowing an immediately preceding definite article. Other examples of the same usage from authentic data are:

(at an airport check-in)

Airline check-in stewardess: Is it just *the one* bag you're checking in, sir?

Male passenger: Just *the one*, yes.

(woman to man standing waiting outside toilet in a restaurant)

Is there just *the one* toilet?

In all cases, the object referred to is immediately visible to the speaker and listener. We can only conclude, since the encounters are public and since none of the speakers was speaking in a non-standard dialect, that such examples are examples of standard spoken English and simply have not been observed or codified before. This structure also occurs with other numbers:

(supermarket assistant to customer) Is it just the three boxes?

16 *what next?:* Verbs are ellipted here: either the verb 'to be' or an auxiliary verb. (e.g. *what's next?*; *what do we do next?*).

17 *[17 sees]:* Note the long silences throughout the transcript, when people are busy doing things. In the context of interchanges between members of a family silences are common. They are neither as disturbing nor perceived as impolite or as unsettling as they might if a stranger or someone from outside the family were in their company. For your convenience we have omitted some of the longer silences on the tape. This also applies to Unit 13, where long silences occur while a customer is having her hair washed at the hairdresser's.

18 *Foreign body in there:* Another example of ellipsis; on this occasion it is likely that the dummy subject *there* and the verb to be are ellipted (*There's a foreign body in there.*). The *phrase foreign body* means here 'strange-looking object that should not be there'.

- 1.13 *There must be a raisin for it being in there:* The speaker plays here on the sound similarities between 'raisin' and 'reason', echoing at the same time the relatively fixed phrase 'there must be a reason for ...'. Creative punning, word play and patterning and all kinds of similar inventiveness are quite common in conversational discourse. Indeed, many so-called ordinary, everyday conversational exchanges can be more 'literary' than is normally appreciated.
- 1.16 *Biscuit?:* This is a heavily ellipped version of 'Do you want / Would you like a biscuit?' and is thus a repetition of 1.14. It is likely that the biscuit is physically offered - an act which makes a second fully elaborated question redundant. It is likely that the same formulations would even be used in more formal contexts too.
- 11.22  
-25 *Didn't know ... I Don't have to ...:* These are further examples of ellipsis involving the deletion of personal pronouns. In formal and written contexts personal pronouns would normally be used but the speaker's choice in omitting them here simply marks the informality of the relationship and the dependence on the immediate context for interpretability.
- 1.25 *they reckon:* Although inaudible, it is likely that the speaker goes on to give some reason why boiling water is used in the rice cooking process. The use of *they* here is a generic pronoun. An attribution is made to an outside, unnamed agency but without the more formal, impersonal force communicated by a passive construction, e.g. 'it is reckoned that...'.  
-25
- 1.27 *Tony was saying:* The use of a continuous past tense form is interesting here since most standard grammars indicate that only a simple past tense form can be used when reporting speech events. However, examination of naturally-occurring data reveals that the past continuous is a relatively regular phenomenon. The choice by the speaker here of the past continuous would seem to impart a deliberately indefinite tone which is in turn more in keeping with the relaxed and informal nature of the ongoing discourse. The use of 'said' here would by contrast impart a sense of definite commitment, factuality and authority. The continuous form is often used to introduce a new and interesting topic into the conversation rather than just to report someone's words. Other examples from real data:

A: Alan was saying the village hall nearly burnt down last night.

B: Really!

A: Jennifer was saying they've discovered five mortar bombs at Heathrow Airport.

B: Oh God!

- 11.29  
-32 *What you making ...just gonna do some rice:* There are yet further examples of ellipsis here, in this case again involving omitting both the verb *to be* and the main subject pronouns. The use of the verb 'do' here is interchangeable with 'make' or 'cook'; 'do' is a ubiquitous verb in spoken language which can be

made to collocate with a wide range of nouns, usually adding in the process a note of informality. It is noteworthy, too, that the phrase is headed by the adverb *just* which is itself a frequent marker of informal and casual discourse.

- 1.38 *not sure actually*: Although a further clear example of ellipsis, involving the omission of the personal pronoun and the verb *to be*, the phrase is actually something of a fixed, routinised expression, and is more likely than not to occur in this form in most informal spoken communication.
- 1.43 *that'll destroy your tape*: A reference to the tape - the speakers knew they were being recorded.
- 1.48 *You may as well turn it off now then*: *then* functions as a kind of summary word, marking the closing of an action or sequence of talk.
- 11.40 This sequence of exchanges contains several examples of the seemingly  
-57 random topic switching and topic overlapping which is characteristic of much informal conversation. Questions remain unanswered or the answers are postponed; questions and answers overlap; turns are punctuated by hesitations and false starts. On the surface there appears to be much divergence, disconnection and incoherence. However, there is nonetheless a large measure of convergence by repetition. For example, the speakers use each other's words, employ parallel syntactic forms and generally pattern questions and replies in such a way as to confirm that there is a strong sense of cooperation, as well as mutual support and common interest in their exchanges. For example, *take* (1.40/1.43); *thirty-five minutes* (11.43/45/50); *do/did* (11.48/50); *yeah* (11.46/47); *drain the water off* (11.55-57). And so on. The repetitions across speaking turns are clearly not the work of people responding non-creatively, disinterestedly and automatically; they serve to create a strong sense of rapport and interpersonal involvement.
- 1.49 *may as well*: This is an example of a composite modal item. It is not absolutely fixed: the alternative 'might as well', a more indirect form, is also possible.
- 1.54 The use of *after here* is typical of informal spoken language. More formal speech or formal written language would usually have 'afterwards'.
- 1.58 *!// switch it off when you turn that on*: Demonstratives and other deictics occur relatively densely in examples of language-in-action. Many of the referents are immediately visible and deictic reference is entirely appropriate. Indeed, at several points here the presence of nouns would be redundant. See also 1.60.
- 1.59 *When Sahib used to come out* The use of *out* with *come* rather than the more usual 'come over' or 'come round' relates to the fact that the family lives on the outskirts of a town or city and that Sahib travels *out* from a point nearer the centre.

1.60 *it'd be about an inch thick on the, bottom it would*: The presence of the repeated verb tag *it would* functions as a kind of reinforcement to the statement. Such structures have been called TAILS and they occur almost exclusively in spoken discourse, mainly as here for purposes of adding emphasis. Tails always occur in full rather than contracted form; that is *it would* and not *it'd*.

### Further reading

For a fuller discussion of ellipsis in relation to spoken discourse see McCarthy and Carter (1995) and Carter and McCarthy (1995a).

For a discussion of creativity in conversation and the use of literary strategies in conversational exchanges see Tannen (1989), and Carter and McCarthy (1995b).

Tannen (1989) is also a seminal source of analysis of repetition in discourse, especially with reference to patternings across speaking turns.

McCarthy (1988) and (1992a) reaches similar conclusions with particular reference to vocabulary patterns and repetitions.

Ishikawa (1991) is a further study of repetition in discourse.

There is discussion of the function of silences in conversation in Loveday (1982).

A seminal article on 'tails' is Aijmer (1989) and there is further commentary in Carter and McCarthy (1995a). McCarthy and Carter (1997) is a re-assessment of tails using extensive data examples.

# unit 8

## Family and relatives



### Activity

Make a list, in order of significance, of the main language features which you would expect to find in a conversation between a mother and a daughter talking in a relaxed and easy manner about family matters and family arrangements. Some of the features you might like to consider are: shifts in topic, use of evaluative words and phrases, repetition, ELLIPSIS, DEIXIS.

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> female

<S 02> female

<S 01> and <S 02> are mother and daughter.

In this recording the two speakers are at home. The main subject of conversation is 'family tensions'. The mother's sister, who is staying with them with her family, is upset because a party has been arranged and they are unable to be there due to previous commitments.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> And erm so we thought we'd have someone to dinner and have a
- 2 party you know a dinnerparty over this coming weekend but they're
- 3 not going to be here so.
- 4 <S 02> Well that would be boring
- 5 <S 01> Don't... Not quite sure when they thought we were going to do it
- 6 but there we are.

7 <S 02> But she's saying that erm loads of people that they're meant to be  
8 staying with can't remember [laughs]. Apparently erm someone's  
9 moving well to a new job and someone else has got relatives coming  
10 to stay. So they can't  
11 <S 01> Oh up in Suffolk?  
12 <S 02> Mm. Don't know. But anyway.  
13 <S 01> Oh. But they're not. I mean they knew we were away for that whole  
14 week cos I wrote and told them.  
15 <S 02> What week? Easter week?  
16 <S 01> Yes.  
17 <S 02> Mm.  
18 <S 01> And they they'd already made their plans for various visits before  
19 they arrived. It's called a hoof.  
20 <S 02> What is that? [laughs] Is it rubber?  
21 <S 01> Yes. I think it's probably quite old and rather  
22 <S 02> Where'd you get it?  
23 <S 01> inflexible  
24 <S 02> Where's it from?  
25 <S 01> A chemist. Erm do you know the chemist which is now Boots in  
26 Petswood?  
27 <S 02> Yeah.  
28 <S 01> That's where I got it. I mean they [laughs] ... you use it like this,  
29 <S 02> [laughs]  
30 <S 01> Push back the cuticle.  
31 <S 02> Mm.  
32 <S 01> And when I had a manicure free of charge  
33 <S 02> When did you have a manicure?  
34 <S 01> They were doing them free in the Army and Navy when I went to a  
35 special shopping evening.  
36 <S 02> Were they?  
37 <S 01> Yes. So I had one.  
38 <S 02> Mm Mm  
39 <S 01> But she didn't like the way I filed my nails. She didn't  
40 <S 02> What would they make of mine? [laughs]  
41 <S 01> I take them too far down at the edges  
42 <S 02> Mm  
43 <S 01> You think I do as well do you?  
44 <S 02> Yes definitely  
45 <S 01> [laughs]

46 <S 02> Can't believe it.  
47 <S 01> Anyway. So I can't celeb, can't have any celebration with them cos  
48 we were going to have something this weekend and then they said  
49 they were going to be away so  
50 <S 02> Well if they're going on Tuesday.  
51 <S 01> Yes but Dad won't be here will he.  
52 <S 02> You're the sister not him.  
53 <S 01> Eh?  
54 <S 02> You're the sister not him.  
55 <S 01> He wouldn't go to that place anyway.  
56 <S 02> Is it not er nice at all?  
57 <S 01> Oh some of the things are delicious yes. But it's a long way from here.  
58 <S 02> Just got to be careful what you choose.  
59 <S 01> It's a [inaudible] You can't choose. He just cooks them a meal. If they  
60 ring up and say they're going, he serves a meal.  
61 <S 02> Where is it then?  
62 <S 01> [coughs] Battersea.  
63 <S 02> Is that Sally lives there or something?  
64 <S 01> Or Battarsia  
65 <S 01> Mm.  
66 <S 02> Battarsia. [laughs]  
67 <S 01> [laughs]  
68 <S 02> Erm where's Battersea ... Dogs' Home? It's not that far It's on the way  
69 out of  
70 <S 01> It's just south of Victoria.  
71 <S 02> Yeah.  
72 <S 01> Of Yes. Just south of Victoria.  
73 <S 02> I suppose it's a long way to go out for dinner though isn't it?  
74 <S 01> It is on a weekd weeknight.  
75 <S 02> Except he can go straight from work.  
76 <S 01> They wanted to go last time. They thought that we could go straight  
77 from work ... and erthey could ... because Dad has the car he could  
78 then drive us all back.  
79 <S 02> I remember that. Remember a bit of a fuss.  
80 <S 01> And because I was coming home at lunchtime.  
81 <S 02> Why couldn't they ... they'd get the train and meet us there?  
82 <S 01> Erm [pause] I think they were going to be in London anyway during  
83 the day so they would meet us there or have us pick them up on the  
84 way.

- 85 <S 02> Mm. I see.  
 86 <S 01> But... if we make a thing about duck pancakes  
 87 <S 02> Yeah.  
 88 <S 01> She says he always does lobster and  
 89 <S 02> Mm. Yeah. Something else nice.  
 90 <S 01> something else but I've *never* had lobster there.  
 91 <S 02> Lobster and?  
 92 <S 01> Prawns?  
 93 <S 02> **No. No.**  
 94 <S 01> Scallops?  
 95 <S 02> Scallops it might have been. Might have been scallops.  
 96 <S 01> I've never had anything like that there.

### General commentary

This conversation is structured along the lines of 'comment-elaboration'. Speakers switch topics relatively freely commenting on each other's statements and elaborating briefly in response to follow-up questions or further comments. The elaboration not uncommonly involves evaluative remarks. Such a structure is frequent in informal conversations between speakers in the same family or between speakers enjoying close relationships. There is no marked overall purpose or outcome to the conversation. Because the speakers can take much for granted about their relationship and mutual knowledge, they do not elaborate and ellipsis is common. Mutual support and convergence is evidenced through widespread repetition.

### Line-by-line commentary

1.5 *not quite sure*: Note the ELLIPSIS of *I* here. This is common with verbs of mental process' (such as 'know', 'think', 'be sure', 'suppose', etc.). Examples:

A: What time is it?

B: Not sure, *or* Don't know, *or* Think it's about five.

See also 1.12; 1.46.

1.6 *but there we are*: A fixed phrase meaning that there seems little more that can be done.

1.7 *loads of people*: The use of *loads of* with countable and uncountable nouns is very common in informal spoken language. 'Lots of would be a little less informal, 'a lot of would be rather neutral, and 'many' would sound absurdly formal in this context.

- 1.11 *up in Suffolk*: References to places in Britain are frequently made using the prepositions 'up' and 'down'. The geographical position of the speaker relative to the reference is usually significant. The speaker here is south of Suffolk. (See also Unit 5.)
- 1.12 *But anyway*. A fixed phrase similar to *but there we are* (1.6 above) which indicates that the speaker has little more to say on this topic and may wish to change the topic.
- 1.19 *It's called a hoof*. A sudden switch in topic, probably occasioned by a switch in the direction of the listener's gaze. A hoof is an instrument used for pushing back cuticle skin on one's nails. See Unit 10, 1.52 for a similar switch.
- 1.22 Note how *where did you* is contracted to *where'd you*. This is perfectly normal and is not 'bad' English.
- 1.25 *Boots*: The name of a chain of department stores in Britain all containing a pharmaceutical section.
- 1.34 *They were doing them*: The use of an unspecific pronoun is not uncommon with reference to general processes which one undergoes.
- 1.34 *Army and Navy*: Army and Navy Stores is the name of a British Department Store.
- 1.38 *Mm mm ... definitely*: Throughout this exchange there is much mutual support through encouraging back-channelling and explicitly positive verbal response.
- 1.43 *as well is*, far more common in informal spoken language than 'also', which has a more formal, written feel to it; 'too' is also common in informal spoken language.
- 1.47 *Anyway*: Speakers regularly use this marker to go back to topics that have been interrupted or diverged from, or else to signal that the topic is coming towards its end.
- 1.50 *Well if they're going on Tuesday*: Subordinate clauses which stand on their own and which remain uncompleted are relatively common in informal conversations. There is an invitation to the other speaker to verbally complete or at least infer the content presupposed by the main clause which it is judged unnecessary to elaborate on.
- 1.51 *Dad*: This is the most common, informal way of referring to one's father. 'Father' would be very formal, and 'Daddy' is mostly used by little children. Compare the discussion of ways of referring to one's mother in Unit 4.
- 1.54 *You're the sister not him*: Her father cannot, of course, literally be a 'sister'. The daughter means that her mother should take the decision since the relative involved is **her** sister, and so it should not matter whether the father (her sister's brother-in-law) is present or not.
- 1.58 *Just got to be careful*: Another example of ellipsis involving an ellipsis of a personal pronoun subject. Additionally the auxiliary verb *have* is ellipted.

- 1.63 *Is that Sally lives there*: A combination of three questions (a) 'Is that (where Sally lives)?' - a false start (b) ('Does Sally live there?' — not fully formed as a result of the previous false start and (c) 'Is (it) Sally (who) lives there?'
- 1.63 *or something*: The phrase is deliberately vague and invites the listener to specify further.
- 11.62 *Battersia*: The speakers play with the pronunciation of Battersea. Battersea is  
 -68 not a particularly salubrious district of London. It is, for example, known primarily for its power station and its Dogs' Home (1.65). It can be made to sound more attractive by a change in pronunciation which lengthens the second syllable, giving an effect of elegance or upper-class speaking style. This is one further example of creative verbal play for humorous purposes. (See also Unit 6.)
- 1.70 *Victoria*: Another district of London, known for its railway station which links London with the European rail network.
- 1.75 *Except he can go straight from work*: This is another subordinate clause which stands on its own. However, the clause complements *It's a long way to go out for dinner* (1.73). As noted above (1.50), apparently self-standing subordinate clauses are frequent in informal spoken discourse. The 'completion' is either present previously in the discourse or is judged to be inappropriate because the other speakers can recover the main proposition for themselves and to be explicit is unnecessary. Speakers can also complete each other's utterances by providing a 'missing' clause. In this way conversational meanings are jointly or co-constructed.
- 11.76 *They ... we ... he*: There is a density of reference here which is perfectly clear to  
 -78 the speakers because the people referred to are clearly established but which would make the conversation almost completely incomprehensible to those 'outside' this conversation.
- 1.83 *have us pick them up on the way*: Pseudo-passive constructions such as this are common in spoken English though less common in written English. The structure is thus an informal alternative to 'be picked up by us on the way'. 'We could pick them up' is also possible but the choice of a passive or pseudo-passive possibly underscores a tone of slight irritation that her sister and family required things to be arranged for them and were imposing a little too much.
- 1.86 *make a thing about*: *thing* is one of the most frequent nouns in spoken English and regularly occurs in such phrases as 'make a thing about' which means 'draw attention to' or 'make a fuss about'.
- 11.88 *does lobster*. The use of *do* as a ubiquitous transitive verb of action is frequent in spoken English. An alternative here would be the verbs 'cook' or 'prepare'. (See also Unit 12.)
- 11.88 There is a real effort here by both speakers to jointly construct meaning and to  
 -95 locate appropriate words. The conversational convergence is also reflected by

repetition of words and phrases across and within speaking turns: *something else, scallops, might have been, there*. Repetitions like this are a common feature of conversations in which both speakers share presuppositions and are mutually supportive. (See also Units 7 and 9.)

- 1.95 *Scallops it might have been*: *Scallops* is front-placed and is thus foregrounded as of main topical significance. The front-placing is prompted by the speaker's question in 1.94.

### Further reading

For discussion of vague language see Channell (1994).

Bublitz (1988) examines back-channelling and White (1989) discusses cross-cultural differences in back-channelling behaviour between Japanese and American speakers.

On subordinate clauses in spoken language, see Schleppegrell (1992).

On *thing* in conversation, see Fronek (1982).

For an initial study of 'completing' structures in dialogue, see Lerner (1991).



### Activity

When two people talk about experiences of places, people or events which they both have in common, would you expect them to relate extended narratives? If so, why? If not, why not? If there are narratives recounted, what form would you expect them to take? To help you, read Units 1 and 2 first.

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> male

<S 02> male

In this extract two middle-aged male teachers talk and reminisce about their days teaching together and, in particular, about time spent at a school, Broadlands School, which they have both recently visited.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> I was amazed walking into Broadlands School how it had changed  
 2 but it hadn't changed if you see what I mean?  
 3 <S 02> Erm.  
 4 <S 01> The old the old classrooms were still there and the little raised things  
 5 by the boss's, what was the boss's offices all brought back memories.  
 6 <S 02> It's it's not changed vastly  
 7 <S 01> No it was a strange sort of feeling walking into that place.  
 8 <S 02> How did Olive speak of it, with certain contempt?  
 9 <S 01> Yes I suppose she did speak of it. Yes I said I remember this when it

10 was a woodwork room [<S 02> Mm] her room and I said cor crikey  
11 it looks as though it could do with one or two. Yes she said they  
12 rearrange the deckchairs round the edges every so often but that's  
13 as far as they go with the place. I think she does some superb work  
14 for them. You just walk in.  
15 <S 02> She's good at what she does.  
16 <S 01> She's very good at what she does. I didn't realise how under underpaid  
17 she is.  
18 <S 02> Well she's not  
19 <S 01> Well she's not on a big scale is she?  
20 <S 02> She's probably on the first allowance so she was probably earning  
21 about  
22 <S 01> Eighteen thousand.  
23 <S 02> Erm.  
24 <S 01> Which is not a massive great amount is it? For someone of her  
25 talents. [<S 02> Well she] She seems sort of content with that level.  
26 <S 02> Well she's like Aubrey was I mean Aubrey was the sort of person who  
27 would never have made a great never a career.  
28 <S 01> No no that's true.  
29 <S 02> And there are people like that who who are very good at what they  
30 do.  
31 <S 01> Yeah  
32 <S 02> I mean Aubrey is very talented both in and out of the classroom you  
33 know good teacher good diplomat nice bloke I've often thought of  
34 contrasting Aubrey and Stan Klebham you know because Aubrey  
35 was the genuine article.  
36 <S 01> Absolutely.  
37 <S 02> Stan had sort of the appearance of the genuine article [<S 01 > and  
38 wasn't] who actually was a little creep who wanted to further himself.  
39 <S 01> Well look where he's got now he erm he's Clerk to the Governors I  
40 think.  
41 <S 02> Yeah well that's erm that's what he should have been years ago.  
42 [<S 01 yeah] I think he's ended up in the right job.  
43 <S 01> You're probably right. Be interesting to see what he looks like. A little  
44 wizened hatchet-faced man.  
45 <S 02> I think he'll look. He's the sort of bloke who won't age much. He'll still  
46 look like Willy Carson's grandfather you know refugee from a racing  
47 stable or whatever. I shall never forget the time that there was this  
48 there was this staff match that he refereed and I got more and more

49 and more and more frustrated and irritated by it. And I could  
50 contain myself no longer. This is I think this was the beginning of the  
51 time that he really really seriously began to dislike me you know on a  
52 professional basis. Cos I went up to him afterwards. Cos I'd suffered a  
53 fair bit and everybody had it was pathetic, I said Stanley  
54 I said I should like to congratulate you on the way you handled that  
55 game. And his eyes but unfortunately I can't and walked off and left  
56 him, fuming. He had the knives out [inaudible]. But Aubrey was a  
57 great player  
58 <S 01> He was super again there were people like Rob Lummel who  
59 was of the same mould a nice character [<S 02> mm] who did his  
60 job well who taught adequately erm.  
61 <S 02> Never get on.  
62 <S 01> Absolutely right.  
63 <S 02> Never get on.  
64 <S 01> I suppose in a way like me.  
65 <S 02> Yes.  
66 <S 01> But wasn't I'm not career minded I've been pushed on occasions well  
67 you should be applying for deputy headship I wasn't interested.  
68 <S 02> Well you and Aubrey used to make me sick actually in the nicest  
69 possible way because erm I worked for two people and the subjects  
70 I taught I worked for two people who actually managed to be good  
71 teachers and be popular.  
72 <S 01> Erm.  
73 <S 02> Which is something that I never cracked you know. I managed to  
74 be a good teacher but I wasn't popular I thought to myself, I mean  
75 how can you follow that.  
76 <S 01> Follow that one yeah.

### General commentary

The speakers are reminiscing about shared experiences. Extended narratives could be expected to be out of place in such exchanges; instead, much can be and is taken for granted and there is therefore little need to identify people and places in any detailed way.

The exchanges are relatively staccato in organisation, with the speakers making a comment about a person or an event and then elaborating briefly upon it. There is extensive topic switching though the topics are all linked by the school and their time there about which the speakers are reminiscing.

## Line-by-line commentary

- l.4 *little raised things*: the use of *things* here is deliberately indefinite and vague (see VAGUE LANGUAGE). TOO great a degree of precision may make the speaker sound assertive and authoritative and this would probably be inappropriate for the reminiscing in which the friends are engaging. (See also 11.52–53 and 11.66–67.)
- ll.4 *The old the old; It's it's*: repetitions of this kind are common in spoken discourse  
–6 They allow a little more time to formulate what you want to say. (See also 11.69–70 below.)
- l.7 *It was a strange sort of feeling walking into that place: walking into that place* is a TAIL. Tails are common in informal conversation in English and allow the speaker to elaborate an idea, at the same time emphasising that it is important. Tails are more common in structures where subjects and accompanying verbs are restated. For example: *He's a very nice person Carl is*. In this example a non-finite verb phrase elaborates the subject *it*. Notice that the tail can be put in subject position and that the resulting structure would sound more formal: '*Walking into that place* was a strange feeling'.
- l.10 *Woodwork room her room*: this is not a 'tail' (see l.7 above) but sounds more like a restatement.
- l.10 *Cor* and *crikey* express surprise or shock. The words are normally more common in the speech of middle-aged people. *Cor* is also sometimes written 'kaw'; both these words can be used on their own but used here together serve to intensify the feelings expressed.
- l.11 *it could do with one or two*: an abbreviation of 'it could do with one or two coats of paint', meaning it looked shabby and needed painting.
- l.12 *rearrange the deckchairs*: A deckchair is a collapsible chair normally used for sitting outside and in the sun. Such chairs are easily moved and rearranged. The phrase in English 'rearranging the deckchairs' is an abbreviation of 'rearranging the deckchairs on the *Titanic*', and has a further meaning, that trivial and easy things are being done when there are more important things that need doing. (The ship *Titanic* sank, even though it was thought to be unsinkable. Simply rearranging deckchairs when the ship is sinking is pointless.) The comment is a negative one. Idioms, fixed phrases and, as here cultural allusions are often employed to evaluate actions, events and people.
- l.19 *a big scale*: The reference here is to scales of pay for teachers. There are four main basic grades for classroom teachers and several higher grades for more senior teachers.
- l.22 *eighteen thousand*: The word 'pounds' is frequently omitted in casual conversation.
- l.24 *Which is not a massive great amount is it?*: subordinate relative clauses are quite frequent in conversation, normally across speaking turns with the effect that

one speaker picks up on, or elaborates on or completes a statement made by a previous speaker. (See Unit 8 11.50 and 75.) The structure is common in written advertisements and gives this kind of text a spoken feel. A further adverbial phrase *for someone of her talents* is then added as a kind of after-thought.

Note also the intensification *massive great*, which is very common in conversational language. Other examples:

She had a *huge great* dog with her.

It was just a *tiny little* road.

- 11.33 *good teacher good diplomat nice bloke*: Notice how this structure involves the ellipsis of subject, verb and indefinite article. (*He is a good teacher ...*) The ellipsis makes things sound more informal and produces a listing, enumerating structure which pointedly focusses on Aubrey's qualities.
- 1.35 *the genuine article*: An idiomatic phrase used to mean that someone or something does not fake what they say or do and is a true representative of a particular quality or set of skills.
- 1.37 Notice the switch from formal vocabulary *appearance of the genuine article* to informal vocabulary *little creep*. Such switches can often mark satirically comic effects.
- 1.39 *Clerk to the Governors*: An administrative assistant to the governing body of the school, a committee consisting of people from inside and outside of the school.
- 1.43 *Be interesting to*: Notice the ellipsis of subject (*it*) and modal (*will* or *would*) and subject and verb. Ellipsis here gives the interaction a more informal feel.
- 1.44 *Wizened* means 'shrivelled', like a thin old person, usually said of someone's face.
- 1.44 *hatchet-faced*: With sharp features (a hatchet is a sharp instrument for chopping wood).
- 1.45 *bloke* is an informal word for *man*. American English speakers usually say *guy*, *And guy* is becoming more common in British English too. (See also 1.33 above.)
- 1.46 Willy Carson was a famous jockey
- 1.47 *or whatever*, is another example of an indefinite expression where a deliberate lack of precision serves to make the proposition a little more casual and informal. The phrase *and/or whatever* normally only occurs at the end of an utterance or sequence of utterances.
- 1.48 *there was this staff match*: *This* is often used in spoken narratives instead of the indefinite article *a(n)*; it makes the people and things it refers to more vivid and immediate.
- 1.53 *a fair bit*: The more formal, written equivalent would probably be *quite a lot*.

- l.56 *he had the knives out*: An idiom meaning 'he was just looking for every opportunity to attack/criticise'.
- ll.61 *Never get on ... never get on*: The two speakers revert to a simple present so  
 -63 that their comments are both in the manner of a generalisation as well as a specific comment on the individual (Rob Lummel). See also 11.75-76 for comment on repetition across speaking turns.
- ll.66 *I've been pushed on occasions well you should*: Here direct speech is embedded within  
 -67 a report. *Pushed* operates as a reporting verb so that *well, you should is* represented as direct speech. This is a common feature of spoken narrative reports. (See also 1.75 below.)
- ll.68 *in the nicest possible way*: This phrase allows the speaker to soften the threatening  
 -69 aspect of what he says. It makes his direct comment about his interlocutor (and Aubrey who is absent) less direct and to some extent protects both speaker and hearer, allowing neither to lose face too much. Other expressions that protect participants' face include:
- What a boring crowd of people! *Present company excepted*, of course.  
 I think a lot of people here, *myself included*, have been rather lazy of late.  
*Mo offence intended*, but I think you're making a big mistake here.
- l.73 *Cracked*: An informal word meaning roughly 'succeed in' or 'find the solution to'.
- ll.75 *follow that ... follow that oneyeah*: This expression means roughly 'it would be  
 -76 difficult to outdo/improve on that'. The two speakers repeat each other's words relatively frequently in this exchange. See also 11.61-63 (*Never get on ... never get on*) and 11. 15-16 (*good at what she does... very good at what she does*).  
 Verbatim repetition and repetition with minimal variation across speaking turns generally indicate agreement between speakers, the kind of convergence where they simply reinforce, by restatement, what the other has said. Where repetition with variation does occur, the second utterance is normally intensified by the speaker. Either a stronger verb or adjective is selected or intensifying adverbs such as 'very' or 'extremely' are employed. Disagreement is normally signalled if different vocabulary items are selected.

## Further reading

McCarthy (1984) and (1988) has observations on uses of vocabulary across speaking turns (what he terms 'interactive lexis').

On repetition across turn boundaries, see Tannen (1989: ch. 3).

On tails, see Aijmer (1989).

On subordinate clauses in spoken discourse see Halliday (1989), Schleppegrell (1992).

On the question of face, and how speakers may threaten it or protect it, see Brown and Levinson (1987).



## Students chatting round the tea-table

### Activity

Because the conversation you are going to hear is a very informal one, a number of colloquial words and expressions occur. These are not always easy to find (or simply are not included) in dictionaries, because most dictionaries do not take everyday conversational language into account. Check the following list of words and expressions that occur in the extract. How many do you already know/understand? How many of them are in the dictionary that you use most frequently when you have problems with English words? Explanations are given for all of them in the **Line-by-line commentary**.

*It's a toss-up between ... and...* (idiom)

*wodge* (noun)

*fag* (noun)

*dangly* (adjective)

*wow* (exclamation)

### Speakers and setting

«S01» female (20)

«S02» female (21)

«S03» female (21)

All three are Art College students who share a house in Carmarthen, Wales.

«S 01» and «S 03» are from the south-west of England. «S 02» is from South Wales. They are having tea at home on a Sunday.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Does anyone want a chocolate bar or anything?  
2 <S 02> Oh yeah yes please  
3 <S 03> Yes please  
4 <S 02> [laughs]  
5 <S 03> [laughs]  
6 <S 01> You can have either a Mars Bar, Kit-Kat or erm cherry Bakewell  
7 <S 03> Oh erm it's a toss-up between [<S 02> [laughs]] the cherry  
8 Bakewell and the Mars Bar isn't it?  
9 <S 01> Well shall I bring some in then cos you might  
10 want another one cos I don't want them all, I'm gonna be  
11 <S 03> Miss paranoid about weight aren't you?  
12 <S 01> Yes but you know  
13 <S 03> You're not fat Mand  
14 <S 01> I will be if I'm not careful  
15 <S 02> Oh God  
16 <S 01> I ate almost a whole jar of raisins this weekend [<S 02> <S 03>  
17 [laugh]]  
18 my Mum gave me all these  
19 <S 03> Look at her, look  
20 <S 01> She goes oh [inaudible]  
21 <S 03> What was that about, you said about you and your Mum don't get on  
22 [<S 02>[laughs]] I'd say you got on all right with that big wodge of  
23 food there  
24 <S 01> We can relate to chocolate ... I think they're the little ones  
25 actually so you can have one of them and one of them if you like  
26 <S 02> Oh those cherry Bakewells look lovely  
27 <S 03> They do don't they?  
28 <S 01> Oh they were ... gorgeous... did you say you'd like a cup of tea?  
29 <S 02> Yes  
30 <S 03> All right then  
31 <S 01> Sound like a right mother don't I?  
32 <S 03> You do  
33 <S 02> But they would go smashing with a cup of tea wouldn't they?  
34 <S 01> They would yeah  
35 <S 02> Cup of tea and a fag  
36 <S 01> Cup of tea and a fag Misses, we're gonna have to move the table I  
37 think

38 <S 03> Yeah d'you like Sarah's table she's constructed of erm boots and and  
39 a book?

40 <S 01> Oh that's brilliant

41 <S 03> Eh that's really good there look

42 <S 02> and it's got the Milky Way wrapper as that little extra support

43 <S 03> I like Sunday nights for some reason, I don't know why

44 <S 02> [laughs] cos you come home

45 <S 03> I come home

46 <S 02> You come home to us

47 <S 01> and pig out

48 <S 02> Yeah yeah

49 <S 03> Sunday's a really nice day I think

50 <S 02> It certainly is

51 <S 03> It's a really nice relaxing day

52 <S 02> It's an earring, it's an earring

53 <S 03> ' Oh lovely oh, lovely

54 <S 02> It's fallen apart a bit but

55 <S 03> It's quite a nice one actually, I like that, I bet, is that supposed to be  
56 straight?

57 <S 02> Yeah

58 <S 03> Oh I think it looks better like that

59 <S 02> And there was another bit as well, another dangly bit

60 <S 03> What, attached to

61 <S 02> The top bit

62 <S 03> That one

63 <S 02> Yeah ... so it was even

64 <S 03> Mobile earrings

65 <S 01> What, that looks better like that, it looks better like that

66 <S 02> Oh what did I see, what did I see, stained glass, there was, I went to a  
67 craft fair [<S 03> mm] erm in Cambridge and erm I know, I went to  
68 a craft fair in Cambridge and they had erm this stained glass stall and  
69 it was all mobiles made out of stained glass [<S 03> ah wow] and  
70 they were superb they were, and mirrors with all different colours,  
71 like going round in the colour, colour-wheel but all different sized bits  
72 of coloured glass on it [<S 03> Oh nice] it was superb, massive

## General commentary

This is typical of casual talk, where the topics drift from one to another, sometimes provoked by what the speakers are doing (e.g. eating and weight problems), or objects in the immediate situation (the discussion about the earring), or just something which springs to mind by association (the remarks about the craft fair), or the whole present situation itself (talking about Sunday). No one person is in control of the topics, and almost anything may be talked about.

## Line-by-line commentary

- 1.1 *or anything*: The other girls understand what this vague expression means. For them it probably includes the possibility of a biscuit or a cake, anything which typically goes with a cup of tea. What do you think speakers might imply when they say the following remarks?:

Are you going to the cafeteria? Will you get me a sandwich or something?

Maureen said you've moved into your new office. Let me know if you need any notepaper or anything.

- 11.2 Don't forget that British English speakers will always include 'please' after  
-3 'yes' when accepting offers of food/drink; it may sound quite impolite to just say 'yes'. Equally, if someone is checking that you have what you need or want, it is normal to say 'yes thanks':

A: Have you had coffee?

B: Yes thanks.

- 1.6 *Mars Bar*. A best-selling chocolate bar with a soft caramel centre. *Kit-Rat*. another best-selling chocolate bar, but with a wafer-biscuit centre. *Cherry Bake well*: a small cake or tart with a cherry on top, named after a town in the north of England.
- 1.7 *it's a toss-up between ... and...:* A colloquial expression meaning *it's difficult to choose between ... and...* (see **Activity** above). The reference is to tossing a coin in the air and having to choose which side will land upwards (e.g. at the beginning of a football match to decide which team will play from which end).

- l.8 *isn't it*: This conversation contains a number of TAGS, which create informality and intimacy among the speakers. They do not necessarily demand a reply; they just suggest a shared view of the situation. (See also Unit 4.) The tags in this extract are:

line	context
18	It's a toss-up between the cherry Bakewell and the Mars Bar <b>isn't it</b>
11	Miss paranoid about weight <b>aren't you</b>
27	They do <b>don't they</b>
31	Sound like a right mother <b>don't I</b>
33	They would go smashing with a cup of tea <b>wouldn't they</b>

Note in particular how the tags often occur when the subject (and sometimes the verb) are ellipsed, as in 1.11: [*You're*] *Miss paranoid...* and 1.31: (*I*) *sound like* .... Other examples:

Got a pen I could borrow, have you?  
Been staying out late again, has she?

Note also how in the case of 1.31 and 1.33, the other speakers reply with the corresponding tag / reduced form too (1.32: *You do*; 1.34: *They would yeah*).

- l.11 The use of *Miss* here is humorous/sarcastic. Other similar examples:

He's real Mister I-know-best, he is.  
She's always playing the little Miss hard-done-by. ('hard-done-by' = badly treated by other people)

- l.12 *Yes but you know*. Notice how sometimes a speaking turn can be no more than just DISCOURSE MARKERS. (See also Unit 6, 11.36-37.) It is not always necessary to say a full sentence with 'content'.
- l.13 *Mand* is a short form of the girl's name, Amanda.
- l.19 Although the tape is difficult to interpret here, this is an example of using 'go' to report people's words and/or actions, which is frequent in informal conversation. (See also Unit 20, 1.42.)
- l.21 *wodge*: A colloquial word for a large piece of something (usually food such as cakes, bread, pies, meat). (See **Activity** above.) Also used for a pile of money (notes).

- l.25 *One of them*: When *them* is stressed (as it is here) it is used in informal conversation as an alternative for 'those':

(In a cake shop)

Assistant: Yes please.

Customer: (*pointing to the cakes*) I'll have one of them and two of them, please.

However, when 'them' is used as an alternative for 'those' in structures such as the following the usage is generally regarded as non-standard dialect form.

Them people over the road always make a lot of noise.

Don't buy them CDs. They're not worth it.

- l.28 *gorgeous* is a word many British English speakers associate with female speakers, although this may be changing nowadays.

- l.31 *right* here is a colloquial alternative to *real/proper*. It is typically used in pejorative contexts by most southern British English speakers:

He's a right idiot, he is.

But in the north of England it is also used as an adverb meaning *really* and is used in positive contexts too:

We had a right good time in Spain last year.

- l.33 *go smashing*: *smashing* is a colloquial word meaning 'wonderful' / 'very good'. It has no adverb form 'smashingly', and so is used in its adjective form here, to mean 'wonderfully' / 'very well'.

- ll.35 *fag*: Colloquial word for a cigarette. (See **Activity** above). In 1.36, the speaker  
-36 is mimicking working-class speech (perhaps imagining a factory cafe or canteen, addressing a colleague).

- l.40 *Brilliant* is frequently used in exclamations by younger speakers to mean 'great/wonderful'.

- l.42 *Milky Way*: Another popular chocolate bar, this time with a very light, soft milky-textured centre.

- ll.44 The repetition here is done in a semi-humorous, affectionate tone of voice.  
-46

- l.47 *pig out*: eat far more than you should.

- l.52 One of the girls has clearly expressed curiosity (probably by her facial expression) as to what \_\_\_\_\_ is holding (a broken earring).

1.59 *danglj*. The -y suffix is often used to create informal, rather vague adjectives (see **Activity** above). Other examples:

Sorry, this ice-cream's all runny, (it's melting and running like a liquid)  
They were made of elasticky sort of stuff, (something like elastic)

1.59 Note how *bit* is used as an informal alternative to *part*.

1.65 *That* and *it* are used one after the other here to refer to the same thing. *That* has a pointing function; *it* simply repeats something already referred to or obvious in the situation.

1.69 *Wow* is a frequent exclamation/reaction of amazement/appreciation used by younger speakers. (See **Activity** above.)

1.70 *They were superb, they were*: This is an example of a TAIL, where the subject + verb are repeated at the end of the clause. Other examples'.

She's a fool, she is.  
I'm always spilling my coffee, I am.

This structure is common when we are *evaluating or commenting on* something, rather than just stating a fact. One of the main functions of tails such as these is to reinforce the comment.

1.7 *The colour-wheel* is a circular chart used by artists and other people working with colour which shows the relationship between the different colours in the spectrum.

### **Further reading**

On how topics shift and change in everyday conversation, see Gardner (1987).

On tails, see Aijmer (1989); Carter and McCarthy (1995a); McCarthy and Carter (1997).

Further examples and a discussion of the creative use of suffixes may be found in Carter and McCarthy (1995b).



## Activity

Think of five things you might want to ask for at a post office in your country. If possible, compare your list with someone else's or with someone from a different country.

Are post offices generally friendly places? What factors might make the conversation between a customer and the assistant more informal/friendly in a post office or other kind of shop?

## Extract 1

### Speakers

- <S 01> customer: male  
<S 02> assistant: female

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Right, send that first class please  
2 <S 02> That one wants to go first class, right we'll see if  
3 it is, it's not it's not 41, it's a 60, I thought it would be, I'd be in  
4 the ... 60 pence [6 sees] there we are  
5 <S 01> Lovely thank you  
6 <S 02> Okay 70 80 whoops 90 100  
7 <S 01> Thanks very much  
8 <S 02> Thank you

## Extract 2

### Speakers

<S 01> customer, female

<S 02> assistant: female

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Can I have a second class stamp please Les?  
2 <S 02> You can ... there we are  
3 <S 01> Thank you  
4 <S 02> And one penny thank you  
5 <S 01> That's for me to spend is it?  
6 <S 02> That's right  
7 <S 01> I bought a new book often first class when I was in  
8 town today and I've left them at home in me shopping bag  
9 <S 02> Have you?  
10 <S 01> And I've got one left  
11 <S 02> Oh dear [laughs]  
12 <S 01> Bye  
13 <S 02> Bye

## Extract 3

### Speakers

<S 01> customer: female

<S 02> assistant: male

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Can I post this second class please?  
2 <S 02> You may. Put him over the bar, just there, look, where  
3 my finger is  
4 <S 01> There [laughs]  
5 <S 02> They're still tingling, thank you ... second class is  
6 thirty-six  
7 <S 01> Right... I need erm to get a TV licence for my Mum, can you do  
8 it month by month or do you have to pay for it all at once or?  
9 <S 02> Er ... well at the

10 moment we've got no forms for you to do it month by month but er  
 11 if you write to TV, Bristol [<S 01 > yeah] just TV Bristol, TV  
 12 Licences Bristol, I think they'll send you a form monthly  
 13 <S 01> Right  
 14 <S 02> They're doing it, they used to do it in book form years  
 15 ago [<S 01 > yes] and I think they're starting it again  
 16 <S 01> Right  
 17 <S 02> So you, you know  
 18 <S 01> Cos she's probably not going to be in her own home for a year so  
 19 we just want to do it for a month at a time to see how she goes  
 20 <S 02> ' That's right, that's  
 21 right, or if she ever leaves she can always change the address  
 22 at a post office where she goes to  
 23 <S 01> Yeah  
 24 <S 02> If she does take a yearly one out, you know  
 25 <S 01> L Right okay, and the other  
 26 thing I need is this, a form for repayment and reinvestment of  
 27 savings certificates please  
 28 <S 02> Yep [ 12 sees] that's that  
 29 <S 01> Thanks very much, that's all, then I owe you for the stamp  
 30 <S 02> Thirty six, yeah  
 31 <S 01> I've got the six actually ... there we go  
 32 <S 02> There we are  
 33 <S 01> Lovely  
 34 <S 02> Thank you  
 35 <S 01> Thanks very much  
 36 <S 02> Thank you bye bye  
 37 <S 01> Bye bye

### General commentary

These three samples go from a very simple service encounter to more complex ones. **Extract 1** contains the bare, essential elements necessary to complete the business the customer wants:

- 1 Request for service (1.1)
- 2 Acknowledgement and stating price (11.2-3)
- 3 Handing over the goods (1.4)
- 4 Giving money and receiving change (11.5-6)
- 5 Closing the encounter (11.7-8)

**Extract 2** is different. As well as doing business, the customer enters into conversation with the assistant. The customer makes a joke (line 5) on receiving the change, which is only one penny (= less than 2 cents US\$) and then tells the assistant about buying stamps earlier in the day. The assistant joins in the joke and responds sympathetically to the customer's story. This is typical of many service encounters where **interactional** (personal/social) language is just as important as **transactional** ('business') language.

**Extract 3** is complex in the sense that three different requests for service are linked together in one transaction. The end of each transaction is clearly signalled by the customer with *right* (lines 7 and 25). In line 16, the customer seems to be indicating that the transaction has ended (*right*), but the assistant offers further information.

## Line-by-line commentary

### Extract 1

1 Note how *right* is used by the customer to mark the opening of the transaction.

*Send that first class:* Although this looks like an imperative verb, it is almost certainly an ellipsis of 'I'd like to send' or 'Can I send' (or something similar). Imperatives are considered very direct in British English and can often be heard as impolite. It would be very unlikely that a customer would use a simple imperative in this situation. However, ELLIPSIS is common in service encounters of this kind, and the assistant 'understands' that it is a request, not a command. Usually, in a post office, it is sufficient to say 'First (or second) class please', when handing over a letter.

*First class* (fast mail service) and *second class* (a slower service) refer to the two options you have when sending an inland letter in Great Britain. First class is quicker but more expensive.

Note the use of *phase*, even in an insignificant service such as buying a stamp. The safest rule is always to use 'please' in Britain when requesting goods and services. Not using 'please' can sound rude.

12 *That one wants to go first class:* It is, of course, the customer who *wants* the letter to go first class, not the letter itself, but *wants* here is used more with the meaning of 'needs' or 'should', which is a frequent usage in spoken language (e.g. 'My hair wants cutting', 'This room wants decorating').

13 Note how the assistant changes from *it's not 41* to *it's a 60*, the use of *a* here refers to the different bands of letter-charges and means roughly 'it's a letter that falls into the 60-class'.

14 *there we are* (see also extract 2,1.2, and extract 3,1.32): This is a common phrase used when handing anything over to someone (not just in shops). Alternatives you will sometimes hear include:

There you are.

There you go.

There we go. (see extract 3,1.31)

15 *lively* is often used just to mean 'good', 'fine' or 'thanks', as an informal acknowledgement when receiving something.

115 Note that *thank you / thanks* occurs three times. Saying thanks several times in  
-8 this way is an important means of marking that the encounter has finished. It is wrong to interpret it as 'over-politeness'.

16 *whoops* is typically said when you drop something (here probably a coin) or if someone stumbles or has a slight fall.

## Extract 2

17 *hook of ten first class*: This refers to a booklet containing ten first class stamps. When you want to buy a supply of stamps in a British post office, you can buy them in 'books' of first or second class stamps. A 'book' may contain 4, 6, 10 or more stamps.

18 *me shopping bag*: *Me* is a non-standard form of 'my', and is common throughout the Midlands and North of England, and in parts of Ireland.

1. *Oh dear* is a polite way of expressing sympathy when someone reports an unfortunate event.

## Extract 3

11 Compare this with line 1 in extract 1: There are various typical ways of asking for a letter to be sent:

I want to / Can I *send/post* this first class please.

Can I *have* this second class please.

I'd like this to go airmail please.

12 *You may* is a rather formal and polite reply to the customer's *can*.

12 *Put him over the bar*. The assistant is referring to the security bar on the post office counter, and wants the customer to put the letter on the weighing scales behind the bar to weigh it. Referring to the item as *him* is also typical of informal workplace situations such as this.

15 *tingling* here refers to the needle on the weighing scale. The needle has not stopped moving but the customer tries to remove the letter. The assistant wants the letter to stay on the scales until it is clear what the exact weight/price is.

- l.6 You will hear a variety of ways of referring to prices in pence in Ireland and Great Britain:
- Thirty-six pee please.  
 Thirty-six please.  
 Thirty-six pence please.
- l.7 *Mum* is the most common informal word for *mother* in Britain. In some parts of Britain and Ireland you may hear *Mam*, *Ma* or *Mammy* as alternatives. *Mummy* and *Mama* (ma'ma:) are considered rather upper-class if used by adults, but *Mummy* is often used by little children. (See also Unit 5, and Unit 8 for a discussion about ways of referring to a father.)
- l.14 *in book form* (compare extract 2, line 7): Formerly, it was possible to buy a booklet into which you stuck savings stamps (usually month by month or week by week) which could be used to pay for your annual TV licence when totalled up.
- l.28 *Yep* is a very informal, but business-like alternative to *yes*.
- l.29 *That's all*: This is said when you have finished your requests for goods or services.
- ll.36 *Bye bye* is not compulsory in service encounters of this kind. Here it probably happens since the conversation has been quite a long one. It would be much less likely to occur in extracts 1 and 2.

### Further reading

On service encounters in general, see Ventola (1987).

On how 'thank you' is used in shops, see Aston (1995).



This unit has two extracts. Do the **Activity** and study the **Commentary** for extract 1 first; leave extract 2 until you have finished all the work for extract 1.

### Extract 1

#### Activity

Before listening to Extract 1, think a bit about how the forms *7*/(or *will*) and *be going to* (often spoken *as gonna* in conversation) are used in English for making 'decisions about the future'.

If you cannot think of a simple rule or guideline for using the forms, have a look in one or two grammar reference books or English coursebooks and see what advice is given there.

(For comments on this activity, see **General commentary** below.)

#### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> customer: female (24)
- <S 02> customer: female (24)
- <S 03> female waitress: (20s)

Two old schoolfriends from South Wales meet up to have lunch in London, in a very informal restaurant, the type that serves hamburgers and other fast-food. At the start of the extract, they are looking at the menu. While they are discussing what to choose, the waitress comes up and stands silently, waiting for them to order.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> I'm gonna have er ... an Old Timer with cheese, I am  
2 <S 02> What's that?  
3 <S 01> The Old Timer burger, but I'm gonna have cheese with it  
4 <S 02> Oh right, I'm gonna have, I think I'm gonna have a  
5 veggy one with barbecue sauce on it  
6 <S 01> Mm, are you gonna have a starter, what you gonna have?  
7 <S 02> LYeah ... I'm trying not  
8 to have nachos [5 sees]  
9 <S 02> I'm either gonna have nachos, buffalo wings or potato  
10 skins  
11 [11 secs]  
12 <S 01> I'm gonna have the deep fried mushrooms, you like  
13 mushrooms, don't you?  
14 [3 secs]  
15 <S 02> I'm gonna have to have nachos, I'm addicted to it...  
16 I want, they don't do cider, and I don't want a beer, [<S 03> Hi]  
17 don't do cider, do you?  
18 <S 03> Sorry  
19 <S 02> Don't do cider  
20 <S 03> **No**  
21 <S 01> I'll have the deep fried mushrooms with erm, an Old  
22 Timer burger, can I have cheese on it?  
23 <S 03> What cheese?  
24 <S 01> What's the difference?  
25 <S 03> Swiss, Monterrey Jack is an American cheese [inaudible] how would  
26 you like it cooked?  
27 <S 01> Erm well done  
28 <S 03> Yes  
29 <S 02> Can I have the, er, nachos and, erm, I was wondering  
30 whether to have a veggy burger or the normal burger, erm, are the  
31 veggy burgers nice?  
32 <S 03> Yeah they're okay, they're not made on the premises though  
33 <S 02> All right I'll have, er, I'll have a normal burger then, with  
34 barbecued beans  
35 <S 03> How would you like it cooked?  
36 <S 02> Erm medium  
37 <S 03> And drinks

- 38 <S 02> En d'you have, er have you got pineapple juice?  
 39 <S 03> [nods her head]  
 40 <S 02> Can I have pineapple juice mixed with white wine?  
 41 Mixed together  
 42 <S 03> White wine  
 43 <S 02> Yeah, in a big glass with loads of ice  
 44 <S 01> [laughs] Erm, can I have, erm, mineral water, sparkling one?  
 45 <S 03> Okay  
 46 <S 01> Thanks

## Extract 1

### General commentary

In this extract, before they place their order, the two women are 'thinking aloud' about what they want to eat. They have probably already *decided* before the waitress takes their order, but at this stage, the decisions are provisional and personal and are simply statements of what they have decided to order when the waitress arrives. Note how their decisions are expressed by *be going to* when they are simply thinking aloud, but change to *'ll* (which is sometimes written as *will*) when they have to state their decision finally and 'externally' to the waitress.

*Be going to* is rooted in the present, what seems likely *now*, or what I intend *now* for the future, or what I predict based on the evidence *now*. It is a very **interpersonal** expression, in which *you*, the speaker, involve yourself personally *Willis* more neutral, objective and simply states what the future is certain to be, or most likely to be, or what you have decided it is to be.

Sometimes both forms are possible or are used together, but with a different shade of meaning:

It *will he* cold tonight, so be careful, those country roads *are going to be* icy

This use of both forms together is very frequent in informal weather forecasts on British radio and television, and seems to express a contrast between 'scientific prediction' *will and* a more interpersonal warning *be going to*, reinforced by the use of '*those* country roads', a very familiar, informal use of *those*.

I'm *gonna* have to go to bed soon.

This was said by a very tired hostess, late in the evening, to her dinner guests. She could have used *will*, but it would have sounded much more cold and neutral. *Going to* expressed well her personal feelings at that moment.

## Line-by-line commentary

- 1.1 *an Old Timer*, a brand name for a particular type of hamburger sold in this restaurant.

Note here the TAG *I am* at the end of the turn, which re-emphasises the personal pronoun *I* at the beginning of her turn. The *I* is stressed, not the *am*. This type of tag is frequent in conversation. Other examples:

She's a fool, *she* is.

He emigrated to New Zealand, *he* did.

They work with me, *they* do.

- 1.1.1 Notice the switch from *an* to *the* before *Old Timer burger*. When ordering food it is very common to refer to something from a menu using the definite article. Compare:

I'll have an orange juice, (where the speaker is not selecting from a list but is assuming that an orange juice is available)

I'll have the chicken, (where the speaker is selecting a particular chicken dish from the menu)

- 1.3 'Hamburger' is usually shortened to *burger* in informal conversation.
- 1.4 Note how useful (*oh*) *right* is as an informal follow-up to an answer from someone, when you want to show you have understood clearly what they tell you. Other examples:

A: Where's Hokkaido?

B: In the North of Japan.

A: Oh right.

A: What time do we have to be there?

B: Six-thirty.

A: Right.

The presence of *oh* can also suggest an element of surprise in the speaker's reaction. *Right* in 1.4 could also mean 'OK it's time for me to order now'.

- 1.5 *veggy*: A colloquial word for *vegetarian*. It is most often used for food, but can be used for a person too:

A: I don't want any meat, thanks.

B: Oh, you a veggy too?

A: Yeah.

B: Oh right, so am I actually.

- l.6 *whatyou gonna have*: In very quick, informal conversation, as well as shortening 'going to' to 'gonna', speakers sometimes leave out the verb 'be'. Here the speaker does not say 'What **are** you gonna have'.
- l.7 *nachos*: A spicy Latin-American crisp-type of snack often served as an appetizer.
- l.9 *buffalo wings*: chicken wings *potato skins*: thin chunks of potato with the peel on, –10 fried and served as an appetizer or starter.
- l.13 Note here a different TAG, *don't you*. Compare it with the reinforcing tag in 1.1. This type of tag, where an *affirmative* verb in the main clause is followed by a *negative* verb in the tag (or vice-versa), spoken *with falling* intonation, is used when you are reasonably sure that what you are saying is true, but you just want the other person to confirm it. If you use *rising* intonation on the tag, you sound less sure:

You like mushrooms, don't you? (fairly sure, confirm)

You like mushrooms, don't you? (not so sure, tell me)

See also the discussions of TAGS in Units 4 and 10.

- l.15 Although *nachos* is plural, the speaker sees the word as the (singular) name of the dish, and so says *addicted to it*, not *them*. *Them* would have been quite correct, too.
- l.16 The use of *do* here is common as an informal word meaning *sell* or *serve* in shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. (See also Unit 8.) Other examples:
- D'you do vegetarian food?  
You don't do children's clothes, do you?  
Do you do just bed and breakfast?
- l.17 At this point, <S 02> has turned towards the waitress, and is directing the question to her. Note when she repeats her question in 1.19 she does not repeat the whole question, just the verb and object. This is situational ELLIPSIS, which is very common in informal situations where things and people are present and fairly obvious in the context.
- l.18 *Sorry* is very common in informal conversation in British English to indicate you have not heard or understood what the other person has said.
- l.21 Note now the change to 'll as the speaker 'announces' her decision.
- ll.26 This is a very frequent sequence in food-ordering in restaurants where steaks –27 and hamburgers are concerned. The waiter /waitress asks 'How would you like it cooked?' or 'How would you like it done?' or even just 'How would you like it?'. Normally, the choice is between 'rare' (barely cooked, a little bloody), 'medium rare' (a little more cooked than rare), 'medium' (considered

'average', neither under- nor over-cooked), or 'well done' (fully cooked but not burnt). (See also 11.35–36.)

- 1.29 *I was wondering...* is a very indirect expression, combining past tense and continuous form. It makes what you are saying less direct and sounds more polite in situations where politeness is important. The actual time reference is to the present. Other examples:

I was wondering if I could have a word with you.

We were wondering whether to write to her. What do you think?

Were you looking for someone?

I was thinking of going to the cinema.

- 1.32 Note the position of *though* at the end of the clause. In formal written text, it is more likely to occur at the beginning of the clause. A formal, written version of the utterance might be:

The hamburgers are good, though they are not made on the premises.

The same is true of *then* in 1.33, which is also common at the end of the clause in informal spoken language.

- 1.38 Note how the speaker uses two constructions with 'have' here. *D'you have...?* means more or less the same as *Have you got...?*, but the form *with got* is more informal, and very common in everyday conversation.
- 1.43 *loads of* is one of a number of informal expressions common in conversation for expressing large amounts or quantities of something. The speaker could also have said 'lots of here. Other expressions you may hear in informal British English include 'heaps of, 'tons of, 'piles of, 'oodles of, 'stacks of, 'masses of. But each expression tends to have its own typical collocations, so listen out for them and the kinds of situations in which they are used. (See also Unit 16, 1.80.)
- 1.44 ELLIPSIS is common in ordering food and drinks and other types of goods and services. Here the speaker does not say *a sparkling one*, which would be expected in more formal, typically written grammar. Other examples:

Cheeseburger please, with French fries, (understood *a* or *one*)

Single to Oxford, please, (understood *a* or *one* single ticket)

## Extract 2

### Activity

This is a small part of another transcript of a recording made in a restaurant.

*Note:* There is no recording on the tape for this extract. The speakers are again looking at the menu and deciding what to order, before the waiter/waitress arrives,

but this time the situation is different. This time, <S 01> has invited <S 02> and is going to pay for her meal. How is this reflected in the speakers' choices of *be going to* and 'll'?

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Well what are you going to have then?  
2 <S 02> Erm I don't want any salad  
3 <S 01> Not [inaudible]  
4 <S 02> No thanks no I think I'll have  
5 [10 secs]  
6 <S 02> I think I'll have the haddock

## Extract 2

### General commentary

<S 01>, who has invited <S 02>, uses *be going to* in her question to ask <S 02> what she is thinking of ordering, but note that <S 02> does not use *be going to* in her answer. This is because it might sound as if she presumes that she can have anything she wants from the menu. When someone is inviting you, it is normal to say to them 'I think I'll have ...', which is (a) more neutral and (b) more indirect because of 'I think'. The person who is doing the inviting is free to say either 'I think I'll have ...' or 'I'm going to have ...'.

### Line-by-line commentary

- ll Note again the final position of *then* (see extract 1,1.33). In this usage, however, the meaning is different from the final *then* above. It is equivalent to sentence-initial 'so' and marks the beginning of a topic. For example, a doctor-patient interview may start as follows:

Hello, do come in ... sit down. So what can I do for you? (or What can I do for you then?)

### Further reading

For an account of *will* and *be going to* which has a good explanation of the present-orientation of *be going to*, see Haegeman (1989).

On the different types of tags and their functions in English, see Quirk et al (1985: 810-14) and Bennett (1989).



## At the hairdresser's

### Activity

When you sit down in the hairdresser's or barber's chair, what is likely to be the first question he/she will ask you? Imagine what *you* would answer for yourself in this situation. See the **Line-by-line commentary** for answers to the first part of the activity and note what the young woman asks for.

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> hairdresser: female
- <S 02> customer: female (21)
- <S 03> hair washer: female

This extract was recorded at a hairdresser's in Beeston, Nottinghamshire.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Hello.
- 2 <S 02> Hiya, I've got an appointment for half past three.
- 3 <S 01> Jodie?
- 4 <S 02> Yes, that's right.
- 5 <S 01> D'you want to hang your jacket up there?
- 6 <S 02> 'Okay, thanks.
- 7 <S 01> Okay, do you want to take a seat across here?
- 8 <S 02> Thank you.
- 9 [3 secs]

10 <S 01> Alright? What?

11 <S 02> LYeah.

12 <S 01> How much do you want off?

13 <S 02> Ermm [2 sees] Well I like to keep the top quite long [<S 01 > yeah]

14 ermm, but I like the back nice and short and the sides nice and short

15 It's just got a bit, you know, a bit grown out of shape.

16 <S 01> Too heavy

17 <S 02> Yeah,

18 <S 01> Do you have your sides feathered?

19 <S 02> Yeah, yeah.

20 <S 01> So wispy there

21 <S 02> Yeah.

22 <S 01> Now, this back bit do you tend to have that bit clipped?

23 <S 02> Yeah, and I have, I tend to have it like graduated at the back, right at

24 the bottom really short and then kind of graduated up, you know

25 not like a line as such, just [<S 01 > Right] graded up

26 <S 01> So, right yeah.

27 <S 02> And I generally style it, but it's 'cos it's got so, I generally have like a

28 maybe side, side-ish parting

29 <S 01> Parting going over that way

30 <S 02> Yeah,

31 just to give it a bit more

32 <S 01> Do you have the front bit thinned slightly?

33 <S 02> Yeah, yeah, it's got so heavy

34 <S 01> How long would you say it is since you've had it

35 cut?

36 <S 02> I know I had it done on the last day of January, so that's

37 [<S 01 > right] but my hair grows really quickly and really

38 thickly as well so

39 <S 01> So about six weeks or so [<S 02> yeah] so off your ear there

40 [<S 02> yeah] and then if I taper that out slightly so it's shorter

41 there, clipper that slightly and taper it slightly down [<S 02> yeah]

42 so you haven't got such a line [<S 02> yeah] and then just take a

43 bit through your layers

44 <S 02> Yeah, that would be great yeah

45 <S 01> [inaudible] for you

46 <S 02> Cos it just needs some more umph you know so

47 <S 01> It's just



87 it where you think oh I just can't stand it anymore [2 sees] I think  
 88 when it's shorter it tends to, you notice it growing more anyway  
 89 [S 02> mm] you know it tends to grow all of a sudden [inaudible]  
 90 <S 02> Mine's just grows so thick though [<S 01 > yeah] quickly and  
 91 really, really **thick** and heavy and you just [<S 01 > yeah] you know  
 92 have to have it thinned out.  
 93 <S 01> [laughs]

## General commentary

This transcript is a typical mix of TRANSACTIONAL and INTERACTIONAL discourse. The hairdresser and customer have to agree on how the hair will be cut and styled (the transactional), but they also chat to each other about various things just to be sociable (the interactional). The transactional parts involve the specialised vocabulary connected with hair and hair-styling.

There are long silences on the original tape where actions are taking place (washing the customer's hair). We have cut these in the tape accompanying the book.

## Line-by-line commentary

l.1 and 2: Compare *hello* with the more informal *hiya* or *hi*, which is very common among young people.

l.5 and 7: Note this polite use of *Doyou want to ...*, which is a more informal way of saying 'Will you ...'. (See also ll. 48, 72.)

l.12 *How much doyou want off?* is usually the first question a hairdresser/barber will ask you when (s)he starts to cut your hair. It means 'How much do you want me to cut off?' (see **Activity** above).

l.18 *feathered here* means made into light, feather-like tufts. This is what the hairdresser means by *whispy* in 1.20.

l.20 Conversations in service encounters are often ELLIPTICAL. Here the hairdresser reduces the message:

So [*you'd like it*] *whispy* there?

Other examples:

(*you want a*) parting going over that way (1.29)

so (*you'd like it*) off your ear there (1.39)

(*wouldyou like*) tea or coffee (1.74)

- 1.22 Note the use of *tend* to indicate what one typically/habitually does. Using *tend* in this way is extremely common in everyday conversation, especially among younger speakers. Notice how the customer uses it in her reply too (1.23). (See also 189.)
- 1.22 *Clipped* means 'cut with clippers', one of the hairdresser's cutting instruments that has teeth that move quickly from side to side.
- 1.23 Note the use of the DISCOURSE MARKER *like*, which is a very common vague language marker when you do not wish to be very precise.
- 1.26 Notice how the hairdresser's turn here consists entirely of discourse markers (*So, right, yeah*). This is quite common in service encounters and in language-in-action types of conversations. (See also Unit 6, 1. 37.)
- 1.28 *Side-ish parting*. The suffix *Ash* is quite common in everyday conversation. It is extremely useful when you do not want to be terribly precise. It can be used quite freely with almost any adjective or number, and with many nouns too. Other examples:
- Come round about five-ish. (it does not have to be exactly five o'clock  
She's about 30-ish I'd say. (she could be any age between about 28 and 32)
- 1.32 *the front bit*: *bit* is a very useful word in informal speech, meaning *part*.
- 1.32 *thinned* means cut with a special pair of scissors which has overlapping teeth.
- 1.39 *six weeks or so*: *or so* is useful VAGUE LANGUAGE for expressions of number and time. Other examples:
- We'll probably stay for a week or so.  
There'll be twenty or so there, I should think.
- 11.40 Note how the speakers construct the *if-conditional* structure between them: the  
-44 hairdresser speaks the *if*-clause (11.40-43), and the customer adds the *would*-clause. Creating a 'sentence-structure' jointly in this way is typical of conversational language. It is a signal of the degree of trust and security which the speakers have developed during the course of their short conversation that they can have a hand in sharing in the grammar of this complex utterance.
- 1.46 *umph* is a slang word meaning 'body/solidity/substance'; her hair is too weak and floppy at the moment.
- 1.48 *It's just laying heavy*: Note how native speakers often confuse 'lie' and 'lay': traditionally correct grammar here would demand 'it's just *lying* heavy'. In informal speech, confusing these verbs usually does not matter, and is very common indeed.
- 1.58 *in't she* is a non-standard dialectal form of 'isn't she'.

- l.62 *till nine*: Note how times on the hour are often stated **ELLIPTICALLY** in informal conversation, without 'o'clock'. This also sometimes occurs with 'half past' which is reduced to 'half, e.g. 'I'll be round at about half three, okay?'.  
ll.65 The hair washer repeats the customer's use of *nice* in her reply, but note how  
-70: repetition is by no means always the case. Observe how the customer does not repeat *okay* in her reply, but intensifies it to *fine*. This is very common in conversation. Other examples:
- A: Good meal wasn't it?  
B: Yes, great/very good/wonderful.  
A: Horrible weather!  
B: Yeah, ghastly!
- l.82 *straggly* is an informal word meaning 'hanging in a very untidy and tangled way'.  
l.82 The word *just* occurs frequently in this stretch of talk. The talk is relaxed and secure and the *word just* has a softening effect, maintaining a friendly and supportive tone; its omission would make the ideas more definite and direct and the interaction less positive.

### Further reading

On how speakers repeat and vary one another's words across speaker-turns, see McCarthy (1988).

On ellipsis in these types of conversations, see Carter and McCarthy (1995a).

On the mutual completion of sentences by speakers see Lerner (1991).



## Local radio phone-in

### Activity

Before reading the transcript or listening to the tape which accompanies this unit, write a brief definition of a radio phone-in. In writing this definition try to answer some of the following questions:

What is the purpose of inviting members of the public to phone a radio station to discuss points of interest rather than inviting guests to the studio?

Are radio phone-in programmes rehearsed?

Who talks the most in radio phone-ins?

Can it be a genuine discussion when only two people, the presenter and the caller, are involved in the discussion?

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> Ed Doolan: presenter

<S 02> John Robinson: caller

This extract is from a radio phone-in programme broadcast by a West Midlands Radio Station in England. It features Ed Doolan, the programme presenter, and a caller, John Robinson.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Did you hear me darling? Love a glass of water Would kill for a glass of
- 2 water. Alright? Thank you. [laughs] Where would I be without Sue
- 3 Kelly. Ten and a half to two and John Robinson's in Lichfield. Hello John.

4 <S 02> Hello Ed.  
5 <S 01> Yes.  
6 <S 02> Er just the usual. I've driven over from West Bromwich to Lichfield.  
7 And I'm amazed literally amazed in these weather conditions that  
8 people are still driving around without lights on.  
9 <S 01> You're joking.  
10 <S 02> No honestly.  
11 <S 01> I can't. I can't you see it is amazing to think that there is anybody left  
12 in the world who can be so thick as to drive in this weather without  
13 the lights on. I'd have thought the first thing you do when it gets as  
14 dark and as wet and as miserable as this. You turn your lights on and I  
15 don't mean the parkers. I mean the lights.  
16 <S 02> It's absolutely unbelievable.  
17 <S 01> But I don't understand how how can it tell me how can there be  
18 anybody left in the world that hasn't heard that's what you do.  
19 [laughs] Tell me.  
20 <S 02> Can I... Can I pose a question Edward? These same people drive  
21 around without the window wipers going  
22 <S 01> God knows. God knows. It is I don't understand it. I don't  
23 understand  
24 <S 02> I mean I I know you've mentioned it several times in the past but it's  
25 it still doesn't seem to get through to people.  
26 <S 01> I dunno. Well th th they it's none of my listeners mate. [<S 02> well]  
27 There isn't one person listening to this at the moment in the car that  
28 hasn't got the full lights on. Right? So we don't have to worry about  
29 that.  
30 <S 02> Mm. Right  
31 <S 01> But I'm worried about the others.  
32 <S 02> And I am Ed.  
33 <S 01> Okay matey.  
34 <S 02> Okay thanks.  
35 <S 01> Good luck to you. [radio jingle] Nine minutes to two. Oh Sue. I think  
36 I love you. I realise that's not money in the bank but it's nice.

### General commentary

In Britain radio phone-ins may differ in format, formality and function according to the particular radio station, the style of the presenter and whether the programme is a national or local radio programme. The programmes can therefore

range from formal discussion and debate on matters of contemporary significance (in which several contributors phone in, in turn) to rather more informally presented viewpoints on local issues. Some calls on some radio phone-in programmes are also taken as opportunities to discuss personal problems and seek personal advice. Some contributions may therefore be a little closer to the genre of comment-elaboration (see pp. 9 and 10) than to debate and argument.

The general format of the radio phone-in programme is that individuals phone the radio station and are 'interviewed' live by the programme presenter. The presenter controls the turns and manages the discussion as far as possible for interest value. In some programmes listeners who telephone are made to feel very much a part of a genuinely interactive and participatory event.

### Line-by-line commentary

- 1.1 The use of ELLIPSIS here by the programme presenter has been commented on several times in this book. (See in particular Units 5 and 6.) Its main function is once again to mark informality between speakers, here the presenter and his personal assistant (Sue Kelly).
- 1.1 *Would kill for a glass of water* is a deliberately exaggerated humorous expression indicating how desperate he is to drink some water. The use of excessive hyperbole is a relatively common feature of the lexis of informal, highly interpersonal spoken discourse (see also below 1.3).
- 1.2-3 *Ten and a half to two*: This very precise time reference (ten minutes and thirty seconds to two o'clock) is not uncommon in radio programmes.
- 1.3 *and John Robinson's in Lichfield*: The caller to the programme is identified by name and by the place from which he is telephoning (Lichfield is a town in the West Midlands of England, about forty kilometres from Birmingham).
- 1.5 *Yes*: This simply invites the caller to say why he is calling.
- 1.6 *just the usual*: This is a FIXED EXPRESSION indicating that the same thing has been said or the same action performed on several previous occasions. The use of *just* here also modalises the expression, allowing the statement to appear casual and tentative, even routine, rather than too assertive. It is not uncommon to hear the expression *just the usual* spoken by customers in a pub when ordering a drink which the barperson will know to be their usual preference or in a hairdressing salon where the hairdresser knows the requirements of the customer.
- 1.7 *literally amazed*: *Literally* is very common in spoken language and is not really the opposite of *figuratively/metaphorically*. It usually just serves to emphasise the words/phrases it qualifies. (See also 1.11.)
- 1.10 *honestly*: An affirmative, indicating that the speaker is serious and is not joking in any way. *Honestly* and *literally* (see above) are interpersonal markers of

stance/attitude/evaluation, which we can expect to hear in a context like this one.

- 11.11 *that there is a anybody left in the world*: This is an example of deliberate hyperbole, or exaggeration, which allows the speaker comically to underline the strength of his position and the absurdity of the characteristic behaviour he is describing. The expression is repeated almost verbatim in 1.18. It is worth noting that advertisers make use of hyperbole in advertising slogans and captions. For example, a recent advert for the Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, claims it to be 'a million times more comfortable'. The absurdity of the claim and that it cannot possibly be substantiated means that no legal challenges can be made to the proposition by its competitors. Deliberately bizarre exaggerations, especially involving numbers and measurements, are not uncommon in informal conversation. They can be used to underline arguments but also for comic and ironic effects. For example, 'The person who can help is not a million miles from here' which means that they are present or very close by.
- 11.12 *thick* here is an informal word used pejoratively to mean 'stupid'/'unintelligent'.
- 11.13 *I'd have thought*: A common grammatical structure for the reinforcement of a point of view. It allows the speaker to presuppose what is reasonable behaviour but then not associate such behaviour with the persons and their activities which are being criticised.
- 11.13 -14 Comments are here chained together by association rather than by explicit cohesive linkage. For example, *I'd have thought the first thing you do when it gets dark ... You turn your lights on*. A version appropriate to written English or to more formal talk would have more complex linking. For example: I would have thought that the first thing you do ... is to turn your lights on / is that you turn your lights on.
- 11.15 *the parkers* here means parking lights or side lights on a car (as opposed to the main lights, the headlights, the *full lights* as the presenter later refers to them in 1.28).
- 11.16 *absolutely unbelievable*: Another example of lexical hyperbole. It imparts, as above, a personal attitudinal marking to the propositions which it precedes or follows.
- 11.26 *I dunno*: An informal version of 'I don't know'. A similar example is 'I'm gonna' for which the written text orthographic equivalent is 'I'm going to'.
- 11.26 *Mate* as an address form marks solidarity between speakers and is almost exclusively used between male speakers. The use of *matey* (1.33) (as is frequently the case with -y endings in lexis, address terms and names in English) normally marks an even greater informality and sense of shared values and viewpoints.

- l.28 *Right?* is a DISCOURSE MARKER used here to check understanding and agreement. However, in 11.26-34 *right* is used, together with *well* and *okay* to signal that the conversation should now end and that it is Ed's wish that it should.
- l.36 / *realise that's not money in the bank*: An idiom 'That's/It's money in the bank.' meaning 'it's something you can absolutely bank on/rely on'. This is modified to a negative form and used by the speaker here to evaluate his own statement. He is referring here to the fact that Sue, his assistant, has obtained for him the glass of water which he had previously said he would 'kill for'; he says 'I love you' but admits she can't bank on that. These further exaggerations, together with the use of the word *darling*, add to the playful, bantering tenor of the presenter's discourse.

### **Further reading**

See Cook (1992) for discussion of hyperbole in advertising language.

Stubbs (1986) and Carter (1987) discuss the informality of -y endings in lexis and in discursal interaction in general.

McCarthy (1992b) and McCarthy and Carter (1994: ch. 3), Moon (1992) and Fernando (1996) discuss the function of idioms for evaluative purposes.



## Student discussion

### Activity

Student discussion can take several forms. Imagine a classroom discussion in which a teacher or lecturer asks a student to give a prepared talk on a topic and then invites other students to comment. Now imagine a voluntary discussion group, set up by like-minded students with common interests in which they support one another by discussing both individual and general problems.

List three main characteristics of the use of language in each type of discussion group. What are the main factors which determine the kind of language you would expect to encounter in each case?

### Comments on activity

Comments on this activity are contained in the **General commentary** and in the **Line-by-line commentary** where differences between formal and informal discourse in academic settings are examined (e.g. 11.27 28, 30, 56-57).

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> female

<S 02> male

<S 03> female

<S 04> male

<S 05> male

All are aged 18-23.

This discussion takes place in an informal atmosphere in a student study-bedroom in a university hall of residence. The participants are all members of a student Christian group. The students have each put down on paper their answers to a series of questions about their personal attitudes to their religion. The first question they are discussing is which aspects of their daily lives *are* and which *are not* affected by their religion. <S 01 > is the chair of this informal meeting and starts the discussion.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Okay what have you got  
2 <S 04> That directed at me  
3 <S 01> in the, let's do the not-affected one first  
4 <S 03> Mm  
5 [1 sec]  
6 <S 04> Well I've gone for a huge cop out but then I have I always do. I put  
7 erm relationships with non-Christians.  
8 [1 sec]  
9 <S 01> Yeah.  
10 <S 04> Yeah well, [<S 03> mm] I mean in some ways you know I think you  
11 should make the difference but it's being pernickety as well because  
12 when I have you know when I do go out with the guys and just talk  
13 to them and just be around hall generally with non-Christians, I try to  
14 just sort of just hope my life isn't affected, by you know by my faith in  
15 that sense but, then my behaviour and attitudes are always gonna be,  
16 you know are always gonna be affected by my faith, you know I'm  
17 not always gonna get overly excited in the alcohol  
18 department and er, you know go round abusing and kicking things in  
19 because, you know as as some of my friends did the other night you  
20 know  
21 <S 01> Mm really?  
22 <S 04> Yeah well one of them did a bit too much and broke his leg [<S 01 >  
23 hmm] but, erm you know because my behaviour and attitudes, but  
24 when I'm just sort of conversing with them now I don't openly think  
25 my life's affected in that sense but, I hope you see where I'm sort of  
26 coming from but  
27 <S 01> Yeah  
28 <S 03> Mm  
29 <S 01> Do you think then that the way you relate to like people who aren't  
30 Christian, and your attitudes towards them like whether you decide

31 to accept certain people and [<S 04> mm] you know get a bit peed  
32 off with other people and stuff I like that, do you think it is affected by  
33 your faith, like you were saying you [<S 04> mm] have kind of moral  
34 standards of not [S 04> mm] like hooliganising and things I mean do  
35 you think that's because of your faith or do you think that's because  
36 well because of society or whatever

37 <S 04> I I think it's because of my faith um because, I I like to do what's right  
38 [<S 01 > yeah] and you know I don't do that very well I don't do that  
39 as as often as I'd like to but there's some sort of certain things such  
40 protocol I wouldn't you know go into I think you know you don't do  
41 that and then I think about well why, why don't you do that and I think  
42 well first of all it's you know just wrong to do so [<S 01 > mm] you  
43 know you have no right to go and kick in someone's property or you  
44 have no right to hit someone or

45 <S 03> But is that because of your faith or because you've got a bit of a  
46 conscience?

47 <S 01> Mm

48 <S 04> Well I see I don't know I think I think it is my faith because it comes  
49 from that the feeling of doing wrong

50 <S 05> Isn't our faith isn't our conscience affected by our faith  
51 [<S 01 & S 04> yeah] for Christians?

52 <S 01> Yeah but

53 <S 02> The thing is I think

54 <S 02> But you could

55 <S 03> We were saying that some people people who are not Christians  
56 <S 02> Might go round who will all go round kicking  
57 <S 03> Who will all go round, kicking

58 <S 04> No no I'm not trying not to generalise in that sense

59 <S 03> No

60 <S 04> Oh yeah a lot of people have got very good morals who aren't  
61 Christians, I mean you can be a good person and not a Christian we  
62 all know that

63 <S 01> Yeah but that that shows there must be somewhere else you get  
64 ideas of morals from, other than Christian

65 <S 04> Oh sure [<S 02> mm] but I  
66 don't know I mean like you say you just ask me does it come from  
67 my faith but I honestly couldn't answer that

68 <S 03> Yeah it's very difficult it's very difficult isn't it

69 <S 01> You can't distinguish cos if you, I suppose if you've been like brought

- 70 up in the church and stuff and have been for all your life maybe that's  
 71 just what you do isn't it so you don't know which comes ... well  
 72 where it comes from isn't it  
 73 <S 03> Mm

## General commentary

The discussion is markedly symmetrical. The participants operate cooperatively and collaboratively, seeing each other as equals with equal speaking rights. A more teacher-led discussion (see Unit 16) would be more asymmetrical, with speaking rights controlled and assigned rather more by a single person (the teacher). A teacher may also want to polarise discussion for purposes of learning whereas in this discussion many of the linguistic choices signal mutuality, consensus and interpersonal support.

## Line-by-line commentary

- l.2 *That directed at me:* This is an example of ELLIPSIS and means 'Is that question directed at me?'.  
 l.6 *gone for a huge cop out:* 'Go for' is an informal version of 'choose/select'. As a verb, 'to cop out' means not to take responsibility. It's a highly informal expression. It can also, as here, be used as a noun in expressions such as 'It's a cop out', which indicates a strongly negative judgement.  
 l.l1 *pernickety:* An informal word, more commonly used in spoken English. The word means to be too fussy or picky. Written equivalents would be *over-fastidious* or *too discriminating*.  
 l.l3 *hall:* A university hall of residence, a hostel for students, usually on or near the university campus.  
 l.l4 *just I sort of are* HEDGES which enable ideas or thoughts to be expressed more indirectly, politely and non-assertively. (See also *like* in 1.29 below.)  
 l.l7 *in the alcohol department:* The use of the word 'department' here serves to divide  
 -18 up human actions or behaviour into different sections. The 'alcohol department' is time spent drinking alcoholic drinks. *I'm not always gonna get overly excited in the alcohol department* is an indirect, ironic way of saying that he will not normally drink too much. The use of quite formal, rather elaborate words to substitute for more direct alternatives is a form of over-lexicalisation which can allow speakers to refer to things with some measure of ironic distance. Another example:

She's a bit lacking in the subtlety department. (She's not very subtle/tactful.)

- l.26 *coming from*: A verb normally only used in progressive forms and which means 'to express a particular point of view'. 'I could see where he was coming from' is a more informal alternative to 'I could understand his point of view/his line of argument'.
- ll.27 *Yeah, mm*: In the early stages of the discussion other speakers are reluctant to  
 -28 intervene with comments of their own; however, verbal and non-verbal BACK-CHANNELLING takes place to give support to the speaker. Later in the discussion there is less back-channelling and more direct interventions and comments on the part of the other participants.
- l.29 *Then* is used here as a summarising word rather than as a marker of time.
- l.30 *Like* here has the meaning of 'for example'. This use of *like* is common in conversational English.
- ll.31 *peed off*: A verb formed from a slang word for 'urine' (pee). A stronger, more  
 -32 vulgar alternative is 'pissed off'; a more acceptable alternative expression for less informal contexts is 'fed up with'.
- l.32 *stuff like that*: A common VAGUE EXPRESSION. A similarly frequent expression is *things like that* or *and things*, as in 1.34. Speakers select vague language as here so that they do not have to specify precise examples - a procedure which would be necessary in more formal discussion in most academic contexts but which is not a prerequisite for informal discussion. In informal discussion among equals speakers deliberately do not want to sound too authoritative.
- l.34 *like* is used here as a conjunction with a meaning similar to 'as' or 'for example'.
- l.34 *hooliganising* is not an established word-form. The speaker has created a verb on the basis of the noun 'hooligan' (a noisy ill-mannered person who causes damage and trouble).
- l.36 *or whatever*: This is another VAGUE EXPRESSION. It allows the speaker to sound deliberately imprecise and unspecific.
- l.40 *I think you know you don't do that*: Verbs such as *think*, *ask*, *tell* can be followed by forms of language which serve, as it were, to reproduce direct speech. Here the words *you don't do that* are reproduced almost as if they were actually said. In formal written use quotation marks would be used or a more 'distant' alternative preferred; for example: 'I think that people don't do that'; 'I think that that isn't done'. Such strategies create a directness and immediacy for the reported process of thinking or saying. The reporting verb can be in either present or past tense form; in fact, in this example the verb *think is*, as is commonly the case in speech reporting, in the present tense, though habitual past actions are being recounted. (See also 11.66—67.)
- l.53 *The thing is* is an extremely useful and common spoken expression meaning 'the problem is/the real question is/the point is'.

- 1.55 *We were saying*: The use of the past continuous tense here is frequent in conversations in which the participants wish to create deliberately indefinite, imprecise and informal interaction. Compare the effect produced by the more complete and definite 'we said'. It is also used here to suggest that the topic is on-going.
- 11.56 *who will all go round kicking*: The reference to *kicking* here and *kicking in* (1.18) may  
 -57 or may not refer to the physical act of students kicking people or property. It may, for example, act as a kind of metaphoric expression for anti-social behaviour. The repetition of this subordinate clause of <S 02> by <S 03> indicates a convergence of viewpoint between the speakers; it also reveals a greater confidence to intervene, to overlap and to complete or attempt to complete the utterances of other parties in the discussion. This increased involvement illustrates that the speakers have now become more relaxed, the enhanced participation contrasting with the more hesitant contributions earlier in the discussion.
- 11.66 *You just ask me does it come*: see discussion at 1.40 above. The speech report  
 -67 here embeds what is effectively a direct, almost unmediated recount of the question 'does it come from your faith?'

### Further reading

For a recent discussion of a wide range of forms of speech reporting see McCarthy (1997: ch. 6), who draws on spoken examples. See also Yule, Mathis and Hopkins (1992).

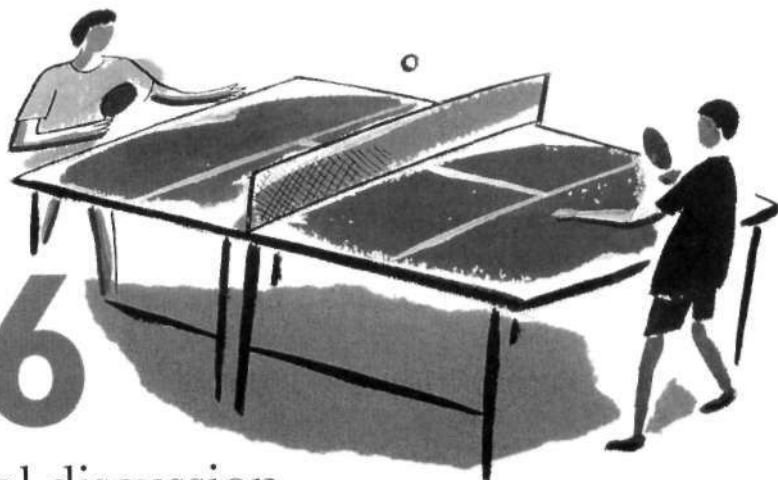
See Thompson (1994) for a discussion of speech reports in written English.

Channell (1994) is a thoroughgoing study of vagueness in language use, drawing on recent work in pragmatics.

Fowler (1986), Halliday (1989) and Carter (1987) discuss the effects of different degrees of under- and over-lexicalisation.

# unit 16

## School discussion



### Activity

Make a copy of this transcript, having first removed any reference to the speakers at the beginning of each utterance. Show the transcript to at least three of your fellow students and ask them to identify the speakers in this discussion. Can they recognise when the teacher is speaking and when the students are speaking? If so, how do they do this? What clues are there in the language the speakers all use?

See the **General commentary** for comments on this activity.

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> teacher: male (37)
- <S 02> pupil 1
- <S 03> pupil 2
- <S 04> pupil 3
- <S 05> pupil 4

In this text a small group of secondary school pupils are working together with their teacher. The students are all girls aged 14–15 years.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> What do you have to do, then, in the evenings, if you want to go out,  
2 where?
- 3 <S 02> On the underground.
- 4 <S 01> Down the underground? What's the underground?
- 5 <S 02> Yeah ... that's where ... boys do the popping

- 6 <S 03> Popping.
- 7 <S 01> Where's that?
- 8 <S 05> It's an area ... where all the boys get together... and they er pops
- 9 <S 02> Underneath Russell Sports,
- 10 <S 05> and dances.
- 11 <S 01> What in the arcade off John Foss Square?
- 12 <S 02> No underneath Russell Sports.
- 13 <S 01> Underneath? That's ... under the car parks.
- 14 <S 03> Yeah.
- 15 <S 01> And what's body-popping exactly?
- 16 <S 03> It's dancing.
- 17 <S 01> What... describe it. I don't know. I've never seen it.
- 18 <S 05> It's just a new style of dancing, American style.
- 19 <S 01> But... er ... if it's in the car park, um, how do you dance? Where's the
- 20 music come from?
- 21 <S 04> Bring a tape-recorder.
- 22 <S 05> They bring a tape-recorder, they put lino in the floor and
- 23 <S 04> So they put all graffiti all over the walls.
- 24 <S 01> So they spray paint the walls, they put lino on the floor and then they
- 25 just do this body-popping in the car park like that? Why do you have
- 26 to do it in the car park?
- 27 <S 02> Cos nowhere else to go.
- 28 <S 03> The police it's cold
- 29 <S 05> The police allows them to um go there ... the people in ... it's
- 30 underneath Russell Sports and, um ... everytime ... they come and
- 31 bring things in, um, from Russell Sports and they says 'Hi' to us ... and
- 32 they don't mind long as we keep the music down.
- 33 <S 01> So as long as it's not too loud the police are quite happy for you to
- 34 go there? No-one chases you away?
- 35 <S 03, S 1)5> No
- 36 <S 01> But you have to go there because there's nothing else to do?
- 37 <S 05> Nothing else.
- 38 <S 01> Well, if you had this £ 10,000, then, which someone's going to give,
- 39 what could you do with that £ 10,000 to make life rather better for
- 40 you, to give you more things to do?
- 41 <S 05> They could make it a place for body-poppers to go and, like a youth
- 42 club and ... special room for all that
- 43 <S 03> Leisure Centre.
- 44 <S 05> Yeah.

45 <S 01> We're having a big leisure centre which is costing millions but you'd  
46 like to have a building where you could go yourselves, would you?  
47 <S 03> Yeah ... in the nights, like, when, it's cold.  
48 <S 02> And you could sleep there.  
49 <S 03> Mm.  
50 <S 01> You could stay there as well? So what kind of things would you like to  
51 see in this building that you could have? Body-popping is one - a  
52 room for that  
53 <S 04> Space invaders ... stuff like that.  
54 <S 01> But can't you get these in ... in arcades in town? Or do you have to be  
55 <S 04> Yeah but you've got to be older.  
56 <S 05> You got to be 18.  
57 <S 04> You got to be over 18.  
58 <S 01> So you'd like to have an arcade where you could go ... without having  
59 to be over 18  
60 <S 04> Yeah.  
61 <S 05> Not gambling machines, though, just the games.  
62 <S 01> Just the Space Invader games. You like those.  
63 <S 05> Mm.  
64 <S 01> You think they'd be popular [pause] That's £ 10,000, I don't think it  
65 would cost £10,000 just to have body-popping and Space Invaders;  
66 what else could you have?  
67 <S 05> You could have a variety of things  
68 <S 03> Snooker tables  
69 <S 01> Yes?  
70 <S 03> Table tennis  
71 <S 01> Do you think people would go there to play table tennis and  
72 snooker?  
73 <S 03> Yes.  
74 <S 01> Do many people go and watch the body-popping down there?  
75 <S 04> Quite a lot  
76 <S 05> Quite a few ... yeah  
77 <S 04> Every Saturday they has a challenge at Maskell's Leisure Centre,  
78 <S 01> So you're saying there's a lot of young people your age, then, who  
79 have nowhere to go and nothing to do.  
80 <S 05> Mm. There's loads of people who does it... but... there's nowhere to  
81 go ... really ... and  
82 <S 01> So you'd have table tennis there, snooker there, body-popping ...  
83 somewhere to stay overnight as well you think.

- 84 <S 03> Mm.  
 85 <S 02> Yeah. Got to.  
 86 <S 01> Why do you think that's necessary?  
 87 <S 02> Something to do, init? Nothing to do. You know.

## General commentary

This is a transcript of a discussion between an English teacher and a small group of Year 10 (aged 14-15) secondary school pupils. The teacher has asked them to consider how they would spend £10,000 'for the benefit of the local community', and makes it clear, in response to a question, that this 'community' included people of their own age.

There are marked differences in the styles of speaking which the teacher uses and which the pupils use. It is noticeable, for example, that it is the teacher who has the most 'turns' and speaks more, even though he is outnumbered by the pupils. The teacher also asks most of the questions, with contributions to the discussion from pupils mainly taking the form of answers to the teacher's questions.

The teacher also tends to use complete, fully-formed clauses, whereas many of the pupils' contributions are elliptical and are understood only in the context of the teacher's utterances. The tone of the discussion is quite detached and impersonal. Everything is controlled (dominated even) by the teacher. Personal pronouns are not much used by teacher or pupil.

The discussion conforms to what discourse analysts have termed an IRF interchange:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Initiation (I) | an utterance, mainly teacher-led  |
| Response (R)   | mainly a pupil response/reply   |
| Feedback (F)   | mainly a follow-up comment by the teacher which also often evaluates or rephrases or expands what the pupil has said. |

This discussion shows a tightly-structured teacher-led discussion, even though the setting is relatively informal and the pupils feel sufficiently relaxed to use a number of informal expressions. A further example of the teacher's control is not just the frequency of his interventions but his use of discourse markers to regulate what is said, when topics are to be changed and how the statements of others are to be reformulated and summarised. It is noticeable that, while the pupils often use each other's words, the teacher evaluates or summarises in different words.

## Line-by-line commentary

The use *of then* indicates that a new stage in the conversation has been reached. The speaker signals either that a new topic is to be introduced or that a different phase of the existing topic is to be entered. In this use *then* is a DISCOURSE MARKER. It does not mean 'afterwards' or 'next' or 'at that time'.

1.5 *do the popping*: This is a typical DELEXICAL use of *do*. Compare everyday uses such as 'do the cleaning', 'do some gardening', etc.

11.8 *they pops ... and dances*: See notes 11.29 and 31 below.

-10

1.11 It is worth noting that *what* can be used in informal spoken language to check information about time and place and circumstances as well as 'things'. For example:

A: These friends of mine climb mountains at night.

B: What, in the dark?

A: Yeah.

A: You know, that Chinese restaurant as you come into town.

B: What, on the left?

A: Yeah, that's the one.

1.11 *off John Foss Square*: The use of *off here* is a colloquial or informal alternative to 'near' or 'next to'.

1.18 *It's just a new style of dancing, American-style*. This type of reformulation or apposition allows expansion of the main headword. Similar examples would be:

Have you tried that new coffee, Columbian coffee?

They've brought out a new Ford Mondeo, a turbo-diesel.

In written English the expansion would typically operate as a pre-modifier; for example: 'They've brought out a new, turbo-diesel Ford Mondeo'.

11.19 *Where's the music come from?* Some grammars claim that 'does' is not normally

-20 reduced in English to *'s* as this is a form exclusive to the verb 'to be' (e.g. Where's he from?) and sometimes 'have' (e.g. She's gone out.). Such contractions are, however, frequent in informal, spoken English. See also Unit 17, 1.7.

1.21 *bring a tape-recorder*: ELLIPSIS of the subject pronoun is common in informal speech. The teacher establishes a greater formality by inserting the pronoun into his parallel phrase.

1.22 *lino* is a shortened form of 'linoleum' a kind of shiny, hard-wearing floor-covering.

1.24 *So*: In informal speech *so* is used as a DISCOURSE MARKER. It signals that some kind of summary of what has been previously said is to take place. It does not mean 'in order to' or 'so that'. See 1.33 and 1.50 for similar uses of so. It is similar in function to *well*, 38 (below).

- l.27 *Cos nowhere else to go:* *Cos* is frequent in informal speech. It is a normal, reduced form of 'because' and is not incorrect. It is a form frequently used by all native speakers. (See Unit 5, 1.47.) The ELLIPSIS of 'there is' is also frequent in casual conversation. It is often reduced to 'there's'.
- l.29 Notice how a simple present tense is used to record repeated actions. (See also 1.31 below.)
- l.31 *they says:* *Say* is a common verb for reporting action and for reporting speech in particular. The more informal the context, the less likely it is that it will be differently inflected. 'I says', 'he says', 'we says', 'you says' are common, overlapping as they do with several local dialect forms. The speakers here speak a local mid-western British English (Shropshire) dialect.
- l.32 *long as we keep the music down:* Note the ellipsis of (*so/as*) *long as*, which is infrequent in informal speech. But note that the student uses the reduced form; the teacher reinstates the more usual, complete form *so long as*.
- l.38 *Well is* used as a discourse marker and is similar to the uses of *so*. (See 11.24, 33, 50). It functions to mark a boundary between one stretch of talk or one section of the topic and another stretch of the same talk. It can also mark a new or different topic.
- l.39 *to make life rather better for you, to give you more things to do:* It is not uncommon in  
 -40 spoken discourse for clauses to be chained together in parallel structures. Such patterning allows the speaker the opportunity to reformulate, refine or otherwise be more precise than composing in real time normally allows. Chaining of this kind occurs in writing, not uncommonly to create a more spoken, 'interactive' rhetorical structure for the writing. (In writing, however, the reformulations do normally lead to additional information content rather than simple topic restatement.)
- ll.45 *you'd like to have a building... would you?* The teacher makes quite frequent use of  
 -6 a structure in which an affirmative clause plus a tag question is used as a way of asking questions.
- l.47 *in the nights, like, when it's cold:* *like* is used here, informally, as an alternative phrasing for 'for instance' or 'for example'. Such uses of *like* would not normally be appropriate in most written discourse.
- l.53 *stuff like that:* *stuffis* a common item of VAGUE LANGUAGE. In conversational English contexts, too great a degree of precision would be likely to sound excessive. Similar vague expressions found in similar structures include 'things like that', 'that' or 'something like that'. See also Unit 15.
- l.54 *But you can't get these in arcades in town?* Another example of questions being put by means of an affirmative statement.
- l.62 *You like those:* As in 11.45-46 and 54 above the teacher puts questions by means of an affirmative structure. Note that in 1.58 and here it is not used together

with a tag. The teacher varies how he puts a relatively long sequence of questions; this structure enables him to elicit information a little more indirectly.

- 11.75 *quite a lot... quite a few*: These sets of expressions are relatively common in  
-76 informal spoken English and they are further examples of vague language. In most conversations very imprecise reference to numbers and to quantities allows speakers deliberately to hedge or to add emphasis without expecting to be taken literally.
- 1.80 *There's loads of people who does it*: Rules for subject verb concord vary in different dialects of English. *Here people* is accompanied by what would be singular verbs in most standard dialects of English, though there is some evidence to suggest that *there's* is a more frequent structure in English and is used irrespective of the noun or nouns which follow it, even by highly educated speakers in public life, in the media, etc. (note that the teacher himself uses it in 1. 78). *Loads of* 'is a very common expression for expressing large quantities or numbers in English (with countable or uncountable nouns). 'Many' would sound terribly formal and 'written' in this context. 'Many' and 'much' are often overused in spoken language by non-native speakers.
- 1.83 Note the use of *as well*. Along with 'too' it is far more frequent in spoken language than *also*.
- 1.85 *Got to* is another example of ELLIPSIS in which the normal subject and auxiliary verb are deleted.
- 1.87 *Nothing to do*: As in 1.85 another elliptical construction which marks deliberate casualness in the reply. Note also the colloquial *init*, a reduced form of 'isn't it'.

### Further reading

The teacher-pupil IRF structure is explained in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975).

How the IRF exchange structure is further elaborated and manifests itself in other types of situation is discussed in Hoey (1991).

For a detailed study of naturally-occurring conversational discourse, including reference to data in educational settings, see Tsui (1994).



# unit 17

## Kid's stuff

### Activity

Before you listen to the tape, consider for a moment how little children manage to learn their first language. Which of these ways do you think children use to learn their mother tongue, and which do you think is/are most important?

- 1 Imitating things they have heard adults say.
- 2 Just quietly practising sounds and words on their own without the help of adults.
- 3 Having conversations with adults.
- 4 Being corrected by adults when they make mistakes.

Now listen to the tape and read the transcript. What evidence is there that the little girl is engaged in any of the ways of learning language listed above?

See the **Line-by-line commentary** for comments on this activity.

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> female (37) (Yorkshire)
- <S 02> female (24) (South Wales)
- <S 03> male (47) (South Wales)
- <S 04> female baby (2) (South Wales)

<S 02> is the niece of <S 01> and <S 03>, and mother of the baby, <S 04>. The speakers are chatting in the kitchen of <S 01> and <S 03>'s house, in Cambridgeshire, while dinner is being prepared.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> D'you get out more now that she's a bit older  
2 <S 04> /Bagabagabagaba...Bagabagabaga/  
3 <S 01> Don't know what that was but I know what it sounded like  
4 <S 03> Sounded like  
5 something you heard your father say  
6 <S 04> /Bagabagabagabaga/  
7 <S 01> What's that... what what's that mean ... mm  
8 <S 04> He burn me he burnt it  
9 <S 02> He burnt you ... you caught your hand on the book did  
10 you naughty book  
11 <S 01> It's the paper that was a bit  
12 <S 02> Naughty book ... oh don't  
13 break Rosie and Jim book  
14 <S 04> Oh he bit me he bit me  
15 <S 02> He bit you did he  
16 <S 01> The book bit you  
17 [8 secs]  
18 <S 03> It must be the biting humour of the story  
19 <S 02> [laughs]  
20 <S 01> Ya-ha-ha-ha  
21 <S 02> We don't go out that much now we you know occasionally  
22 Mum'll baby-sit if we've got anything special on but  
23 <S 01> Yeah  
24 <S 02> Quite often some of the neighbours'll just come over  
25 [<S 01 > yeah] and we'll get a takeaway or something and  
26 [<S 01 > yeah] have a drink in the house  
27 <S 01> Yeah  
28 [10 secs baby babbling]  
29 <S 01> Probably just feel like having a quiet night in after  
30 a day of running round after a [<S 02> yeah] little girl with  
31 a foul mouth  
32 <S 02> I don't know where she got that from what what you  
33 doing to that oh no that's horrible you don't do that to books  
34 <S 04> No  
35 <S 02> No  
36 <S 04> My my dummy  
37 <S 02> You want your dummy you big baby

- 38 <S 03> [laughs]
- 39 <S 04> Want my big book
- 40 <S 02> You want your big book there
- 41 <S 04> Want my book back what in the drawings
- 42 <S 03> What
- 43 <S 04> crayons
- 44 <S 03> What what do you want
- 45 <S 02> Read read in there read all tell me everything that's in that book tell
- 46** me that you, what pictures what's that... drawing
- 47 <S 03> Is there any ponies in there like you saw this afternoon
- 48 <S 02> There is what's that's like you saw isn't it what's that
- 49 <S 04> Gee-up
- 50 <S 02> Gee-up yeah and what's that
- 51 <S 04> Dolly houses
- 52 <S 02> Yeah d'you know what those are
- 53 <S 04> Bottles for green dolly
- 54 <S 02> Bottles for the dollies is it and what's that
- 55 <S 04> Colourings
- 56 <S 02> Colourings yeah it's like what's that though
- 57 <S 03> No wonder all those child language acquisition studies
- 58 have got them just saying what's that that's a horse cos it's the
- 59 only way they can get them to talk on the tape-recorder [laughs]
- 60 <S 01> LGet them to talk yeah a||
- 61 this business about [<S 03> yeah] you know two word sentences
- 62 <S 03> Interactive discourse yes yeah it's
- 63 not yes exactly they have all the sentences but they only ever
- 64** record two-word sentences cos it's the only thing they say when
- 65** the tape-recorder's on
- 66 <S 02> What's that
- 67 <S 01> Yeah
- 68 <S 04> Very hot it's very hot
- 69 <S 02> It's hot yes ... and what d'you do with that
- 70 <S 04> Play with it
- 71 <S 02> Play with it
- 72 <S 04> I pour it
- 73 <S 02> Pour it
- 74 <S 04> I pour it
- 75 <S 02> You pour it do you
- 76 <S 04> Yes [inaudible]

children say rather than its grammatical correctness. But repetition of the correct form by the adult probably influences how the child learns.

- l.13 *Rosie and Jim* is the name of a series of story books for very young children.
- l.18 This is a rather silly joke which plays on the collocation of 'biting' with words such as 'sarcasm', 'humour', 'comments', etc., where 'biting' means 'sharp' or 'Very strong'.
- l.22 Note the use of *will/'ll to* indicate tendencies or typical or predictable events in  
-25 the present. Other examples:

Normally I take the bus but occasionally I'll get a taxi.

About once or twice a week my sister'll ring me up.

Note also the use of 'to have something on' (*if we've got anything special on*), a colloquial expression meaning to have a social appointment or date:

D'you have anything on on Saturday? Fancy going to the cinema?

- l.25 *get a takeaway*: Buy a meal from a 'take-away' restaurant (you take the food home to eat it).

- ll.32 Note the **ELLIPSIS** of *what (are) you doing...? 'Are* often gets ellipted in very  
-33 informal talk in similar constructions:

Where (are) you going?

Why (are) you looking so miserable?

What (are) you worrying about?

- l.45 Now the mother starts to interact with the little girl rather in the way teachers often do with their pupils, asking them 'display' questions (i.e. questions to which they already know the answer) and giving the child feedback on her responses, reinforcing her answers and praising her - the **IRF** structure mentioned in Unit 16. This kind of 'learning through interaction' with adults is obviously very important for the child's development and the learning of language.
- l.47 Note the use of the singular *Is there ...?* with a plural noun (*ponies*). In present-day British English, this usage is very common, even among highly educated speakers, and can often be heard on radio and television, used by journalists and politicians.
- l.49 *Gee up*: This is what one shouts to make a horse go faster. In 'baby-talk', horses are often called 'gee-gees'. Also, the suffix '-y' is often added to words in baby-talk: e.g. 'doggy', 'piggy'. This happens with *dolly* in 1.51.

11.60 *all this business about...*: This expression is a very useful one in informal talk, and  
-61 can be used to refer to a 'topic' or 'issue':

What do you think of all this business about fishing damaging the environment? (all the debate/discussion in the papers/on TV).

### **Further reading**

On how children learn language, see Elliot (1981) and the papers in Snow and Ferguson (1977).

For more on ellipsis in informal talk, see Carter and McCarthy (1995a).

For further guidance on the use of *will* to refer to predictable/typical events in the present, see Quirk et al (1985: index).



## Activity

What differences would you expect there to be between planned and unplanned talk on a specific topic? (In each case, you have a good knowledge of the topic in question.) Consider both general and specific linguistic differences. Pay particular attention to vocabulary. For example, which of the following words and phrases would you consider more likely to occur in planned talk?

On the one hand; firstly, secondly; well; dodgy; dunno; contribution; military interventions; funny; 'cos.

Would you expect formal talk to be characterised more by nouns or by verbs?

See **Line-by-line commentary** for comments on this activity.

## Speakers and setting

- <S 01> student: male
- <S 02> tutor: male
- <S 03> student: female

This is an extract from a recording of a university seminar on European politics. The main participant is an undergraduate student who has been asked to give a presentation on a specific topic: does France need Africa as much as Africa needs France?

During the presentation there are very limited interventions by the tutor and by other students. At the end of the presentation more general and informal discussion ensues among the tutor and the group of students. The student who gives the presentation has had time to research the presentation and to write it out in

advance in the form of both continuous prose and, in places, detailed notes. The talk is therefore written to be spoken and is an example of planned talk.

The views expressed in this extract are not necessarily those of the authors and publisher.

## Transcript

1 <S 01> When President De Gaulle ensured that France had a prominent  
2 role in Africa, it was part of his strategy to try and make France a  
3 world power along with membership of er NA ... what...  
4 membership of NATO at the time but... had a seat on UN Security  
5 Council and his nuclear weapons. How has francophone Africa  
6 benefited from this policy? Well it doesn't appear economic growth  
7 is anything any better in francophone Africa than anywhere else  
8 despite the large sums of aid given by France to the region. The vast  
9 majority of the population have not seen their lives improve as a  
10 result of a relationship with France. It cannot be said that African  
11 populations have benefited from French support for authoritarian  
12 and oppressive regimes, President Bongo in Gabon or Mobutu in  
13 Zaire. Support of corrupt governments have ... has done little to  
14 promote development; much of the aid provided has been either  
15 mismanaged or embezzled. The crisis in the relationship began during  
16 the late 1980s as France's so-called fading affair with Africa. Towards  
17 the end of the 1980s, France's enthusiasm with Africa began to cool.  
18 Instead of a financial benefit from its dealings with er francophone  
19 Africa, it began having a deficit, its balance of payments went in  
20 deficit and so did the Franc Zone. The French government ended up  
21 subsidising its former colonies. The failure of the economies of er  
22 French Africa led to a lot of blame being placed on France and its  
23 failure to promote development is quite is er important role in Fre in  
24 African governments earning large sums of aid pumped in. The  
25 end of the cold war focussed the attention on the French  
26 government's policy of propping up authoritarian and corrupt  
27 regimes. People began to question the er benefit of propping up  
28 such governments especially as er Eastern Europe began to have a  
29 weight with democracy. Africa began to lose its appeal to French  
30 industry, especially as the European Community became more  
31 important in French exports. Also with the opening up of Eastern  
32 Europe to Western Europe there's even more attraction in Europe  
33 for French business. In the last month France devalued the CFA

34 Franc deciding its subsidising of Francophone Africa. Some believe  
35 this is a clear sign that France is abandoning its Africa commitment  
36 in favour of Europe and other areas. An example is the fact the new  
37 right wing French government is not willing to fund these corrupt,  
38 bureaucratic governments. But despite this there seems some  
39 continuation in the policy. Despite the intentions to promote  
40 democracy as President Mitterrand said in 1990 summit with the  
41 African leaders, it appears France is unable to break its old habits.  
42 The previous socialist government in its last few months in office was  
43 humiliated by African leaders. President Bongo, an authoritarian,  
44 is still in power; Mobutu is still in power. France did little to .. to er  
45 punish Zaire despite the French ambassador being murdered by  
46 Mobutu's henchmen, [a student laughs]... armed guard  
47 ... or whatever  
48 <S 02> Armed guard  
49 <S 01> Armed guard was it? Nothing was done by the government in  
50 reaction to the 1993 election in Cameroon despite the result being  
51 claimed to be fixed and there was ... dunno ... dodgy dealings.  
52 Cameroon therefore is still receiving a recipient of French aid  
53 despite threats of aid being linked to democracy and Cameroon is  
54 one of the richest countries in francophone Africa so the newer  
55 aspect of aid policy doesn't seem to be doing much. The French  
56 political parties still need African leaders for France as they've always  
57 done, funded by or partly funded by African leaders... so ... it's a  
58 habit that's hard to break. However does Africa need France still?  
59 Despite the favourable noises about democracy and freedom,  
60 France has done little to promote either. Devaluation will hit African  
61 people hard. The only people who will benefit from the CFA franc  
62 devaluation are the big trading and export companies which are  
63 often foreign owned and controlled anyway. The mass of people face  
64 an ever greater drop in living standards. French aid policy has failed  
65 to benefit the majority. Instead it has pandered to the interest of  
66 French business and corrupt African leaders. African leaders in the  
67 past have needed France. Military interventions or the threat of  
68 them has helped keep many of them in power. An example of this  
69 at the moment French troops have helped to prop up the routed  
70 Rwandan army after its er defeat... and that is it.  
71 <S 02> Good. Thank you very much indeed. Okay so there's about three or  
72 four major points you want to talk about... right... which you were

73 going to try and identify.  
 74 The first of them is ... just to go into the basis of the relationship that  
 75 Ian started with. Why is it that France didn't want to break with  
 76 Africa? Why is it that France didn't want to let Africa em become  
 77 independent 'cos they clearly didn't I mean it was '58 where they had  
 78 that sort of funny referendum, oui ou non and er then we went on  
 79 to the 60s situation; why?... why not? Why did they ... what was ...  
 80 <S 03> [They] saw it as part of France itself... Like the British didn't really  
 81 see their colonies as like a part of Britain, France very much saw it as  
 82 an integrated part of the nation.  
 83 <S 01> The plan was always ... The plan was never to let go but to er  
 84 assimilate em the Africans into a er sort of wider France. The plan  
 85 was always beginning with the French [inaudible] or whatever was to  
 86 er assimilate the Africans into a larger France, never to sort of ... like  
 87 Britain. The plan was, I mean they saw an end to the road, they never  
 88 said they would hold on to it

## General commentary

This teaching situation is marked by extended, prepared contributions by individual students directed in advance of the session by the tutor. It therefore contrasts markedly with the kinds of interchanges found in Unit 17 where speaking turns are shorter, less complete and less planned.

Time to plan what to say and to draw on books in preparation in addition to knowledge of the requirements of formal seminar presentations result in more formal talk. In terms of *vocabulary* more written, precise, infrequent and specialised items can be expected and are, indeed, to be found in the transcript above. In this context of language *written* to be spoken it is interesting to ask if there are words which are peculiar to spoken discourse. The specific commentary which follows examines some aspects of this question. It is also interesting to compare this transcript with the data in Unit 5 which mixes formal and informal features.

## Line-by-line commentary

The speaker is finding his way into his argument at this point and the talk is thus characterised by one or two false starts (*anything any better*) (*er, what*), an informal discourse marker (*well*), and some lapses in syntactic ordering (*when ... but had a seat on UN Security Council*).

*It cannot be said that:* The speaker has now located an appropriate formal style which approximates to written English. Impersonal passive constructions such as this are common in most forms of written argumentation.

- 1.34 *Some believe ...*: This is another impersonal formulaic phrase which allows views to be ascribed to others. It is a strategy for making an argument more subtle and is common in informal or written discourse. In informal discussion and debate the phrase is more likely to include the verb 'say' ('some say', 'some people say').
- 1.39 *... continuation in the policies*: In informal speech it would be unusual for nouns such as *continuation* to occur. The process of turning different parts of speech into nouns, particularly verbs into nominal forms, is a characteristic of written discourse or of discourse which is written to be spoken. In speech this expression would be more likely to be formulated as '... the policies seem to have continued' or '... they seem to have continued the policies'.
- 1.41 *it appears* is a marker of tentativeness. There is, however, still only minimal intrusion of the speaker's personal views (compare 'it seems to me'/'it appears to me'). Compare also the density of structures which indicate tentativeness when the discussion becomes more interactive and individual contributions are evaluated (see 1.71).
- 1.48 *armed guard* is a prompt on the part of the tutor in response to the student's use of *or whatever*, which indicates he is uncertain of how accurate his statement is. The tutor still controls the situation even though the student holds the floor. It would be unusual for any of the other participants to provide a prompt at this point.
- 11.51 *dunno ... dodgy dealings ... a recipient of French aid*: The talk enters a phase here in which spoken and written modes are mixed and interspersed; *dunno* is an informal form of 'I don't know'; *dodgy* is a word normally used in informal talk (a written equivalent would be 'dubious' or 'suspicious'); *recipient* is a more markedly 'written' form, nominalised from the verb 'receive' so that a more spoken alternative would be 'Cameroon still receives (or gets) French aid'.
- 1.52 The student here starts with a verb, *receive*, then changes to the very formal noun, *recipient*. This is another example of the nominalisation found in formal discourse. See comments on 1.39 above.
- 1.63 *anyway* is here used adverbially and in clause-final position. An equivalent phrasing would be 'in any case'. In clause-initial position, *anyway*, in spoken discourse in particular, regularly functions as a marker of shift from one topic to another or as a signal to close a conversation.
- 1.71 *good*: The tutor here positively evaluates the presentation of the student. The option to evaluate is in this kind of institutionalised educational context very much the preserve of the teacher. It would be very unusual, for example, for speakers <S 03> or <S 04>, also students, to evaluate at this point the contribution of fellow students.

- 11.72 *seem to, 'cos... right*: The whole discourse becomes here much more  
 -77 'unscripted' and less planned. The use by the tutor of the shortened form of 'because' (*cos*), the false starts (*er, the first of them is ...just to go into*) and the self-monitoring checks (*I mean*), indicate a less structured, more dynamic and developing discourse which contrasts with the more ordered 'written' character of the student's presentation; *right* serves as a kind of discourse organiser. With a rising intonation pattern it can serve to check understanding.
- 1.78 ... *sort of funny referendum*: The speaker here begins to use more informal lexical items (*funny*) and to qualify assertions by the use of informal 'spoken' disclaimers (*sort of*).
- 11.80 *like* is a very common DISCOURSE MARKER of exemplification in informal spoken English. A formal, written equivalent would be 'for example' or 'for instance'. It can also commonly function as deliberately VAGUE LANGUAGE.
- 11.83 The discussion is now becoming far more informal and interactive. The  
 -88 student is hesitant, he reformulates his utterances, he uses VAGUE MARKERS such as *whatever, sort of* and the interactive marker, *I mean*.

### Further reading

For one of the fullest explorations of the differences and distinctions between speech and writing see Halliday (1989). This study gives further examples of what Halliday calls 'grammatical metaphor' (see also Halliday 1985; 1994) - linguistic representations by which processes which are typically reported by verbs in spoken English are encoded as nouns in formal written English.

For further valuable explorations of spoken/written continua see McCarthy and Carter (1994: ch. 1); Chafe (1982); Tannen (1989).

For a core article on planned/unplanned discourse see Ochs (1979).

Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) analyse the role of fixed phrases in formal and informal talk. See also Lewis (1993).

Stenstrom (1990) and Carter and McCarthy (1988: ch. 5) analyse lexical items peculiar to spoken discourse, and lexis in discourse respectively.

On the language of lectures and formal presentations, see Coulthard and Montgomery (1981); Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993).

Coulthard (1995) is an interesting study of the spoken and written characters of statements made to the police. Coulthard makes particular use of measures of lexical density.

For a detailed study of naturally-occurring conversational discourse, including references to data in educational settings, see Tsui (1994).



# Unit 19

## Planning a family holiday

### Activity

You are going to listen to about 900 words of conversation where a married couple are at home planning their summer holiday with a guide book and with the help of a friend who is staying with them.

How good are you at predicting how often certain words might occur in this conversation? Given that the speakers are making plans, they are likely to suggest things, decide things, agree and disagree over possibilities.

Below are some frequency figures for certain verbs in this conversation, counted by a computer. Only one of the figures is correct for each verb. Which one?

	can	could	shall	should	must	suggest	think	reckon
frequency	110,2,6	8,4,0	16,0,1	119,9,122	14,2,155	88,4,0	110,5,2	6,0,1

Turn to page 146 for the correct answers, and note the comments on each verb in the **Line-by-line commentary**.

### Speakers and setting

- <\$01> female
- <\$02> male
- <\$03> female

Recorded in <\$01>'s and <\$02>'s home. <\$03> is a house-guest. At the beginning of the extract, the speakers have just been discussing whether it would be better to take their car across the English Channel or to go by train and ferry.

## Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Yeah we'll just leave the car behind and go on the bus go on the trains  
2 <S 02> I reckon that's what we should do [<S 01 > yeah] the only problem  
3 that we've got then is carrying luggage  
4 <S 01> Yeah I won't take any  
5 <S 03> Just take a ruckie  
6 <S 01> Yeah just take one, just take a Sainsbury's bag  
7 <S 02> Well this is what we usually do I haven't got a rucksack  
8 <S 01> Well what we need to take we've got the cool bag so we'll take that  
9 and just so we can keep, it's only small take things in that and we  
10 can get go to Zebbrugge get the train down to Brugge and then 'cos  
11 it's only a wee bit south then take the train back up and go into Delft  
12 and up to Amsterdam and there's somewhere else nice on the way  
13 go up to Amsterdam and then just get it back again, is Delft in  
14 Holland or Belgium  
15 <S 03> Delft Holland  
16 <S 02> Holland  
17 [5 secs]  
18 <S 01> And it says in my book the train's quite cheap  
19 <S 02> The only problem I suppose if we do go by train is the hassle of  
20 finding the right buses and coaches and  
21 <S 01> Nah cos the train stations'll be in the cities won't they it'll be fine  
22 <S 02> The ferry  
23 <S 01> And the ferry  
24 <S 03> Well you've done inter-railing haven't you  
25 <S 01> Yeah and they're in the towns  
26 <S 03> But they do a Benelux tour rail card 'Which enables you to travel on  
27 all Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourg railways or buy a voucher for a  
28 specified 17 days'  
29 <S 01> Wow how much is that  
30 <S 03> It costs erm [6 sees] hmm [6 sees] 80 quid that's a lot isn't it  
31 <S 01> That's a lot ... each  
32 <S 03> Must be  
33 <S 01> That's a lot  
34 <S 03> But it does, I mean that would give you loads, that's if you go for like  
35 17 days [<S 01 >mm] you're probably just better to get your tickets  
36 when you're there  
37 <S 01> Mm

38 <S 03> For wherever you wanted to go  
39 <S 01> Yeah probably won't be dear  
40 <S 02> It might be worthwhile taking the car you know  
41 <S 01> Oh I don't know I can't be bothered with the hassle  
42 <S 02> I'll do the driving I like driving  
43 <S 01> It's not that it's the parking and trying to find things  
44 <S 03> If you go to Amsterdam it would be a nightmare to take the car  
45 <S 01> Trying to sort out everything  
46 <S 02> Because originally when we thought we were going I thought we  
47 were just going to Amsterdam and that was it we were just spending  
48 our week in Amsterdam cos there's loads to do  
49 <S 03> We're not we're not  
50 though  
51 <S 02> Which makes it more difficult  
52 <S 01> We are going to Brugge now as well  
53 <S 03> Did you know British Rail operate services to Amsterdam from  
54 Liverpool Street and Victoria Stations  
55 <S 01> Yeah it's 49 pounds return each  
56 <S 02> Are you sure you want to go to, I mean we can go for a city break in  
57 Brugge  
58 <S 01> It's dead expensive it's dear it's so cheap if you go, it's the same price  
59 for the two of us and the car return to Zebrugge or Hook of  
60 Holland either, as it is to go as foot passengers it's no cheaper or  
61 dearer  
62 <S 02> But then you've got to add on 50 pounds a night wherever we stay  
63 <S 01> Don't you want to do that anyway  
64 <S 02> But you don't if you've got one of these city breaks it's all inclusive  
65 isn't it  
66 <S 01> Yeah but then you're talking about 220 quid each aren't you instead  
67 of 30  
68 <S 03> And you could base yourself in Amsterdam and just go to Brugge  
69 for the day  
70 <S 01> How far is it how far's Brugge from Amsterdam  
71 <S 03> Don't know probably miles  
72 <S 01> [laughs]  
73 <S 02> You could do that you're right  
74 <S 03> Don't know  
75 <S 02> -You could do that  
76 <S 03> You know like if you got the earliest train in the morning

77 <S 01> Oh that's true yeah  
78 <S 03> And then just got the last train back at night  
79 <S 02> The only thing is when I opened that up at Brugge first thing it said  
80 in it was don't stay in Brugge ... no it says don't stay in Brugge cos  
81 it's dear  
82 <S 01> Is it  
83 <S 03> Yeah  
84 <S 02> Yeah it does say that  
85 <S 03> Page 363 that was in the *Let's go* it said that it's difficult to find a  
86 reasonably priced meal  
87 <S 01> Well maybe then we could do that go to the Hook of Holland, go to  
88 Amsterdam cos Delft isn't far from Amsterdam is it that would be, if  
89 you could go there for a wee jaunt  
90 <S 02> I thought Delft was miles from Amsterdam  
91 <S 01> Don't think so  
92 <S 02> Well I mean it's only, Holland's only small, it's not a big place  
93 <S 01> It's not I don't think it's far alright well we'll do that  
94 <S 03> Well it says 'you would be mad to come to Flanders and miss this  
95 place' Brugge  
96 <S 01> It is the Venice of the north of Europe  
97 <S 03> 'Its museums are named as one attraction hold some of the  
98 country's finest collections of Flemish art'  
99 <S 02> You see I'd never get her into a museum to look at art  
100 <S 03> Yes well Jen could go and look at something more interesting while  
101 you go and  
102 <S 01> Ah yes  
103 <S 02> Jen could go and, you could go and look at things like glass buoys  
104 <S 01> Yeah that's okay  
105 <S 02> While I go and look at Flemish art  
106 <S 01> Good idea  
107 <S 02> That's separating our cultures  
108 <S 01> Yeah I'll go and sit in a cafe, street terrace bar somewhere and drink  
109 beer, Belgian beer and eat chocolates and you can go and look at  
110 paintings  
111 <S 02> You can pay 40 pounds for a Belgian beer  
112 [4 secs]  
113 <S 01> Well maybe we should do that

## General commentary

When people are negotiating and planning in very informal or intimate situations like this one, verbs such as *suggest*, *agree*, and *disagree* are unlikely to be used very frequently. Instead, speakers simply state their position, but usually soften it by using modal verbs, especially *could* in this well as other softeners such as *maybe*, *think* and *reckon*. These words are commented on as they occur, in the **Line-by-line commentary**. Words such as *suggest*, *agree* and *disagree* are more likely to occur in more formal settings such as debates, meetings, etc. (though even in those settings they are not as frequent as language coursebooks sometimes suggest). *Suggest*, *agree*, *disagree* are, in short, likely to be more useful for *reporting* such functions rather than actually performing them.

## Line-by-line commentary

- 1.1 *We'll just leave the car.* Note here the 'll/form used for making informal decisions. It is often not clear whether such uses of 'll/ are a short form of 'will' or 'shall', and it may be better to think of 'll/ as an independent form in conversational grammar. The use of 'll/ with *we* to announce informal decisions in this way is quite common. (See also 1.8.)
- 1.2 Two softeners occur here: *reckon* and *should*; *reckon* (meaning 'think' or 'guess') is very common in informal conversation.
- 1.5 *ruckie*: Short form of *rucksack*. The '-y/-ie' suffix is often used to create informality, and in language used to or by young children. Other examples:
- doggy, horsy, froggy (used to/by children)
  - Trekkie (a fan of the science fiction TV series *Star Trek*)
  - Tommy, Maggie, Charlie, Micky, etc. (informal versions of personal first names)
  - Biccie, ciggy, bevvy lolly (biscuit, cigarette, alcoholic drink [beverage], lollipop)
- 1.6 *Sainshury's*: A major chain of supermarkets in Britain.
- 1.8–9 *can* occurs three times here as the softener for the speaker's suggestions.
- 1.10 *wee*: This speaker is Scottish. *Wee* is standard Scottish and Northern Irish English for 'small', but is sometimes used by other English speakers (e.g. 'Could I have a wee bit more milk in my coffee please?').
- 1.19 *hassle*: An informal word meaning 'problem'/'nuisance'/'difficulty'. (See also 1.41.)
- 1.21 *Nah*: This form of 'no' often sounds slightly scornful or dismissive.
- 1.26 *They do a Benelux card*: Note this informal use of 'do' used to refer to services provided by shops/companies, etc. (see also Unit 12,1.16).

- 1.29 *Wow*: An exclamation of surprise, normally used by younger generations.
- 1.30 *quid* is the normal, everyday colloquial word for a pound sterling in Britain. (See also 1.66.)
- 1.32 Note the **ELLIPSIS** of *it* with *must be*, and the same with *won't be* in 1.39. In 1.71 and 1.74 /is ellipsed before *don't know*, and in 1.91 the same happens with *don't think so*. These are typical ellipses with everyday routine expressions.
- 1.34 *loads* is a common, informal word meaning 'a lot'/'many'. It can be used with plurals or uncountables:

She's got loads of money.

No need to rush, we've got loads of time.

There's loads to do. (1.48)

- 1.35 *you're probably just better to ...*: This construction would not normally occur in writing, where we would be likely to find 'It would probably be better if you just...'.  
 1.40 *might is* one of the most indirect softeners of all. 'May', 'could' or 'would' are all stronger alternatives here.  
 1.47 *that was it*: 'that was all, nothing else'.  
 1.51 *Which makes it...*: In spoken language, speakers often tag on subordinate clauses in their next speaking turn; they do not have to start a 'new sentence' each time they speak. The structure is common in advertising language:

Which is why you should always drink Fortuna beer.

Such usage allows the adverts to sound distinctly interactive and conversational in tone.

- 1.58 *dead expensive*: *dead here* means 'really'/'very', and is a very informal intensifier:

That film was dead boring.

I was just dead tired and couldn't concentrate.

Note also how the speakers alternate between *expensive* and the less formal *dear*.

- 1.66 *you're talking (about)*: This is an informal way of saying 'that means'. Other examples:

For two weeks you're talking 300 pounds.

You're talking thousands for a car like that, even ten years old.

- 1.68 *could* is the most common softener for making suggestions in this extract. Note its use here and in 11. 73, 75, 100 and 103 (twice).
- 1.76 Note the use of *like*, which is a very frequent discourse marker in informal conversation. Speakers use it when they are exemplifying, or often just as an alternative or accompaniment to 'you know'.

- l.79 *The (only) thing is:* This is a frequent conversational expression meaning 'the only problem is'.
- l.89 *a wee jaunt:* A *jaunt* is an informal word meaning 'a pleasant excursion/day out away from home or where one is staying'.
- l.92 *Holland's only small, it's not a big place:* Speakers often use antonyms (opposites) in the same utterance to make their meaning clear. Other examples:

The countryside's hilly, it's not flat.  
It's quite smooth, it's not at all bumpy.

- l.94 The guide book obviously uses quite informal language (probably because it is  
-95 aimed at young people), not dissimilar from conversational style, e.g. the use of *mad* ('crazy').
- l.99 *get her...:* an informal construction meaning 'persuade her to go to ...'. Other examples:

You'll never get me into an amusement arcade.  
You'd never get him to go to church, not in a million years.

l.103 *glass buoys* here are marine buoys made of glass. Jen (<S 01 >) collects them.

### Answers for frequency activity

	can	could	shall	should	must	suggest	think	reckon
<i>frequency</i>	6	8	0	2	1	0	2	1

### Further reading

On the use of modal verbs in real language compared with language teaching text books, see Holmes (1983, 1988).

McCarthy (1988) has further examples of how speakers use synonyms and antonyms to elaborate meaning in conversation.

Sinclair (1991) contains much fascinating material on lexical frequencies and related matters.



### Activity

The word 'get' (and its other forms 'getting/got') occurs quite frequently in the extract (as it does in spoken language in general). How many different meanings/uses does the verb 'get' have in English? Make a list of its different meanings and, if possible, compare your list with a partner's.

The occurrences of 'get' and approximate meanings/uses are given in the table at the end of this unit. How do they compare with your list?

### Speakers and setting

- <S 01> informal meeting chairperson: female (30s)
- <S 02> male (mid-20s)
- <S 03> male (30s)

This is an extract from an informal meeting held at an educational publisher's office. The meeting consists of a small group of close colleagues who are planning the production schedules for educational materials.

### Transcript

- 1 <S 01> Erm can we keep these intermediate cassette schedules
- 2 as draft until [4 sees] erm [3 sees] because I, I have to erm
- 3 get a confirmed date for the tapescript from the author and stuff
- 4 <S 02> Yeah that's fine
- 5 <S 01> Cos the authors have to finalise the tapescript and

6 until they do that erm  
7 <S 02> -Yep it's not a problem  
8 [6 secs]  
9 <S 01> I can't really say that all this is going to work [sounds of pages  
10 rustling] and then *Changes* ... which is finally getting moving [4 sees]  
11 now erm can we change the film date for Teacher's Book One  
12 to the 30th of May because we're we're putting in some extra  
13 pages ... so I'm waiting for typescript for those extra pages  
14 <S 02> What's the extent  
15 <S 01> [whispered] the extent  
16 <S 02> Is it going to remain the same  
17 <S 01> Yeah it should be one-seven-six ... yeah I think we've  
18 got spare pages it's not a problem  
19 [3 secs]  
20 <S 02> Fine  
21 <S 01> Erm [sound of paper tearing] [4 sees] and we need  
22 stock by July, early July we have to be a bit careful with these  
23 three now because the the Loescher warehouse closes from the  
24 first of August to the 22nd so ... we must allow time for things  
25 to get there and get into the warehouse before it closes  
26 <S 03> How do you spell Loescher is it L-O-E-S-C-H-E-R  
27 <S 01> Yeah erm ... but I mean that seems that I mean based  
28 on the printing time we've allowed here we should get stock  
29 [<S 02> mm] early July [<S 03> yeah] anyway so that's a month to  
30 get to Italy [3 sees] so that one's going okay, we've got...  
31 Workbook Book Two film okay by the 29th of May, shouldn't be any  
32 problem at all in fact should be, should be quite a lot earlier  
33 <S 02> Do I need to do price fixes for Teacher's Book One  
34 <S 01> Oh gosh erm  
35 <S 02> Do, don't I  
36 <S 01> Yes actually Workbook Two's probably the  
37 most urgent now [4 sees] I reckon we'll probably have film ...  
38 in about three weeks for Workbook Two  
39 <S 02> Right... it's not going to change in quantity is it  
40 I mean I think we've bought the paper for it already  
41 <S 01> Change in quantity ... no  
42 <S 02> Fine ... this is the bit where Kate goes oh it's  
43 actually a hundred-and-ninety-six [laughs mockingly]  
44 [<S 01 > no no no] don't mean that erm right fine great so I'll just, I'll

**45** leave it as on schedule  
 46 <S 01> Oh hang on sorry  
 47 <S 02> Oh no what  
 48 <S 01> No the extent is not ninety-six  
 49 <S 02> What is it  
 50 <S 01> It's eight more ... sorry that's not a very nice extent  
 51 is it but  
 52 <S 02> It isn't but erm  
 53 <S 03> What er what I can't add that what does that take us  
 54 to hundred and four  
 55 <S 01> Er ninety, hundred and four  
 56 <S 03> Hundred and four  
 57 <S 02> Yeah  
 58 <S 01> Is that hideous  
 59 <S 03> Yeah  
 60 <S 02> It is a bit of a problem  
 61 <S 03> -Yeah it is  
 62 <S 02> Well, have to see what they come  
**63** up with  
 64 <S 03> We'll see what we can do  
 65 <S 02> Oh it's the, it's the mono one so it'll be less of a  
 66 problem  
 67 <S 01> You know there was just no way [<S 03> mm] I could  
 68 squeeze it in  
 69 <S 03> Don't worry don't worry we'll sort it out  
 70 [3 secs]  
 71 <S 01> Erm and Teacher's Book Two we've got yeah film end of  
 72 May again that's what I'm aiming for still  
 73 <S 02> Shall I do a price fix for estimate for that  
 74 <S 01> Price fix estimate yes have you got costs from Tony  
 75 <S 02> No well basically yeah  
 76 <S 01> Erm sorry I was sending you hundreds of messages  
 77 before, while you were away about getting disks of things to Tony  
 78 <S 02> For *Changes* which we've actioned  
 79 <S 01> ' He must now have the Workbook  
 80 because he's [<S 03> We've done them] so he's got Teacher's Book  
**81** Two and Workbook *Two* and those bits of artwork for Teacher's  
**82** Book One  
 83 <S 02> He hasn't got the bits of artwork yet for Teacher's

84 Book One Teacher's Book Two G&E are finding the disks and sorting  
85 that out for us  
86 <S 01> Oh right and he's got Workbook Two hasn't he 'cos he  
87 said he was, he would print it out  
88 <S 02> ' He's got Workbook Two he's got the fonts he  
89 needed he hasn't got the artwork he needed G&E are looking into  
90 that at the moment  
91 <S 01> Right okay but it's all under control  
92 <S 02> It's actioned  
93 <S 01> Jolly good there's something else I wanted to ask you um  
94 ... when are you going to start handling reprints cos I need some  
95 advice about reprints for *Changes*  
96 <S 03> Erm I won't, I couldn't offer you any intelligent  
97 advice on reprints until I actually get it and probably even then  
98 it would take me about three months I would think to get an angle  
99 on it but I'm not getting it until June  
100 <S 02> Linda's coming in in June yeah  
101 <S 03> So until June  
102 <S 01> So I have to talk to Hamish  
103 <S 03> Everything is Hamish yeah  
104 <S 01> Right  
105 <S 02> I mean Linda's doing them as we speak all new ELT  
106 reprints are being handled by Linda  
107 <S 01> It's Linda not Carrie  
108 <S 02> That's right  
109 <S 03> That's right  
110 <S 01> Erm

### General commentary

The extract is quite informal, since the people at the meeting know each other well and work closely together every day. Business meetings between people who do not know each other are likely to display more formal features of language. Here the speakers have to arrive at a number of decisions regarding book production. As there is no one 'authority' figure, they have to negotiate their way to the important decisions. This transcript includes several examples of the problem-solution pattern, where problems are presented and possible ways of solving them are evaluated by the participants, for example, the problem of getting books to one of the company's distributors (ll. 22-30).

## Line-by-line commentary

- 1.1 Note the use of *can* to make a polite but firm proposal; it is almost like an instruction here, and does not really give the others much room to say 'no'. See also *can* in 1.11.
- 1.3 *and stuff* is a very informal way of saying 'and so on'/'and things like that'.
- 1.4 a The speaker does not repeat himself but uses *that's fine* and *it's not a problem* more or less synonymously. The same happens in reverse in 1.18 and 1.20. Speakers often vary their vocabulary in this way.
- 1.7 *Yep*: A very informal version of 'yes'. *Changes* is the title of a book.
- 1.14 *extent here* is a publishing term meaning 'number of pages'.
- 1.17 *one-seven-six* is just another way of saying 'a hundred and seventy six'. Since they are discussing numbers of pages, it is not necessary for the speaker to spell out that it is 'hundreds' and 'tens'.
- 1.22 *stock*: Books in the company's warehouse, ready to send out to booksellers.
- 1.22 *a bit careful*: *a bit* is much more common in informal spoken language than 'a little' or 'rather/somewhat'. (See also 1.60.)
- 11.31 Note the ellipses here of the it pronoun subject before *shouldn't*. This is frequent  
–32 in informal responses with modal verbs:

- A: Can we do it by August?  
B: Might be difficult, actually.  
A: Who's in charge of that?  
B: Must be Linda, surely.

Notice that ELLIPSIS also happens with the auxiliary *do* in 1.35. This is common where the utterance ends in a TAG [*don't I*].

- 1.34 *gosh* is a rather middle-class exclamation. The same speaker uses *jolly good* in 1.93, which has a similar middle-class feel to it.
- 1.37 *I reckon* is frequent in informal talk, meaning 'I think/guess/estimate'.
- 1.42 *this is the bit where ...*: This expression is often used to introduce a parody or some sort of joke about the present situation, especially emphasising the predictability of things.
- 1.42 Note here how *goes* is used instead of 'says'. The verb 'go' is used to report speech in informal contexts (especially narratives), where the speaker wants to dramatise the reported speech, or to emphasise the actual sounds the person made, or any gestures or body language they used:

- A: And then he goes 'a-a-a-gh!' and jumped off the roof. I thought he was going to kill himself!

The simple past tense 'went' can also be used in this way for speech reports.

- l.44 Note the ELLIPSIS of *I'm (I) Don't mean that*. This often happens with frequently occurring FIXED EXPRESSIONS such as this one. In 1.62, similarly, *we* is understood before *have to see...*
- Observe also how the speaker uses three DISCOURSE MARKERS together here (*right, fine, great*), to mark the boundary between this bit of business and the next. (See also Unit 6,11. 36—37.)
- l.46 *hang on* is an informal version of 'wait (a moment)'.  
 l.53 The speaker here says *take us to*, rather than 'take it to', which personalises the expression more.  
 ll.55 Here we note that the speakers do not use *a* (or least of all *one*) before *hundred*.  
 -56 This is common in informal situations. Learners of English often overuse *one* before words like hundred, thousand, dozen, etc. which is only used in rather formal contexts or contexts where it is essential to be very precise.  
 l.58 *hideous* often means 'very ugly', but here it just means 'awful/very bad'.  
 l.65 *mono*: This is short for 'monochrome', meaning black-and-white, not colour.  
 l.67 *there was just no way ...*: This is a frequent informal spoken expression meaning '(I) can/could not possibly ...':

There's just no way I can phone him at 6 o'clock in the morning.

- l.69 The collocation 'sort out a problem' is much more frequent in spoken language than '(re) solve a problem'. See also 11.84—85.  
 l.72 Note the final position of *still*. The position gives it emphasis. This would be very unusual in written style, but often happens in spoken language. In formal writing we would expect 'I am still aiming for the end of May'.  
 l.75 *basically* here seems to be used to mean 'in a general sense'; it softens the definiteness of 'yes' as an answer.  
 l.78 The use of *of action* as a verb here is typical business language, meaning 'put into action'. We would not use it in everyday conversation.  
 ll.81 and 83 *bits* is much more informal than 'pieces' would be here.  
 l.84 *G&E* stands for Goodfellow & Egan, a typesetting company.  
 l.105 *as we speak*: 'at this very moment'. Compare this with 'as I write' in written language.

## Follow-up activity

Note how often throughout the extract the speakers use discourse markers *like you know* and *I mean*. These soften and personalise their remarks, which is very important in a context like this, where consensus is necessary and where the speakers are negotiating their way towards agreement, even though this is 'business English'.

## Occurrences of get

Note that the paraphrases of meaning are approximate; it is very difficult to give precise glosses.

line	context	meaning/use
3	I have to erm <b>get</b> a confirmed date for the tapescript from the author	obtain/secure
10	and then <i>Changes...</i> which is finally <b>getting</b> moving	starting (to move)
18	I think we've <b>got</b> spare pages	have
24–25	we must allow time for things to (a) <b>get</b> there and (b) <b>get</b> into the warehouse	(a) arrive/reach (b) be put into
28–29	we should <b>get</b> stock early July	receive/have
29–30	so that's a month to <b>get</b> to Italy	reach/travel to
30–31	we've <b>got</b> ... Workbook Book Two film okay by the 29th of May	have/have noted down
71	we've <b>got</b> yeah film end of May again	have/have noted down
74	have you <b>got</b> costs from Tony	obtained/received
77	about <b>getting</b> disks of things to Tony	sending/so that he receives
80–89	he's <b>got</b> Teacher's Book Two He hasn't <b>got</b> the bits of artwork yet He's <b>got</b> Workbook Two he's <b>got</b> the fonte he needed he hasn't <b>got</b> the artwork	has/doesn't have
96–97	I couldn't offer you any intelligent advice on reprints until I actually <b>get</b> it	receive
98	it would take me about three months I would think to <b>get an angle on</b> it	part of an idiomatic expression: 'to understand its nature'/'have a proper perspective on it'
99	but <b>I'm</b> not <b>getting</b> it until June	receiving