⑩ Spoken English

10.1 The nature of spoken language

Linguists have become increasingly interested in spoken language, crediting it in recent years with far more significance than did the traditionalists of earlier centuries. The publishing company Longman, for instance, has initiated the Spoken Corpus project (1994) which aims to create a database of ten million words taken directly from every-day situations. It has collected material by taping more than a hundred volunteers over a period of a week. Because of its real sources, the lexicographers will be able to trace the **current development and disappearance** of words and expressions in a very con-crete way. Equally, their focus can be on **frequency of usage**, allowing a comparison between words that are spoken and those that are used in writing; on the ways in which **men and women** differ in their use of language; or on **regional differences**. While lin-guists have been interested in **phatic communication** for a long time, this project will also help them to analyse the non-verbal sounds we make, in a far more detailed way than ever before. There can be no doubt that this research will result in the world's largest database of spoken English and this, in its turn, will also give prestige to the study of spoken language in its own right.

Spoken language is the dominant **mode** in our society because most of us use speech to communicate in a variety of contexts, for a range of purposes and in various registers. We are all experts, able to adapt to the demands of each speech encounter almost subconsciously. This makes a study of the sounds and features of speech central to an understanding of the English language – spoken language is a variety in its own right, with distinctive **lexical, grammatical, stylistic and structural characteristics**.

The **CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS** and **SHARED VALUES** of a society dictate the roles speakers must fill if they are to be accepted and we begin to learn the necessary skills from a very early age. To enable effective spoken communication to take place, we assimilate ritualistic patterns as the basis for spoken exchanges. Participants are involved in a constant process of evaluation which can be both conscious and subcon-scious: identifying what is and what is not acceptable; making lexical and grammatical choices which are appropriate for the context; using **paralinguistics** to reinforce and underpin the words spoken; interpreting the meaning of utterances and so on. Although different kinds of speech encounters will display different characteristics, it is possible to establish distinctive features that make spoken and written discourse very different.

For many people, written language is more prestigious than spoken language and yet far more people use speech on a daily basis. **Writing** does have obvious benefits: it is permanent; it makes communication over a physical distance possible; it can be revised and carefully crafted; it can be reread at any time; it can overcome limits of the human memory and therefore encourages intellectual development; and it has made it possible to preserve the canon of literature. SPOKEN LANGUAGE, however, has strengths that cannot be matched by written language: it enables people to take an active role in social groups; responses are often immediate; and the speech of each user is made distinctive by characteristic sound qualities, mannerisms and accompanying gestures – it is far more difficult to establish a personal style of writing.

Even though participants may not be equal, most forms of spoken language are **interactional**: points can be clarified; questions can be asked; topics can be easily changed; and any number of people can take part. Because communication usually takes place in a face-to-face situation, speech does not have to be as explicit as writing. We can rely on **non-verbal signals** like gesture, facial expression and non-verbal sounds as well as the words themselves to understand an exchange. Equally, because the **audience** is more likely to be known, shared knowledge will prevent problems arising from any vagueness.

Just as written varieties can have a whole range of **purposes**, so too can spoken language. It may be informative, in a lecture (**referential**); social, in an informal conversation (**phatic**); it may aim to get something done, as in a telephone call to a plumber (**transactional**); or to reveal a speaker's personal state of mind or attitude at a certain time (**expressive**). In each case, the context, the audience and the speaker's intentions will dictate the linguistic and prosodic choices made.

The key to analysing any spoken discourse is to start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who are the participants and what are their **roles**?
- Do they have equal **status**?
- What is the **purpose** of the exchange?
- How is the discourse affected by the **context**?

Answers to these questions will provide the basis for a closer focus – having identified the general framework for communication, linguists then consider lexical, grammatical and prosodic choices made by an individual in a specific situation.

Spoken language covers such a wide range of examples that it is difficult to draw up a definitive list of linguistic characteristics. Nevertheless, it is possible to establish a number of distinctive features that mark it out as different from other varieties.

The manner

The MANNER will depend upon the relative status of the participants – the inequality at a job interview between interviewers and interviewee means that the tone will be **formal**; the equality between two students having a chat in the common room means that the tone will be **informal**. Lexical, grammatical and prosodic choices will be dictated by the manner – that is, by the relative formality or informality of the encounter. Because of the cultural and social expectations assimilated from an early age, participants in any spoken discourse will often make the same kinds of decision about what is and what is not acceptable. Thus despite the fact that many speech encounters are informal and spontaneous, spoken language is quite formulaic.

The speakers

The **RELATIONSHIP** of the speakers or their **RELATIVE STATUS** is the first area of a transcript to address. Things like the educational, social or economic status of the participants are fixed, but other features are not. Speakers may take it in turns to select topics; turn-taking may be co-operative or one speaker may be more dominant than others; the purpose of the discourse could change, making a different participant the 'expert'.

The topic

The **TOPIC** and the **GOAL** of a spoken encounter are also directly related to the manner and the participants. The more clearly defined the purpose, the more formal the exchange is likely to be. A formal **speech** will often first be written in note form or in full, and will have a predetermined content; the subject matter of spontaneous informal **conversation**, on the other hand, is usually random with no clear pattern or evidence of conscious planning. In an informal spoken exchange a speaker can introduce a wide range of material and jump from one topic to another; in a formal context, the topic will be less adaptable. For example, a prearranged **lecture** on 'the nature of religious language' for a group of A-level students will be far more structured and the content will be less flexible than a conversation taking place in the common room.

TOPIC SHIFTS (the points at which speakers move from one topic to another) mark key points in spoken discourse. The speaker responsible for initiating new topics is clearly in charge of the turn-taking – this role may be taken up by different participants during an exchange, or one particular person may be dominant throughout. Even though topic placement may seem to be random, participants try to introduce them as though they arise naturally. In informal conversation this may mean that the main topic (the reason for the exchange) does not come first.

The **end of a topic** can be identified by linguistic signals: in informal conversation, phrases like *by the way...* and *incidentally...* or clauses like *that reminds me...* and *to change the subject...* may be used to bring one topic to an end and establish a new one; in formal contexts, adverbials like *lastly...* and non-finite clauses like *to conclude...* can be used as indicators that something different will soon be introduced. **New topics** can be found by reintroducing material that cropped up earlier in the exchange but in a new form: *as I was saying before...*; by relating a new topic to the old one: *speaking of which...*; or taking a completely new direction: *let's talk about something else...*, and so on. Interruptions may be seen to bring a topic to its end before its natural conclusion. After a digression, an attempt may be made to revive the old topic (*where was I?*), or the new topic may be allowed to replace it because it is seen as more interesting. This kind of **topic management**, however, is unlikely to take place in a formal speech context (lecture or interview) where the topic is usually predefined and particular speakers are dominant.

The structure

The **structure** of spoken exchanges is distinct despite the apparent randomness. Formal discourse, where the words spoken may have been planned on paper before being spo-

ken, will often adopt structural devices typical of written language. Informal speech, however, has its own distinctive structural features. Sequences of utterances called ADJACENCY PAIRS create a recognisable structural pattern. They:

- follow each other;
- are produced by different speakers;
- have a logical connection;
- conform to a pattern.

Questions and answers, greetings, and a command followed by a response are all examples of adjacency pairs.

A: Can I come in?
B: Of course you can.

A: Shut that door now.
B: I will any minute, just don't nag.

The order of TURN-TAKING also structures spoken discourse. Participants are skilful in manipulating turns: usually only one person will speak at a time; despite the fact that turns vary in length, transitions from one speaker to another occur smoothly, often with no gap; the order of participation is not planned in advance, but speakers seem to instinctively identify where turns are coming to an end; if an overlap does occur, it rarely lasts for long. Speakers have to make decisions about turns throughout an exchange, but the knowledge used to do so has not been learnt explicitly. Research into turn-taking would seem to suggest that participants build up an awareness of general frameworks and then use these as the basis for their decisions. For instance, they 'learn' the pattern of exchanges that will take place in a job interview or a classroom and can therefore contribute effectively to the spoken discourse. Speakers can also rely on their knowledge of structures like adjacency pairs – in a meeting with a new person, participants can confidently introduce themselves using a familiar pattern of statements and questions and answers. Assimilated grammatical knowledge enables smooth turn-taking too since speakers know when an utterance is grammatically complete. Non-verbal clues can work alongside the linguistic ones: changes in eye contact, intonation or volume can indicate that a turn is coming to an end; the final syllable of a turn may be lengthened; or a gesture may imply that a speaker has no more to say.

Openings and closings are marked by distinctive features. Social equals might use a neutral starting point or OPENING in a conversation by talking about the weather. This may then lead into a **self-related comment** (focusing on the speaker) or **other-related comment** (focusing on the listener). Vocatives are common as they help to personalise an encounter.

Spoken words	Comment
A: morning (.) oh (.) Richard (.) I must tell you about the holiday = B: = ah (.) I was going to ask about that	The first speaker establishes the topic. He initiates the discourse with a phatic opening, a vocative and a self-related comment. The second speaker adopts a supportive role by creating a link between 'self' and 'other'.
A: come in (.) Peter (.) hang on a sec I've got to turn the oven off (4) do you want a drink = B: = thought you'd never ask	The use of the vocative and imperative show that the speaker is focusing on the other participant in the conversation. Speaker B's response is directly related to the last part of the first speaker's utterance, creating an adjacency pair.

Speakers have a wide range of possible openers to draw on: social greetings, hospitality tokens like *have a drink*; neutral topics; or self- or other-related remarks. They can also establish a co-operative atmosphere by selecting a topic that reflects the interests and experiences of all the participants.

CLOSINGS are used to sum up the exchange. Reference is often made to something outside the speech encounter as a reason for ending the discourse. Self- and other-related remarks are common, but neutral tokens like the weather are not. Closings are often repetitive since the speakers use delaying tactics, referring back to earlier topics and adopting frequently occurring formulae.

Spoken words	Comment
A: better be off now (.) I know you're busy (.) enjoy yourself tomorrow (.) B: I'll make sure I do (.) thanks for coming = A: = have a lovely time = B: = I will (.) and thanks again = A: thanks (.) bye (.) B: bye = A: = bye	An other-related remark is used as a reason for ending the speech encounter. This is followed by a return to an earlier topic (reference to an event taking place on the next day). Both of these establish conventional patterns in which Speaker A focuses interest on Speaker B. The exchange is clearly repetitive – social formulae are reiterated.

In the main body of the dialogue, it is possible to classify a number of SPEAKER MOVES:

- FRAMING, in which openings and closings create an overall structure;
- INITIATING, in which a topic is established;
- FOCUSING, in which comments clearly specify the direction of a topic and ensure its development;
- SUPPORTING or FOLLOWING-UP, which encourages continued discussion of a topic;
- CHALLENGING, which interrupts a topic or introduces a new one without mutual agreement.

Prosodic features

PROSODIC FEATURES are a means of dividing spoken utterances into smaller units just as punctuation, capital letters and paragraphing do in a visual way for written language. Whether they are marked or not on a transcript depends upon the purpose of the transcription. A narrow phonetic transcription will contain a lot of information about the quality of sounds used, but most transcriptions you deal with will be broad – that is, less detailed or phonemic. The list below indicates some of the variations that can be identified and the symbols that may be used to highlight them. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. To identify all the prosodic changes in spoken discourse takes great expertise, so you are unlikely to have to use all of them in your own transcriptions. You should, however, be able to recognise the symbols and the sound qualities they represent. The transcripts used here are broad and selective, marking only the most prominent prosodic features.

Intonation

INTONATION PATTERNS can vary dramatically, and each change will usually reinforce the meaning in some way. By varying the intonation, speakers can convey different

VOICELESS HESITATION, VOICED PAUSES and **WORD SEARCHING** also create pauses in spoken language. Sometimes they are used intentionally by speakers to encourage equality of status between participants -- they prevent speakers giving the impression that they are experts by suggesting that information is not spontaneous, but requires thought. A student, for instance, might hesitate in talking about *Hamlet* so that she did not seem too knowledgeable.

> Hamlet is a (.) complex character who (1) uses his madness to (.) conceal his (1) real intentions

It is important to remember that where written language identifies the end of a sentence with a full stop, spoken language uses a pause. Some pauses therefore have a functional role in spoken discourse – these tend to be micro-pauses rather than timed pauses.

Vocal effects

VOCAL EFFECTS (giggling, coughing, throat clearing) and **PARALINGUISTICS (gestures, posture)** can reinforce or contradict the meaning conveyed by the spoken word.

Lexis

The **lexis** of spoken discourse is often less formal than that associated with written language. If a topic does require formal subject-specific language, unless a speaker is specifically assigned the role of expert, participants will often underplay the importance of key words by introducing clauses like *you know* and phrases like *sort of*. An informal atmosphere can be recognised in the use of conversational lexis (*yeah, cos, all right*); colloquial idiom (*in a minute, the thing is, as far as I can see*); clichés (*that's life*); hyperbole (*on and on and on, really stupid, thousands*); and phatic communication and vocalisations. Abbreviations may be used where the speakers are well known enough to have established a code based on familiarity and a shared view of the world. Equally, in-slang or in-jokes will be mutually intelligible among 'insiders'.

Spoken discourse can often be **ambiguous** because speakers use language inexplicitly. Ambiguities, however, usually cause no problems with understanding because participants can rely on the context and non-verbal communication for extra information. Deictic expressions like *this one, over there* or *right now* are common. They are typical of face-to-face interaction where speakers can refer directly to specific characteristics of the context. Their meaning is always relative to the speech situation. Phonologically vague utterances like **mumbling** and **tailing off** can also be overcome because there is a permanent possibility for **recapitulation**.

Grammar

The **GRAMMAR** of spoken language tends to be looser and more rambling than that of written language, which can be crafted. Typically, spoken discourse in an informal context will be marked by frequent use of minor 'sentences' and co-ordinated clauses; phrasal verbs and informal 'filler' verbs; and contracted forms. In more formal situations, grammar will be less erratic and more likely to conform to standard patterns.

In general terms, phrases tend to be relatively straightforward. Noun phrases are often simple; where they are complex, they tend to consist of one pre-modifier rather than a string. Post-modification occurs less frequently. As the topic becomes more serious and the manner more formal, noun phrases are more likely to be complex. Certain adverbial intensifiers like *very* and *a bit* occur frequently. Verb phrases also tend to

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grammatical moods and attitudes of surprise, excitement, pleasure and so on.

> | nǒ | I rèally mean it | nô | I dòn't think so |
> | (indignant) | (certainty) | (doubtful) | (matter-of-fact) |

Intonation has functional as well as semantic uses -- it marks grammatical boundaries and structures turns.

Pitch

PITCH may be high, low or anywhere in between. Variations (high, mid or low) can be marked on a transcription, but the level, particularly for monosyllabic utterances, will often be quite uniform. Changes in pitch are usually linked to meaning and the speaker's relationship to the topic: a raised pitch often indicates excitement or enthusiasm; a lowered pitch marks a finale or anticlimax of some kind.

> and the most ↑fantastic thing↑ has happened (.) everyone is standing ↑up↑ (.) the concert is almost over but people are ↑still clapping↑ (.) the soloist is ↓smiling↓ (.) the conductor is ↓acknowledging↓ the orchestra (.) and what a concert it's ↓been↓ (.) the last night of the Proms is over for another ↓year↓

Stress

The pattern of **STRESSED** and **UNSTRESSED WORDS** in English is directly linked to the rhythm of utterances. It also marks words of importance – a change of stress can change meaning.

> | I ate an icecream | Focus of sentence: *ate* rather than bought or made |
> | I ate an icecream | Focus of sentence: *I* rather than someone else |
> | I ate an icecream | Focus of sentence: *icecream* rather than another kind of food |

TONE UNITS help to organise the discourse, directing listener attention to the syntactic structure of an utterance, the relative prominence of the clause elements, and any new information.

Loudness and pace

The **LOUDNESS** (loud, quiet, or increasing or decreasing in volume) and **PACE** (fast, slow, or getting faster or slower) of spoken language can also influence the meaning and reveal attitude. Variations in the volume of utterances, for instance, are used to reflect the relative importance of what speakers say.

> **forte'** it's important (.) 'I need to have it by' ↓tomorrow↓
>
> **'cresc'** and it's a 'goal (.) Shearer's scored for England again' (.) and ↑what↑ a **'dimin'** 'goal it ↓was↓'

Pauses

PAUSES are seen to be acceptable in many kinds of spoken discourse, particularly where the manner is informal. This means that the **RHYTHM** is often uneven. Where the manner is formal, however, although pauses can be used for dramatic effect, the rhythm is usually more regular and stylised. This kind of rhetorical style is commonly found in speeches written to be spoken.

> Never (.) in the field of human conflict (.) was so much owed (.) by so many (.) to so few.
>
> Winston Churchill (20 August 1940)

have a simple structure: they will often be made up of a lexical verb standing alone or an auxiliary plus a lexical verb. If the manner is formal, a wider range of tense forms and aspects will be used. In many spoken encounters, contracted verbs are common. Colloquial ellipses occur frequently, but use of the passive voice is limited.

Clauses are often quite uncomplicated, made up of S P O/C A.

> (it) (was) (great) (yesterday) – (I) (went) (into town)
> S   P   C   A   S   P   A
>
> (can) (you) (bring in) (Mr Jones's letter)
> P   S   P lex   O

Clause structure is often developed by the addition of strings of adverbials which are normally found in the final position.

> (the train) (was) (late) (in Swansea) (on Platform 2) (last night) (as usual)
> S   P   C   A   A   A   A

If the manner is informal, the relative pronoun introducing the relative clause is often omitted.

> (the boys [who go] down the Leisure Centre) (are) (really mad)
> S   P   C

The structure of utterances is difficult to establish in spoken discourse because it is hard to say exactly where each one begins and ends. Length is more variable in speech than in any other variety and minor 'sentences' are common as responses to questions or in summary statements. Grammatically incomplete utterances tend to be accepted more readily than in many other varieties. Longer utterances tend to be associated with a developing argument or anecdote. Co-ordination of clauses tends to be loose, often using a clause like *you know* as an introductory link. Internal linkage is created through pronoun referencing, cross-referencing of determiners, and ellipsis. Tag questions and examples of phatic communication maintain the pace of spoken discourse. In most forms of spoken language, interrogatives are more common than the imperative mood. Vocatives in the initial position help to create a personal relationship between speakers and encourage interaction.

Spoken language is very versatile – it can use a range of grammatical modes: reported speech: direct quotations; first-person accounts of events; and so on. Changes in modality are also common.

In most spoken contexts, the relationship created between speakers is sympathetic. Even if the speakers are using different kinds of structures (dialect versus standard English), the discrepancy will not be mentioned. One speaker may, for instance, use the standard form *we were* while someone else will use the dialectal *we was*. Such variations are usually seen as a reflection of the speaker's individuality and background. Even within one conversation, an individual may be inconsistent, using both standard and non-standard grammatical forms alongside each other. The willingness to accept such variation is indicative of the co-operative principles governing most speech exchanges.

Non-fluency features

NORMAL NON-FLUENCY FEATURES are common, clearly distinguishing between written and spoken language. The more formal the manner, the less likely there are to be examples of hesitancy, slips of the tongue, simultaneous speech, and the like. However, even in contexts such as an interview on a news programme or a formal debate, transcripts may reveal evidence of non-fluency. The interesting thing is that such 'errors' are taken for granted and often go unnoticed.

Brief **OVERLAPS**, for instance, are quite common in conversation. They may occur where speakers are having to compete for a turn in a speech encounter where lots of participants are involved (a group of friends chatting in the pub); equally, a speaker may have misjudged the end of a turn (the speaker adding extra information after having used closing formulae to signal the end of a turn); or one speaker who is particularly dominant may insist on interrupting (a heckler at a political meeting).

> A: I would like to speak today about our policy on the National ‖ Health Service
> B: ‖ you haven't got
> B: one
> A: on the National Health Service (.) since we have been in Government
> B: ‖ we have spent
> B: ‖ oh yeah
> A: please let me finish =
> B: = if you must =
> A: = as I was trying to say. . .

The example here is typical of a negative speech interaction in which the overlaps are caused by Speaker B's desire to challenge and disrupt Speaker A's turn. Speech encounters are usually co-operative, however, and most overlaps will therefore be resolved quickly, with one participant ceasing to speak.

Some simultaneous speech is not classed as an interruption because it enhances the collaborative approach of spoken discourse. Where a second speaker utters **MINIMAL RESPONSES** like *mmm* or *yeah*, often the function of the utterances is to support rather than challenge.

> A: have you seen the colour of that wall (.) it's horrific (.) it'll have ‖ to be repainted
> B: ‖ mmm
> A: we'll have to say something (.) ‖ I just can't be expected to put up with that
> B: ‖ yeah

VOICED HESITATIONS or **FILLED PAUSES** are also examples of non-fluency which are tolerated in spoken language. Speakers can use these to protect themselves from interruption while they think. In formal contexts, speakers use fillers like *um, er* or *ah* to prolong their turns. It would not be acceptable in a co-operative speech encounter to interrupt halfway through a clause, so by pausing in the middle of a clause, a speaker can prevent another speaker taking the turn. Voiced hesitations and false starts can also be used to gain the attention of an audience who have not yet settled. Politicians or public speakers will often repeat the opening of a speech several times during clapping until quiet has again been established – they will only move on when they are sure that everyone is listening.

Normal non-fluency features therefore may be attributed to inaccuracies associated with informal speech encounters, but they can also be used consciously to control turn-taking and to ensure that all participants are listening.

Problems

There can be **problems** in spoken language which the participants must solve if the speech encounter is going to continue. Temporary interruptions can be dealt with in a variety of ways.

Repairs

REPAIRS involve practical approaches to restore conversation. If a speaker chooses a

wrong word, for example, she can correct herself or another speaker can correct her; if a listener mishears a word, he can ask for clarification. Even though a side sequence is created running alongside the main topic, the interruption is only temporary.

Spoken words	Comment
A: You know Michelle (.) you know (.) the nurse (.) er (.) no (.) that's it (.) Susan = B: = I know who you mean now (.) yeah she's called Susan	Speaker A starts with a formulaic opener. The number of brief pauses indicates hesitancy and suggests that she is unsure of her information. She corrects herself and Speaker B supports her final choice.
A: I've got English next lecture = B: = English (.) we had English earlier (.) A: sorry (.) yeah (.) you're right (.) it's French actually	Speaker B questions Speaker A's statement by reiterating the key word and introducing information which challenges it. Speaker A accepts the challenge and the repair is complete.

Topic loops

TOPIC LOOPS can offer an alternative method of dealing with a problem. These involve reintroducing an earlier topic in order to move away from the disruption. For instance, a speaker may invite an evaluation from the listener; if the response is minimal or negative, then the first speaker may return to an earlier, safer topic of conversation to repair the damage to the co-operative interaction.

Spoken words	Comment
A: = I (.) well it was only a one off = B: = [laughs] fine (.)	Speaker B's laugh is significant because the tone of the conversation has not been humorous. Instead it implies disbelief. The accompanying utterance is also dismissive.
A: I did get all the stuff for the invitations so I can do (.) make those tonight	Speaker A is forced to make a topic loop in order to repair what would otherwise be a complete breakdown in communication.

Listener response

A speaker who is **aware of listener response** can make repairs before communication breaks down. Expressions like *you know, you see* or *you understand* are a speaker's way of encouraging the listener to acknowledge that communication is effective. Direct address can also draw listeners into the conversation: *and you know what I said?, can you guess what happened?, if you ask me...* Such expressions require the listeners to show some kind of approval or encouragement to continue. Questions can have a similar function: *are you with me?, do you get what I mean?* or *OK?* If the listener response is negative, the speaker must repair the point of breakdown before moving on. Restating or rephrasing points made can solve the problem: *what I was trying to say was...* or *what I really meant was...* or *in other words...* This kind of monitoring behaviour can prevent spoken discourse breaking down by clarifying structures. It is a form of repair that relies on the speaker being sensitive to listeners.

Silence

SILENCE in a conversation can require repair. Utterances in spoken discourse often come in pairs and if for some reason an answer is not given quickly to a question or if a greeting is not returned, a speaker must decide whether to ignore the breakdown in co-operation or to tackle it. Repeating the utterance may repair the breakdown if the lack of response has been due to mishearing, but it may instead reinforce the conflict.

Pauses can also be responsible for creating a silence so they are usually kept to a minimum in speech. A long pause can cause embarrassment because it is seen as an indicator of failure. Often several people will then begin to speak at once in an attempt to fill the gap. Once a new topic has been established, the collective embarrassment is replaced with relief that the repair has been accomplished.

Silence must always be considered within the spoken context because it can also be used for dramatic effect, particularly in public speaking. Before deciding whether a repair is necessary, participants will have to assess the role of the silence within the discourse. If it enhances the meaning of utterances, it is probably purposeful; if it makes the participants uneasy, it can probably be seen as a breakdown in co-operative behaviour.

Spoken words	Comment
A: I went to town this morning to get some felt pens and stuff to make a (.) some party invitations (.) B: mmm =	Instead of providing a positive response to Speaker A's opening, Speaker B offers a minimal acknowledgement. This suggests the interaction may not be co-operative.
A: = I couldn't resist getting this too = [holding up a dinosaur magic painting book] B: = why (.) A: well you know he's crazy about them at the moment so ‖ B: ‖ but we've already got his present (.) A: I know (.) I (.) but he'll like it = B: = yes but you can't keep buying things (.)	Speaker B's question also signals practical trouble since it denies Speaker A the expected positive evaluation. Because of the structure of an adjacency pair, Speaker A is forced to respond. Speaker B is now controlling the turn-taking. The practical trouble is caused by Speaker B's implied criticism of Speaker A's actions. The co-operative nature of the conversation has been lost – the frequency of overlaps and Speaker B's negative evaluations highlight this.
A: I know (1) it was in the sale ‖ so I B: ‖ that's not an excuse for buying everything =	The speakers continue the topic, making no attempt to repair the damage. The disjointed turn-taking suggests that the conversation is still not collaborative.

10.4 Different kinds of spoken language

A spoken narrative

The following transcript is an extract from a family conversation in which three young girls listen to their great uncle telling stories from his youth. The dominant speaker is the storyteller since his turns are extended, and the extract here focuses specifically on one of the narratives.

ACTIVITY 10.1

The transcription is a broad one: it takes no account of regional accent and only the most prominent examples of intonation and stress are marked.

Read through the transcript and respond to the following. A key to the symbols can be found on page 86.

1 Comment on the opening and closing of the narrative and any other distinctive structural features.

2 Describe the effects of the main prosodic features marked on the transcript.

3 Highlight any significant lexical or grammatical features.

4 List and describe the normal non-fluency features.

5 Identify any points at which the speaker tries to ensure that his audience is still paying attention and comment on the ways in which he does this.

Narrative (1 minute)

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1    Well (.) you know I was in the bànd (.) St. Faiths bànd you know (.) well
     we went a-carol-playing there one (.) just before Christmas (2) we went
     all round St. Faiths and Newton St. Faiths (.) and then we went up to the
     Mànor (3) and there was a lot a mud up that old loke and ol' Jack Fisher
5    said (.) i.i.i. ah.h o.o.o. w.wor what about the m.mud (.) he said (.) I g.got
     some w.water boots on b.but they g.got a h.hole in the bottom (1) course
     ol' Jack used to stutter you see (.) anyway, we kept agoing 'n' they called
     at the King's Head and that got on there 'til past ten and so they said (.)
     well we'd better (.) have one more tune before we go home (1) so they
10   played a carol or one or two carols round there (.) 'til someone said (.)
     you know what you are doing altogether don't ya (2) what someone said
     (.) you're playing to an old haystack (.) huh they said (.) that was a wròng
     un (.) so we had to pack that up (.) and of course we had to go home cos
     some of them weren't feeling too gòod (.) it was dark you knòw (.) and
15   we didn't know where we were...
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COMMENTARY

Both the **opening** and the **closing** of the narrative provide a framework for the story: the speaker directly addresses his audience using the comment clause *you know* three times (ll. 1, 14). This is typical of storytelling within a conversation because the speaker has to ensure that the audience have accepted his dominant role in the turn-taking. To be effective, a narrative turn needs to be uninterrupted – by **monitoring audience response**, the speaker can prevent a problem occurring in the conversation. If speakers fail to monitor audience response and a breakdown does occur, the necessary repairs interrupt the smooth development of the story, spoiling the atmosphere and destroying the narrative's momentum.

The narrative starts and finishes with a statement that explains something to the audience. First, the speaker describes his own relationship with the story and events using a **self-related comment** – the use of the first person pronoun clearly establishes the tale as autobiographical. The use of the linking adverb *Well* (l. 1) establishes the informal manner and gives the speaker time to think before he starts the story. The concluding statement explains the narrative to the audience in case they have missed the point – it provides a summary which clearly marks the **end of the speaker's turn**.

The speaker uses several **narrative techniques** to dramatise the incident he is recalling. Much of the turn is taken up describing a sequence of events, but there are also key points at which characterisation becomes the focus of the narrative. Direct speech is used to give a sense of the people involved. Old Jack Fisher is distinctive because of the speaker's imitation of his stuttering – to prevent a breakdown of communication at this point, the storyteller again speaks directly to his audience using the comment clause *you see* (l. 7). This enables him to explain the reason for his non-standard speech. Informal utterances like *don't ya* (l. 11) and vocalisations like *huh* (l. 12) are used to animate the story and give it validity.

The **prosodics** help the storyteller to emphasise certain points in the narrative. **Emphatic stress** is used regularly to highlight key words: *bànd* (l. 1), *Christmas* (l. 2) and *haystack* (l. 12). It ensures that the audience are focused on the central theme. The **intonation patterns** are typical of the speaker's regional accent (Norfolk). Simple rises or falls are often used to mark the end of grammatical utterances or as a lead-in to direct speech. On one occasion a falling-rising tone (l. 12) is used, stressing the response of the players to what they have just been told. It adds variety after the climax of the story has been reached in the stressed noun phrase *an old haystack* (l. 12). **Pauses** are mostly brief and usually correspond to the end of an utterance, helping the listener to divide the speech into meaningful units.

The **lexis** establishes the narrative in **time** – *Christmas* (l. 2) and in **place** – *St. Faiths* (ll. 1, 3), *Newton St. Faiths* (l. 3), *Manor* (l. 4), *King's Head* (l. 8). **Lexical sets** build up a sense of the story's focus: rural – *mud* (l. 4), *haystack* (l. 12), *water boots* (l. 6); musical – *band* (l. 1), *carol playing* (l. 2), *carols* (l. 10), *tune* (l. 9); night – *past ten* (l. 8), *dark* (l. 14). Only one character is named, but **direct speech** helps to create a sense of other participants. Spoken narratives are far less descriptive than written narratives, but the speaker does use a few **complex noun phrases** to build up the atmosphere:

m   h
that old loke
det Adj   N

m   m   h
an old haystack
det Adj   N

The noun *loke* (l. 4) is a Norfolk **dialect word** which describes a path leading up to a house – it makes the narrative distinctive because it links the speaker directly to his regional and cultural background. Examples of **abbreviated words** like *'til* (l. 8), *'n'* (l. 7) and *we'd* (l. 9) are typical of all informal speech, not of a particular dialect.

The **grammar** is mostly standard, but it is marked by some dialectal features. While the use of the archaic **present participle** *a-..playing* (l. 2) and *agoing* (l. 7) is typical of dialects in general, the use of the **pronoun** *that* instead of *it* is a variation specifically associated with a Norfolk dialect: *we had to pack that up* (l. 13).

The **sentence structures** are typical of spoken narratives: **co-ordination** is far more common than subordination. It is possible to analyse the clauses using the following model:

CConj	SConj	S	P	O/C/(S)	A
					Well
	(that)	you	know		
		I	was		in the band...
and		we	went	a-carol-playing	there
					just before Christmas
					all round...
					then
and		we	went		up to the Manor
and		there	was	a lot of mud	up that old loke...
					anyway
and		we	kept	agoing (NFCl)	at the K's H
and		they	called		on there
		that	got		'til past ten

The columns here indicate clearly the dominance of co-ordinated clauses in the narrative and this is typical of the rambling nature of spoken language. The co-ordination allows the speaker to sustain his turn without interruption. In written language, the structure would seem repetitive, but in speech we accept it. There are examples of **subordinate clauses** like *'til someone said...* (l. 10) and *cos some of them* (ll. 13–14), but these are far less common.

Although the **pronouns** begin in the first person (*I* and *we*), the speaker slips into the third person halfway through the narrative: *they* (l. 8). Inconsistencies like these would be eliminated in a first draft in a written narrative, but the audience here would probably barely notice them.

Normal non-fluency features do not significantly affect the fluency of the story. In fact, the speaker is very controlled in his extended turn. There are some examples of restarts like *one (.) just before Christmas* (l. 2) in which the speaker repairs the breakdown himself, and a few longer pauses in which the speaker organises his thoughts before continuing with his tale, but on the whole the narrative seems effortless. Lexis and clause structures are quite repetitive, but that is typical of much spoken discourse.

The speaker uses the same technique on several occasions to ensure that his audience is still responsive. The comment clauses *you know* (l. 1) and *you see* (l. 7) require some kind of response from the listeners which, in a narrative turn, are more likely to be paralinguistic than vocal. Nods of the head, direct eye contact and minimal vocalisations like *mm* will satisfy the speaker that he still has the audience's consent to continue dominating the turn-taking.

A telephone conversation

The next transcript is an extract from a telephone conversation between a husband and wife in which they discuss everyday events. The speakers are involved in a co-operative exchange in which they both take more or less equal turns. Because they cannot rely on clues other than linguistic ones, however, the turns are not so clearly marked as they are in face-to-face informal conversation.

ACTIVITY 10.2

The transcription is a broad one, focusing on only the most significant changes in intonation patterns and stress.

Read through the transcript and respond to the following.

1 Comment on the opening and closing of the conversation and any other distinctive structural features (topic management; turn-taking).
2 Identify and discuss the main prosodic features and their effects.
3 Highlight any significant lexical or grammatical features.
4 List and describe the normal non-fluency features.
5 Comment on the main differences between one speaker telling a story and two speakers contributing to a conversation.

A key to the symbols can be found on page 86.

Telephone conversation (3 minutes)

1 A: héllo (.)
  B: Lúcy =
  A: = yes (.) hiya (.) work OK=
  B: = mmm (.) same as ever (.) have you found out when (.) where the
5   place ‖ is
  A: ‖ yeah (.) I phoned College (.) and Susan didn't know (.) Mark
     didn't know (.) but then Jane did know (2) that's Jane at work =
  B: = oh ‖ yes
  A: ‖ mm (.) it's the big one =
10 B: = the one on the corner of the road you turn into (.) into for the school =
  A: = that's it ‖ yeah
  B: ‖ I don't know where you'll park =
  A: = well no (.) she said something about parking in the car park d. down
     by the Odeon cinema (.) ôh she means the multi-storey =
15 B: = mm (.) the Odeon um (.) I don't know whether she means the old (.) I
     think there's an Odeon cinema which is now a Bingo Hall (.) isn't it (.)
  A: ôh (.) right
  B: you know ‖ which is just between that ‖ turning
  A: ‖ I know
20   ‖ but I don't know where there's a
     car park there =
  B: = mm =
  A: = anyway (.) she says you probably can park on the road =
  B: = mm (.) you might (.) should be able to (.) depending on how many
     people are there (.)
25 A: I'm just wondering whether to go in at half elevenish (.) so I can buy the
     paper first =
  B: = the paper =
  A: = er (.) typing paper =
  B: = oh (.) oh yeah (.) I forgot you were (.) going to do that (.) you've got
30   the card 'n' stuff in (.) it didn't mind (.) matter ‖ if you
  A: ‖ I think it's er downstairs =
  B: = oh =
  A: = the form says (.) do you think it'd be er business ‖ use
  B: ‖ ehh (.)
35 A: it's not actually home use really =

card and the appropriate form for entry to the stationery shop (l. 33). The conversation begins to come towards an end when Speaker B introduces a self-related remark: *I won't be going for a run* (l. 52). The **closing section** is typical of the end of a conversation – it is repetitive; Speaker B shows concern for Speaker A in a statement which becomes the reason for ending the exchange: *I'll let you get on* (l. 67); and traditional formulae are used. The **topic management** is quite equally divided – both speakers introduce and develop the content.

The **turn-taking** is typical of a telephone conversation: speakers tend to avoid long utterances without introducing brief pauses for listeners to mark their continued interest. On the whole, turns are quite short, with neither participant dominating. Because the turns cannot be clearly marked by paralinguistic features, there are many examples of overlaps. Some of these are supportive minimal vocalisations: *yeah* (l. 6), *mm* (l. 9) and *[laughs]* (l. 62), but others mark points at which both speakers talk at once. Because the context is co-operative, usually one speaker will stop to allow the other participant to complete the utterance:

A: I don't expect it actually makes much difference ǁ I
B: ǁ it's probably just for their

B: information (ll. 46-7)
B: I'd better go ǁ now
A: ǁ right well I'll go and get on with some typing (ll. 65-6)

Usually a telephone call will have a **specific purpose** since the conversation does not take place by chance. By dialling a specific phone number, a caller expresses a desire to speak to someone in particular. This means that most topics will not be randomly selected.

The **prosodic features** show the typical variations in **intonation patterns** that mark informal conversation. Because the participants cannot see each other, speakers on the telephone will often compensate by making their intonation more varied. There are many examples in this extract of falling, rising, rising-falling and falling-rising tones. Their function is varied: rising tones can be used to mark a question: *work OK* (l. 3); rising-falling tones can be used to show agreement: *dò that* (l. 39); rising-falling tones can reflect sudden understanding: *òh she means the multi-storey* (l. 14); and falling-rising tones can reflect uncertainty: *Lùcy* (l. 2). Speakers use variations to maintain the listener's interest and to enhance the meaning.

Emphatic stress is used to highlight key lexical items: *work* (l. 7) and *education* (l. 38). It helps to establish a relationship between two participants who cannot see each other. In a telephone conversation, **pauses** will be kept to a minimum. Longer pauses could create a breakdown in communication because participants cannot rely on visual clues to know whether the gap is intentional or not – the listener may think the call has been cut off. Equally, long pauses could leave room for unwanted interruptions. To prevent these kind of breakdowns, participants tend to use pauses only to mark the end of grammatical utterances or while they momentarily order their thoughts. **Voiced hesitations** are common since these allow speakers to pause without communication breaking down: *mm* (l. 21), *er* (l. 31) or repetitions of words.

The **lexis** is linked directly to the topics: directions to *the place* (ll. 4-5), *paper* (l. 26) and *card* (l. 30). There are few examples of descriptive use of language because the purpose here is far more practical than a narrative. Colloquialisms like *hiya* (l. 3), *yeah* (l. 11), *well* (l. 39) and *won't* (l. 43) and imprecise references like *stuff* (l. 30) are common because the manner of the exchange is informal.

The **grammar** has similarities with casual conversation too. There are many grammatically incomplete utterances which function as complete clauses: *the paper* (l. 27)

B: = mm I'm er not mm cònvinced ǁ er
A: ǁ one of the bits then later on you know
      (.) it's got what's it for and it's got education ǁ and
                                                        ǁ well put (.) dò that ǁ then
40 A: later ǁ on   ǁ and
B: ǁ you can put education (.) publishing (1) or something like that (.)
      well I ǁ won't be
             ǁ we won't be playing games or ǁ anything
45 B: ǁ no (.)
A: I don't expect it actually makes much difference ǁ I
B: ǁ it's probably just for
      their information (.) they might (.) they might (.) ǁ circular (.) circularise
                                                          ǁ yeah
50 A: things for ǁ businesses
B: ǁ is there anything else we need from tówn =
A: = I can't think of anything (.) er I won't be going for a run er now (.) at
      lunch ǁ time
A: you're góing ǁ tó
55 B: ǁ well I won't be ǁ nòw
A: ǁ I was thinking you were being a
      bit ǁ brave
B: ǁ yeah (.)
A: did you go swimming in the énd =
60 B: = yeah (.) I did 60 (.) cos I was doing breaststroke (.) and I interspersed
      with some crawl (1) crawl being the operative word (.) ǁ I think (.)
                                                             ǁ [laughs]
A: but ǁ well
B: ǁ hang on =
65 A: = I'd better go ǁ now
B: ǁ right well I'll go and get on with some typing =
A: = OK (.) I'll let you get on ǁ so I'll see you later
B: ǁ OK =
A: = bye =
70 B: = bye

COMMENTARY

The beginning and end of the conversation are marked by **formulaic utterances**: *hello* (l. 1), *I'd better go then* (l. 65) and *bye* (ll. 69-70). These clearly signal the intentions of the speakers in one of the few spoken contexts where the participants cannot see each other. Because they cannot rely on visual feedback from the exchange, they use patterned linguistic structures to prevent any possible ambiguity.

The **introductory section** includes the formulaic opening (ll. 1-2) and an other-related comment in which Speaker A asks Speaker B a question (l. 3). Having responded to that, Speaker B introduces the first **topic**: finding out about *the place* (ll. 4-5). Because the speakers are familiar, they have a shared knowledge of the topic. This means that they do not make explicit exactly what they are talking about -- the participants understand the sequence of exchanges, but for an external listener they are ambiguous. The first **topic shift** occurs when a new topic is introduced by Speaker A: buying *the paper* (ll. 25-6). It leads naturally into a third related topic: the entrance

and *same as ever* (l. 4). Because they are in context, the participants can easily understand them. Such **minor 'sentences'** are often used in answer to a question – as part of an adjacency pair, the response is clearly linked directly to the question that precedes it. There are both compound and subordinate clauses, but there are not usually strings of dependent clauses embedded within a main clause. This would place a large load on the memory of the listener and informal conversation is not usually demanding in that way. Compound:

    (I) (phoned) (College) (and) (Susan) (didn't know) (Mark) (didn't know) (but)
    S   P   O   conj   S   P neg   P neg   conj

    (then) (Jane) (did know) (ll. 6–7)
    A   S   P

Complex:

    (I) (was thinking) (you were being a bit brave) (ll. 56–7)
    S   P   O SCl-NCl

Although the structure of sentences is still often loose, subordination occurs more frequently than it did in the narrative. The telephone conversation has a quicker pace and the alternation of the two speakers seems to add more variety to the clause patterns.

There are many examples of **normal non-fluency features**. The conversation is spontaneous and this means that both speakers make **false starts** – *have you found out when (.) where the place is* (ll. 4–5); **repeat** words or phrases – *you turn into (.) into...* (l. 10); use **voiced hesitations** – *er* (l. 28), *ehh* (l. 34) and *mm* (l. 36); leave **utterances incomplete** – *I don't know whether she means the old (.)* (l. 15); and **speak over the top** of the other participant. Because the exchange is co-operative, speakers tend to make their own **repairs** – *you might (.) should be able to* (l. 23); *well put (.) do that then* (l. 39). If corrections are made by the other speaker, it can cause tension, but both participants here are at ease because they know each other. No judgements are being made based on the way they speak and this allows them to participate without feeling self-conscious. Equally, all the examples of non-fluency features are typical of informal conversation – when we take part in a conversation, we rarely even notice them. The fact that such inaccuracies are accepted is a distinctive trait of this kind of spoken language.

There are obvious **linguistic differences** between the two transcripts. In the earlier example, the narrative monologue is far less varied both in grammatical structures and prosodic features. The story demands an extended turn which the speaker sustains by repetition of the co-ordinating conjunction *and*; the telephone conversation, on the other hand, specifically involves two participants who share the turns. This automatically makes the grammatical structures of the two types of spoken language quite different: the short bursts of speech in the telephone conversation tend to have a more clearly defined structure in which subordination plays a greater part. Equally, because the storyteller has been granted the right to an extended turn, the prosodic features tended to be less varied; the participants in the telephone conversation cannot see each other and therefore have to use greater variation in intonation patterns and stress in order to keep the conversation alive. Both use formulaic techniques, but the opening and closing of the telephone conversation use conventional formulae far more rigidly because the participants cannot rely on non-linguistic clues. Despite the differences in grammar and prosodic features, in each case the participants are aware of their audience so they use language in a way that will ensure that effective communication is taking place.

An interview

The third transcript is an extract from Classic FM's evening news report on Monday, 17 July 1995. It is an interview between the presenter, Jane Markham (JM) and Classic FM's film critic, Cherie Lloyd (CL). In the interview, they discuss the release of the new Batman movie.

In many interview situations, participants do not have equal status – in a job interview, for example, the interviewee clearly does not have any control over the speech encounter. Here, however, the situation is rather different – Cherie Lloyd is being consulted as an expert and therefore has equal status with the presenter of the hour-long radio programme. The speech encounter takes place within a very precise time allocation and this affects the nature of the linguistic and prosodic features of the discourse.

ACTIVITY 10.3

The transcription is broad and prosodic features are marked selectively. Read through the transcript and make notes on the following areas.

1 Comment on the way in which the speech encounter is structured.
2 Identify the main prosodic features and consider their effects.
3 Highlight any significant lexical or grammatical features.
4 List and describe the normal non-fluency features.
5 Comment on the differences between an informal telephone conversation between two speakers and a radio interview.

A key to the symbols can be found on page 86.

Radio interview (2½ minutes)

1 JM: there's a new Batman mòvie (.) with a new Bátman and a new director (.) and Cherie Lloyd (.) our film critic (.) has been along to see it (.) Cherie (2) is it véry different from the other Batman films that have been || out

5 'accel' CL: || yes it is (.) it's 'far more light-hearted um (.) the old director (1) the director' of the old films Tim Burton ha. (.) went for the more Gòthic (.) er split personality Bruce Wayne Batman problem (.) where (.) this one is just non-stop (.) excitement and action from the first frame (.) um

10 (1) it's (.) it's mu. (.) ↑it's↑ much more entertaining (.) it's more (.) sort of like an action film (.) as opposed to a deep psychological drama =

  JM: = and a new Bátman of course (.) and that now probably makes quite a difference because you dó identify with the

15 actor who plays Batman =

  CL: = one of the problems î thought with the older films was the fact that (.) Michael Keaton wasn't a very successful Batman for mè (.) um (.) there was just something about him (.) 'super-hero (.) um (.) nò (.) not really' (.) Val Kilmer very much so (.)

  'rall' he's (.) very very good looking and Val Kilmer is far far more convincing =

20 JM: = ↑they've↑ also brought in the Robin character from the old

25 CL: television series *who didn't appear at all in the other Batman movies* (.) um (.) *it is nice to have him back* =

= yes (.) because they've done a really nice *parallel* between er (.) Bruce Wayne's story in the earlier Batman films and (.) um Robin in this film um (.) Bruce Wayne's parents were killed (.) by a criminal (.) Robin's (.) (*indistinct*) been killed by a criminal and er it's Batman *helping* Robin find himself (.) and that

30 sort of *thing* (.) it's very nice (.) it's very well handled =

JM: = what about the story (.) who's the er arch enemy in this one =

CL: = there's (2) there's um (.) the *Riddler* (.) *brilliantly* played by Jim Carrey and Two Face er played by Tommy Lee Jones (.)

'accel' um (1) they're both very (.) Tommy Lee Jones is a little bit (.) 'a little bit too similar to the Joker' =

35 JM: = who did we hear at the beginning of this piece ‖ who was that
CL: ‖ Jim Carrey

as the Riddler =

JM: = uhh =

40 CL: = um (.) Tommy Lee Jones is a little bit too similar to (.) um (.) Jack Nicholson's the Joker (.) for my tastes but (.) Jim Carrey is *superb* (.) he really is (.) as th. (.) the vill. (.) the villains make a film like this and they've picked a good one with Jim Carrey =

45 JM: = so (.) this (.) looks (.) rather like you haven't *actually* said anything *bad* about it at all (.) Cherie (.) which is quite unusual for you when you're doing your film reviews =

CL: = and I've got nothing (.) at *all* bad to say about this *one* (.) it's *great* (.) it's (.) it's *great fun* (.) it's (.) the *script's good* (.) it

50 looks brilliant (.) it's *entertaining* (.) it's a nice (.) *slice* (.) of escapism (.) in fact I'd go as far as saying it's well worth £7 of anybody's money (.) it's just a great film =

JM: = Cherie Lloyd giving it the *thumbs* up (.) you're listening to Classic Report (.) in a *moment* a larger than life performance

55 by a larger than life performer. . .

COMMENTARY

The **manner** is formal because the two speakers are participating in a radio broadcast. Despite the formality of the setting, however, they are obviously known to each other and also have equal status. This means that their language mixes both formal and informal registers.

The presenter of *Classic Report*, Jane Markham, **opens** the interview with a clear indication of the content. The opening statement defines the **topic** from the outset: *there's a new Batman movie* (l. 1). An interview does not usually involve a range of topics because it has a clear purpose, and an opening that establishes the theme is typical of this kind of spoken encounter. The whole of the 2½-minute interview then concentrates on the new Batman film. Another topic is not introduced until Jane Markham clearly signals the end of the interview about the film and describes what is to follow the commercial break (ll. 53–5). The **closing** is marked by a summary in which the film critic is again named in full and her comments on the film are generalised in a colloquial cliché: *giving it the thumbs up* (l. 53).

The **turn-taking** is distinctive. The structure is based on **adjacency pairs** in which the presenter asks a question and the film critic replies. This framework is used throughout the speech encounter. Turns are not short: the presenter tends to make a statement which leads into a question and the reviewer's answers are fully developed. Because the participants are co-operative, giving each other space to develop their views, the radio listener learns a lot about the film within the 2½ minutes. However, it is important to recognise that in this kind of speech encounter, the main body of the interview deals with subjective attitudes rather than objective fact.

In a radio interview, the participants have only a limited amount of time to complete their discourse. In most interviews based on a review, the turn-taking will be very carefully organised. In the extract here the participants **latch on** to each other very smoothly: as one speaker finishes, the other picks up the cues and starts to speak. This means that almost every utterance is marked '= =' in the transcription. On only two occasions do the speakers **overlap**. In the first instance, the reviewer, who has been waiting for her turn to start, answers the presenter's question before she has quite finished saying it (ll. 4–5):

JM: ...is it very *different* from the other Batman films that have been ‖ out
CL: ‖yes it
    is. . .

An overlap is common in this kind of formal context since the second speaker can only begin to feel at ease once the dialogue has started. It does not cause problems for radio listeners because the main body of the question has already been heard. The second overlap occurs because the presenter rephrases her question just as the reviewer begins to answer the first version (ll. 36–8):

JM: who did we hear at the beginning of this piece ‖ who was that?
CL: ‖Jim Carrey as the
    Riddler. . .

In both cases the overlap is minimal because the speakers are sensitive to each other and the formal context.

The **prosodic features** seem more prominent than in normal conversation. Because the participants are 'performing' for their radio audience, they exaggerate the prosodics to animate the conversation for listeners who have no visual clues. Key words are **stressed**. Often the stressed words are modifiers revealing the reviewer's attitude: *brilliantly* (l. 32), *superb* (l. 42) and *great* (l. 49); others are stressed to draw attention to contrasts: *different* (l. 3) and *old* (l. 6); and some highlight important words in an utterance: *Gothic* (l. 7), *identify* (l. 14) and *slice* (l. 50). **Intonation patterns** enhance the meaning of utterances: questions are marked with a **rising tone**; the listing of the film's positive features also uses a rising tone: *the script's good* (.) *it looks brilliant*. . . (ll. 49–50); **falling tones** tend to be used when the reviewer refers to herself as though she is emphasising that the viewpoint is personal: *for my tastes* (l. 41); negative responses also have a falling tone: *superhero* (.) *um* (.) *no* (ll. 18–19); **falling-rising tones** are used to emphasise key words prior to a stress: *is it very different*. . . (l. 3) and . . .*about this one* (.) *it's great* (ll. 48–9). **Pitch changes** are used to mark a change of direction: ↑*it's↑ much more entertaining* (l. 10) and ↑*they've↑ also brought in* (l. 22). Changes in **pace** add interest and are indicative of the limited time allocated within the programme for each feature of this kind of spoken encounter. Negative responses also have a falling tone and are indicative of the limited time allocated within the programme for each feature of this kind of spoken encounter — the reviewer significantly speeds up on two occasions (ll. 5, 34), and only slows down once when comparing the present and past Batman actors (l. 18). Some of the **pauses** seem to break the long utterances into easily comprehensible units:

(there) ('s) (a new Batman movie) PAUSE (with a new Batman and a new director)
dumS · P · (S)
PAUSE (and) (CL PAUSE our film critic) PAUSE (has been) (along) (to see it)
conj · SCl-NFCl
(ll. 1–3)

The pauses in this compound-complex structure help the listener to focus on one section of the utterance at a time.

The **lexis** is all related to the film, but it is not technical. Although there are some subject-specific terms – *frame* (l. 9), *action film* (l. 11) and *psychological drama* (ll. 11–12) – much of the discussion is very informal: *sort of thing* (l. 30), *sort of like* (l. 11). The noun phrases are usually complex because the whole purpose of the discourse is evaluative. Both pre- and post-modification are used:

the director of the old films (l. 6)
m h q
det N PrepP

a (really nice) parallel (l. 25)
m m h
det Adv Adj N

a (very successful) Batman (l. 17)
m m h
det Adv Adj N

a nice slice of escapism (ll. 50–1)
m m h q
det Adj N PrepP

As well as the strings of attributive modifiers, there are also many predicative modifiers functioning as complements.

(it) ('s) (great) … (the script) ('s) (good) (it) (looks) (brilliant) (it) ('s) (entertaining)
S P C · S P C S P C S P C

There are a lot of abstract nouns because the interview is focused on a general analysis of the film: *escapism* (l. 51), *drama* (l. 12) and *reviews* (l. 47).

The **grammar** is quite involved because of the length of the utterances. The relationship between the participants is not formal, but because the context is formal and because there is a clearly defined purpose, grammatical structures are usually complete and utterances are often complex.

(one of the problems I thought with the older films) (was) (the fact that MK wasn't
S · SCl-ComCl · P · C · SCl-NCl
a very successful Batman for me) (ll. 16–18)

There are also several co-ordinated clauses which are more typical of informal spoken language.

(the villains) (make) (a film like this) (and) (they) ('ve picked) (a good one) (with JC)
S P O conj S P O A
(ll. 42–4)

The **normal non-fluency features** are typical of any spontaneous speech. Here the speakers are under particular pressure because they are speaking to a large unseen audience and this means that despite their fluency they make some mistakes. **Voiced hesitations** like *um* (l. 6) and *er* (l. 7) are common in the utterances of presenter and reviewer. **Restarts**, however, tend to occur in the reviewer's responses to questions: *it's (.) it's mu (.) it's much more entertaining* (l. 10); *TLJ is a little bit (.) a little bit too similar …* (ll. 34–5). This is to be expected because questions are easier to prepare beforehand than answers. Some of the hesitations are clearly allowing the speaker thinking time while informing the other participant that the turn is not yet complete: *there's (2)*

there's *um* (.) *the Riddler* (l. 32). There is some **repetition** of material (reference to Jack Nicholson's portrayal of the Joker) which is common in spoken discourse where speakers cannot go back and eliminate unnecessary words or phrases as they can in written work. In some places, utterances are **grammatically incomplete**: *they're both very* (l. 34). Even though an utterance is grammatically incomplete, understanding is not affected. When discussing the character of Batman in the old films, for instance, Cherie Lloyd uses the simple noun phrase *super-hero* (ll. 18–19) on its own. The accompanying rising intonation, however, ensures that listeners know she is asking a question.

The speech encounter is co-operative and all **repairs** are self-repairs. For example, where the reviewer feels that her words may be misinterpreted, she reorders what she has just said. In discussing the earlier films she talks of *the old director* (l. 6), but realising that the modifier may be misunderstood, she rephrases the nominal group: *the director of the old films* (l. 6). Where time permits, the speakers are **supportive** of each other – turns start with the affirmative *yes* (l. 25) or the minimal vocalisation *uhh* (l. 39).

It is possible to summarise the main differences between a telephone conversation and a radio interview in a table:

Linguistic features	Informal telephone conversation	Radio interview
Audience	One specific person who is known and whose number has been dialled.	On one level the participants are speaking to each other, but they are also speaking to a wider unknown audience listening to the radio programme.
Topic	Although a telephone conversation will normally have a specific purpose, new topics are likely to emerge as the speech encounter develops. To an outsider, topics may seem to arise randomly, but to the participants with their shared knowledge there may well be a logical progression from one to another.	The participants will normally have a clearly defined reason for their discourse. There will often be no more than one topic as the focus for the speech encounter. Tentatively connected topics are unlikely to be a part of the developing discourse.
Turn-taking	Turns tend to be short so that speakers can be sure that the other participant is still listening. Lack of visual clues means that the end of each turn must be clearly marked to avoid confusion. Overlaps are common because speakers do not always interpret linguistic clues properly. Because the context is co-operative, however, the overlaps do not tend to be long.	Turns tend to be quite long and their organisation is very precise. Adjacency pairs are created by the question/answer framework. Because of time limits, latching on makes the turn-taking smooth – each speaker picks up exactly where the last one finishes. Some overlaps occur, but they are rarely long.

Read through each transcript and make notes on the following.

1 Comment on the turn-taking.
2 Identify the main prosodic features and consider their effects.
3 Highlight any significant lexical or grammatical features.
4 Comment on the normal non-fluency features.
5 List the distinctive features of unscripted commentary and comment on any differences between radio and television commentaries.

A key to the symbols can be found on page 86.

Television commentary (3 minutes)

1
BS: and a strange atmosphere really at the beginning of this second half (.) Steve (.) it's like (.) a phoney war (.) isn't it =

SS: = yes a bit of aerial ping-pong at the moment but I'm sure they'll settle down (4)

5
BS: the Italians now (.) calling some variation at the lineout moving Number 8 'Julian Gardner up to the front' but
'accel/stacc' that's a decoy move for Pedroni (2) Ben Clarke (1) through quickly through on Cuttitta good rucking too by
10 'rall' England the Italians 'again up very quickly indeed' (3) but that's a lovely kick by Rob Andrew (.) forcing them to
'accel' turn (5) you saw then (.) the problems that 'Gerosa faced as Johnson sets it up (indistinct) (1) just about getting it away there Dominguez only just (1) for a moment it
15 'accel' looked as if England might 'just get in there' =

SS: = it must be that corner Bob it must be jinxed it's where Mike Catt made his mistake and the Italians were in all sorts of pressure there (.) in fact in the end they were quite lucky to get away with it (1) ball bobbling around needed tidying up (.) that's a place you don't want to slip over a yard from your own line (.) and really the Italians
20 got out of jail in the end Martin Johnson 'really I thought
'accel' should have held on here' once again one pass too many and intercepted chance gone (2)

25
BS: Brian Moore (.) a bang in the face for his pains (4) waiting now (.) then to put into the lineout a great chance for England just a few metres out from the Italian line (7)
'accel' 'Bayfield in the middle tackles it beautifully' Rowntree in to support him now England looking for the drive (7)
30 'accel' England looking to turn and 'move this rolling maul' (3) just a couple of metres out then from the Italian line into
'accel' Rodber (3) still just held up short (.) Bracken has options
'rall' both sides (.) 'Andrew (.) beautiful long pass (.) Catt out to Rory Underwood' (2) 'beautifully created try' (3) and
35 'leg'/'lento' it's 'the Underwood brothers who are again' on the 'mark for England' =

Openings and closings	Because speakers cannot see each other, beginnings and endings are marked by formulaic utterances which are easily recognisable.	To ensure that listeners can follow the different parts of a programme, the start and finish of each section must be clear. An interview therefore opens with a statement that focuses attention on the topic and closes with a summary.
Prosodic features	Participants seem to use stress and varied intonation patterns to sustain listener interest. Pauses are usually short so that turn-taking does not become confused. Voiced hesitations are common.	Speakers often exaggerate stress and intonation patterns to add interest to what is being said. Because utterances are often long, pauses divide them into easily understandable units. Pace and pitch also vary quite dramatically. Voiced hesitations give speakers time to order their thoughts.
Lexis and grammar	The words are often informal and grammatical structures are often incomplete. Participants accept inaccuracies because the speech environment is co-operative and supportive. Co-ordination may be more common than subordination.	Lexis can be formal and subject specific, informal or a mixture of the two depending upon the participants, their topic and the context. Utterances are usually grammatically complete and subordination is more common.

Unscripted commentary

The most common forms of unscripted commentary are those which accompany sports events broadcast on television or radio. There are, however, other examples that fall into this category: unscripted commentaries may be used when an event like a royal wedding is televised or when a state occasion like the opening of Parliament is covered on the radio.

Sometimes commentators will speak from a text, but live coverage requires them to describe and comment on events as they happen. This means that the commentators must speak spontaneously. The purpose of a television commentary is clearly different from a radio version of the same event. Both radio and television commentators comment on and evaluate what is taking place, but because radio listeners cannot see what is happening, a radio commentator must also use language to convey an exact description of the developing action.

ACTIVITY 10.4

The last transcripts in this section are taken from commentaries accompanying the Rugby World Cup England versus Italy match on 30 July 1995. The first is a commentary for the televised match on ITV by Bob Symonds (BS) and Steve Smith (SS); the second is from the Radio 5 live coverage by Ian Robertson (IR) and Mike Burton (MB).

SS: = and that try was a beauty created by England forwards at the lineout terrific forward play (1) in the end they sucked up the Italians and they just ran out of players.

40   Radio commentary (3 minutes)

IR: Underwood takes it runs up (.) to his own 22 and right footed (.) hammers it I think is the only phrase I can use there (.) into touch near side of the field (.) 'on the England (.) 10 metre line' (.) that's on the er Italian left =

45   MB: = he had er a much uh better better angle there did Underwood than Mike Catt had from the kick just (.) a few (.) moments earlier Diego Dominguez had put a 'cracking kick into the corner and er even if it hadn't have gone in' then the receiver who was Mike Catt on that occasion had no angle to kick the ball || back

50   IR: || and Ben Clarke snaffles the ball from this lineout it comes back to Bracken sends it out to Andrew (.) Andrew puts a kick down towards the corner that's again a very very good kick it's rolling right up to the (.) Italian line Gerosa slips

55   (.) 'he recovers very quickly but can't get his kick in Johnson picks it up' 'all the Italians are offside' the ball's charged down by Brian Moore (.) across goes Troiani (1) and the scrum half Troncon 'sidefoots it into touch' (.)

60   and that was a sort of 'er pantomime wasn't it (.) a comedy of errors' =

MB: = yes and the the the main feature of that passage of play was the Rob Andrew kick you see he he he put it down bouncing er behind the the Italian defenders (.) and even if it didn't go into touch then (.) it would have

65   been difficult for (.) the (.) Italian defender to clear because (.) we had no angle in the end Mario Gero. Gerosa (.) the er the left wing er slips on trying to collect the ball and even when he got up the thing wouldn't have

70   gone any distance and 'it was the same story when Catt took the ball' in a deep position just now (.) clever kick there (.) from Rob Andrew =

IR: = well Brian Moore's had a bit of treatment there (.) he charged it down with his head which is not a the the best thing to do and he's recovered now so we'll have the

75   lineout after a (.) couple of minutes injury time there (.) the ball's 'won magnificently by Bayfield England are just 5 metres' (.) 6 metres short they've got a drive on they're beginning to roll towards the posts and (.) only 5 metres from the line this is where they've got to feed it now

80   Rowntree has it (.) slips it up (.) England now 4 metres

Margin prosodic annotations (bottom section): 'rall' · 'alleg' · 'accel' 'cresc' · 'alleg' 'dimin' · 'accel' · 'cresc'

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from the line (.) the ball's on the 'ground Bracken pops it up for Rodber he's 2 metres' from the line (.) and this 'time perhaps (.) perhaps as it comes out' out to Andrew (.) Andrew a long 'miss pass to Catt out to Rory Underwood' for his 43rd try' in international rugby and that made by a touch of genius' from Rob Andrew that

90   he knew where every one of the 30 players was was on the pitch saw 'the yawning gap on the left' and Rory Underwood doesn't need a second invitation with no one to beat and he shot in for (.) a tremendous try =

MB: = the long flat er pass obviously gave Rory Underwood the room out wide but the work was done by the forwards because that's what we've been saying all though the first half England had drawn in all the Italian back

95   row er they weren't er 5 metres out from the Italian line so the Italian midfield men were forced back behind their own line couldn't encroach that at all and (.) it it created the room out wide for this beautifully long floated flat pass er for Rory Underwood to go in on the left hand

100 side...

Margin prosodic annotations (top section): 'accel' · 'rall' · 85 'accel/cresc' 'rall/leg' · 'rall'

COMMENTARY

The **function** of a commentary is to describe a sequence of actions, to give the listener or viewer background information and to entertain. The **target audience** will usually be people who are interested in the particular activity taking place and who already have a reasonable knowledge of the subject specific language and structure of the event.

A commentary must be **spontaneous** and **sustained** as it mirrors the process of the activity. This does not mean, however, that the **structure** is random. In fact, unscripted commentary is quite different from the loosely structured nature of informal conversation since the **topic** is predefined and utterances must be orderly. Commentators can use notes to give their utterances structure, but this is really only feasible when they are filling long breaks in the action (half-time, injury time). They must therefore be able to describe ongoing actions fluently and develop a more personal level of comment and interpretation when little is happening.

The **structure** of an unscripted commentary will vary depending upon the kind of activity that is taking place: a cricket match will take place over a longer period of time than a football match, for instance, so the commentary for each will have a different pace. When little is happening, commentators might give **background information** summarising the state of the game so far; when significant activity develops, they will describe **what is happening** and will try to **create an appropriate atmosphere** for people watching or listening; where events follow a recognisable pattern, they may use a **formulaic utterance**; if the outcome of a predictable sequence of moves is exciting, they will choose more **emotive language** – if nothing develops from the initial activity, they will choose more **reserved language**. Alongside descriptions of the activity itself, a skilful commentator will provide **interpretative comment** and often **personal asides**. It is this part of a commentary that allows commentators to be idiosyncratic and to develop a personal style.

The **turn-taking** has to be very orderly, just as it is in an interview. Often there will

Pauses are used in a distinctive way in commentaries. Because sustained speech is so important there are few examples of the kinds of casual pauses associated with informal conversation. The variety as a whole is noted for its lack of voiced hesitation, so pauses tend to be used consciously: to add emphasis – *but that's a lovely kick by Rob Andrew (.) forcing them to turn* (ll. 11–12); to reflect lack of specific activity – *England looking for the drive (7) England looking to turn* (ll. 29–30); to punctuate a sequence of actions – *Bracken has options both sides (.) Andrew (.) beautiful long pass (.) Catt out to Rory Underwood* (ll. 32–4); and to breathe *and Ben Clarke snaffles the ball from this lineout it comes back to Bracken sends it out to Andrew (.)* (ll. 51–3). It is important to remember that pauses do not always correspond to the end of a grammatical utterance in unscripted commentaries.

The advisers alter the pitch, pace, volume and tone of their utterances less often. Their pace may become fast (marked 'alleg') in order to complete their turn before the next piece of play is described by the commentator, but usually their delivery is far less exaggerated. They imitate the techniques of commentators, but do not always manage to control them as skilfully because they have had less practice. In some stretches of their turns, utterances become very long and it is possible to hear speakers almost running out of breath as they aim for a point at which a pause can be taken for breath: *the long flat er pass...encroach that at all and (.)...* (ll. 92–8).

The basic function of the **language** of unscripted commentaries is to name things and people (nouns) and to describe actions (verbs). The lexis is **subject specific** because the focus of attention is inevitably on one particular kind of activity: *lineout* (1.76), *try* (1.34) and *rucking* (1.9). Many of the technical terms are used in everyday discourse, but in the sporting context have a more specific meaning: *left wing* (1.68) and *corner* (1.54). Alongside the technical terms, colloquialisms are common: contractions – *he's* (1.75) and *we've* (1.94); phrasal verbs – *get away with* (1.19) and *ran out of* (1.39); informal 'trendy' modifiers – *a cracking kick* (1.48); the use of adverbs like *really* at the front of utterances to indicate disapproval – *really I thought...* (1.22) and *really the Italians...* (1.21); and conversational collocations – *the same story* (1.70). There tend to be other **collocations** which are directly linked to a particular context: *long pass* (1.33), *into touch* (1.43) and *near side of the field* (1.43). There is a high proportion of **proper nouns** because the commentators have to describe a sequence of actions carried out by a limited number of participants: *Diego Dominguez* (1.47), *Rory Underwood* (ll. 85–6) and *Rodber* (1.32). **Modification** is used to add detail – it will often consist of numbers. Strings of modifiers like *beautiful long pass* (1.33), and adverbial intensifiers like *a very good kick* (1.54) are quite common. Often extra detail will be added by placing phrases in apposition: *the receiver/who was Mike Catt on that occasion/had no angle to kick the ball...* (ll. 49–50). Both pre- and post-modification are used.

```
        m       m      m     h
this (beautifully long) floated flat pass (ll. 99–100)
det    Adv    Adj        V    adj   N

  m h  q
a bang in the face (1. 25)
det N PrepP
```

Individual commentators develop a **personal approach**. They try to avoid high-frequency clauses like *you see*, *you know* or *I mean* which are common in informal conversation and instead try to make their choice of words striking. Here, *you see* is used as a filler (1.63). Unusual **descriptive noun phrases** like *phoney war* (1.2), *a bit of aerial ping-pong* (1.4) make the account of what is happening more distinctive. Unexpected **verbs** can prevent commentaries describing an event in which similar sequences of action occur from becoming repetitive: *bobbling* (1.19), *snaffles* (1.52) and *sidefoots*

be two people to talk about the activity: one will be in the role of commentator and the other tends to be a sportsman or sportswoman who advises or summarises. The two participants will sometimes interact directly in informal conversation, but usually their turns will be directly related to the event they are watching. In the examples here, the commentators are Bob Symonds (television) and Ian Robertson (radio); the advisers are Steve Smith (television) and Mike Burton (radio). The approach of the commentators and advisers is usually quite different.

In the transcripts of the Rugby World Cup, in almost every example the speakers pick up clues promptly and **latch on** smoothly. In a few places in the television commentary, the end of a turn is marked by a **timed pause** (ll. 5, 12) – the adviser finishes speaking and the commentator waits until the next piece of action develops before starting his turn. On only one occasion in the radio commentary is there an example of an **overlap** (ll. 10–11) – the adviser is finishing his comment as activity develops in the match and the commentator begins his turn. There is no confusion caused by the overlapping of words and the overlap itself is minimal. The dominance of **latched turns** indicates the highly structured nature of unscripted commentary. Although it is a form of spontaneous speech, it is clearly an acquired skill in which certain techniques must be learnt and practised.

Unscripted commentaries are distinctive for the wide range of **prosodic features** on which they draw and even at first sight the marginal notes are obviously more detailed than the other transcripts considered so far. As the activity described changes, so too do the intonation patterns, the pitch, the pace and the volume. Commentators use these to animate the scene they are creating for radio listeners who cannot see what is happening; and to focus the viewer and personalise the event for a television audience. The **timing** of utterances is crucial and this is another reason why spontaneity and sustained speech are so important.

In both transcripts, the commentators use a far wider range of prosodic features than the advisers. This emphasises the fact that unscripted commentary is a variety for which there are techniques to be learnt. The **pace** of utterances is directly linked to the speed of the activity taking place. Where exciting developments occur, commentators frequently increase the pace of their utterances (marked on the transcript as 'accel'). This will usually be followed by a noticeable decrease in pace as the height of activity falls away (marked 'rall'). To signal the end of a dramatic passage of play and the end of a turn, a commentator might use a distinctively slow delivery (marked 'lento'). Changes in **volume** often accompany changes in pace: as excitement builds, the volume will increase (marked 'cresc'); and as a particular period of activity dies away, so too will the volume (marked 'dimin'). Dramatic changes of pitch are also distinctive: a commentator may raise his pitch (marked ↑ ↑) to reflect anticipation and enthusiasm, or lower it (marked ↓ ↓) to indicate a return to less fevered activity.

Emphatic stress is used to highlight key words, just as it is in other forms of spoken language. What can perhaps be seen as a distinctive feature, however, is the emphatic stringing together of stressed words: *his 43rd try in international rugby* (1.86). Stress patterns like these are often accompanied by a **rhythmic delivery**: short, abrupt vocalisations (marked 'stacc') may be used to describe players' positions as quickly as possible; drawling, prolonged vocalisations (marked 'leg') may add emphasis to important moments.

Intonation patterns are also noticeably exaggerated in unscripted commentary. **Rising tones** mark excitement: *Underwood takes it runs up to his own 22 and right-footed hammers it* (ll. 41–2). They are often used repeatedly as the activity builds to a climax. **Falling tones** tend to mark the end of a turn: *a comedy of errors* (ll. 60–1). **Rising-falling** and **falling-rising tones** are used to give emphasis to key words: *tackles it beautifully* (1.28). Intonation patterns are also used to give coherence to utterances where clause elements are often deleted to achieve brevity.

(l. 59). The use of **verb modifiers** can dramatise the action, emphasising the ongoing nature of the process: *rolling maul* (l. 30); *yawning gap* (l. 89). In the radio commentary, Ian Robertson uses the verb *hammers* (l. 42), drawing attention to his choice of word by following the clause with a comment clause: *I think is the only phrase I can use there* (ll. 42–3). This is a form of METATALK (a term in linguistics for language used when talking about language) in which the speaker discusses his own lexical selections.

The other way in which a commentator can create a distinctive style is to use **metaphors**. There are many well-known examples of sporting clichés: *sick as a parrot*, *over the moon*, *the game's not over until the final whistle's blown* and *it's a game of two halves*. When a commentator uses a new image, however, it can animate the scene he is trying to describe. Metaphorical language is in complete contrast to the factual language used to record what is happening at moments of intense activity – it will most often occur when the speed of the match has slowed down, allowing the commentator to indulge in a more impressionistic kind of comment. In the transcripts here, Ian Robertson develops a theatrical metaphor: *pantomime* and *a comedy of errors* (ll. 60–1) – the title of a play by Shakespeare. This allows him to summarise an uncontrolled passage of play in a vivid and personal way. Steve Smith also uses metaphors in the televised match: *got out of jail* (l. 22) and *sucked up* (l. 39). They are perhaps not as distinctive as the theatrical extended metaphor, but they reflect nevertheless a creative use of language which develops the atmosphere.

The **grammar** of unscripted commentaries has many distinctive features. Because the discourse is spontaneous, **grammatically incomplete utterances** are common. However, in the focused context of a sporting activity these are rarely noticed. Most utterances are in the **declarative**, but **questions** may be asked where two people are involved. These may take the form of tag questions requesting affirmation of a point just made like *isn't it* (ll. 2–3) or may momentarily involve the participants in something more like conversation than commentary. At moments of tension, a commentator may ask rhetorical questions in which he anticipates the outcome without yet knowing what will happen. **Clause elements** will usually appear in a standard order – inversion may be used for dramatic effect, but **marked themes** are not common in unscripted commentary. They are more likely to appear in the turns of the adviser than those of the commentator.

> A — (in fact) A — (in the end) S — (they) P — (were) C — (quite lucky to get away) [SCl-NFCl] (ll. 18–19)

The **main verb** usually comes early in the clause and the sentence structures are often **simple**:

> S — (Ben Clarke) P — (snaffles) O — (the ball) A — (from this lineout) (ll. 51–2)

> S — (Bracken) P — (has) O — (options) A — (both sides) (ll. 32–3)

Just as informal conversation is marked by loose co-ordination of utterances, so too is spontaneous unscripted commentary. The use of *and* in the initial position is common since it allows speakers to latch onto the end of the previous turn and to sustain the continuous flow of speech.

> conj — (and) S — (that try) P — (was) C — (a beauty) ... A — (in the end) S — (they) P — (sucked up) O — (the Italians)

> conj — (and) S — (they) A — (just) P — (ran out of) O — (players) (ll. 37–40)

Subordination is more common in evaluative or summative comment than in description of the action, but long, embedded clauses are not common.

> S — (he) P — (charged) O — (it) A — (down) A — (with his head) (which is not the best thing to do) [SCl-RelCl] [SCl-NFCl]

> conj — (and) S — (he) P — ('s recovered) A — (now) conj — (so) S — (we) P — ('ll have) O — (the lineout) A — (after a couple of minutes of injury time) (ll. 73–6)

One of the most distinctive features of the grammar of unscripted commentary is the number of **deletions**. Minor 'sentences' are common – often the subject or predicator, or both are omitted, leaving only the essential information. This happens most often when activity is at its height. It is appropriate in this variety since if all the clause elements were included it is likely that the overall structure would be very repetitive. By analysing the clause structure of a particular section of a commentary using a table, it is possible to see which elements are commonly omitted. There is often a marked difference between the deletions in a television and in a radio commentary.

Television (ll. 6–13)

Co conj	Sub conj	S	P	O/C	A
		the Italians	∅	∅	now
		∅	∅ calling	some variation	at the lineout
		∅	∅ moving	Number 8 Julian Gardner	up to the front
but		that	's	a decoy move for Pedroni	
		Ben Clarke	∅	∅	through quickly
		∅	∅	∅	through on Cuttitta
		∅	∅	good rucking	too by England up very quickly indeed
but		that	's	a lovely kick by Rob Andrew, forcing them to turn	
	that	you	saw	the problems	then
	as	Gerosa	faced	it	
		Johnson	sets	it	up

Commonly deleted elements here are the subject of the utterance and verb *to be*. The meaning is still clear despite the number of omissions – it would be quite straightforward to expand the grammatically incomplete utterances by inserting appropriate subjects and predicators. A commentary is describing a series of actions which exist: it would therefore be easy to use the *existential there* + *be* structure repeatedly. The minor 'sentences' help a commentator to avoid a repetitive style and save time.

Radio (ll. 51–8)

Co conj	Sub conj	S	P	O/C	A
and		Ben Clarke	snaffles	the ball	from this lineout
		it	comes	back	to Bracken
		∅	sends	it	out to Andrew
		Andrew	puts	a kick	down towards the corner
		that	's	a very very good kick	again
		it	's rolling		right up to the Italian line
but		Gerosa	slips		
		he	recovers		very quickly
		∅	can't get	his kick	in
		Johnson	picks	it	up
		all the Italians	are	off-side	
		the ball	's charged		down by Brian Moore

The radio commentary is far more complete than that of the televised version of the match. Perhaps because the radio listener is far more reliant on the commentator for details, a radio commentary will vary according to the speed of the action at the time and according to the style of the commentator.

The **verb tenses** in unscripted commentaries are distinctive. The **simple present** is used to describe actions as they are happening: *sets* (l. 13) and *tackles* (l. 28); *puts* (l. 53) and *comes* (l. 52). The **present progressive** is used to create a sense of ongoing movement: *getting* (l. 13); *beginning* (l. 79). The **simple past tense** is used in any reference to events that have just taken place. It is more likely to be found in the summative comments of the advisers: *needed* (l. 20) and *created* (l. 37); *was* (l. 63) and *had* (l. 67). The **present** or **past perfect** may also be used in the reflective sections of the commentary: *have held* (l. 23); *had drawn in* (l. 95).

There are few examples of **normal non-fluency features** in either commentary. **Voiced hesitations** are rarely heard. If they do occur, they are more likely to be in the advisers' summaries: *er* and *uh* (l. 45). Other examples of hesitancy are also rare in the official commentators' utterances, but may appear in the advisers' comments: **repetition** – *much uh better better angle* (l. 45); **false starts** – *and the the the main feature* (l. 62); and unexpected **pauses** – *it would have been difficult for (.) the (.) Italian defender...* (ll. 65–6). The exceptional fluency of unscripted commentary is one of its distinctive features.

The **distinctive features** of unscripted commentary can be summarised as follows:

• The **audience** have expert knowledge so they are able to fill in the gaps left by the economic nature of the variety as a whole. While television viewers can rely on visual and linguistic clues to decode the event, radio listeners have only language.
• The discourse is **spontaneous** and so it has many of the features of informal conversation. However, there are also marked differences because commentaries have to

be **fluent and continuous**, unlike the casual, random nature of conversation.

• The **topic** is predefined and apart from asides in which a commentator may make connections with other things, the focus will be on the actions taking place.
• The **structure** is very precisely ordered. The commentary must: describe the process (particularly on radio where listeners rely on the commentator's linguistic re-creation of actions); create an appropriate background atmosphere; engage the audience's attention; and entertain with interpretation, comment and personal asides.
• **Turn-taking** is co-operative and orderly, as it is in an interview. The professional commentator will provide focused description of who is doing what where and the 'player-expert' will comment and summarise. Most turns end smoothly – each speaker picks up signals marking the end and takes over promptly. Overlaps occur infrequently and are minimal. Some timed pauses occur at the end of an adviser's turn when the commentator waits for the next sequence of events to develop. This is more likely to happen on television where the audience can watch the action; a complete silence on the radio, even for a few seconds, would cause problems for listeners. Radio commentators must therefore be even more fluent and sustained in their commentaries than television presenters.
• **Prosodic features** are used extensively to animate the commentary, particularly by the commentator. Pitch, pace, volume and variations in intonation patterns reflect the dynamics of the event. Stress and rhythm are used to enhance meaning – it is common to find strings of words with emphatic stress that is quite different from most other varieties of spoken language. Pauses tend to be used for emphasis, to punctuate utterances, when nothing of significance is happening, and for breathing. They rarely indicate hesitation. Good timing is very important. Advisers tend to be less fluent and less able to manipulate the range of prosodic features to create dramatic effects.
• The **lexis** is subject specific and technical. However, because unscripted commentaries are spontaneous, examples of informal conversational language are also common. Collocations may be technical or conversational. The variety is marked by its prominent use of proper nouns and its personal and idiosyncratic choice of lexis. Metaphorical language can also make commentaries very characteristic, enabling commentators to develop a recognisable personal style. Modification is common because it adds precise detail – radio commentaries require particularly well-focused descriptions and adverbials of place are common.
• The **grammar** is very distinctive. Grammatically incomplete utterances are common, although these will rarely be noticed in the speed and intensity of the action. The mood is usually declarative, but questions may be addressed to the other participant(s). This kind of interaction can make commentaries resemble informal conversation. Utterances rarely have marked themes – the subject and predicator tend to be placed at the front of the clause so that the actors and processes are clear. Clause structures are often simple or loosely co-ordinated, just as in informal conversation. The co-ordinating conjunction *and* is often used in the initial position as one turn moves smoothly into another – this enhances the audience's sense of a continuous speech turn. Where subordination is used, it rarely involves strings of embedded dependent clauses.

The most noticeable grammatical feature of unscripted commentaries is the number of deletions. Because the focus is on a description of actions which exist, commentators commonly use the *existential there + be* structure. To avoid repetition, the subject and predicator are often omitted, resulting in an unusually large number of minor 'sentences'. This is in line with the need to be economic, using as few words as possible to effectively convey the nature of the event. Radio commen-

taries often have fewer deletions than televised versions because their listeners can-not rely on visual clues to fill in the gaps. Simple present tense and the present progressive are used to describe the facts, creating a sense of immediacy; simple past and the present perfective are used to comment and give opinions.

- The variety can be recognised by an almost complete absence of **normal non-fluency markers**. The commentaries of less experienced speakers may be marked by voiced hesitations, false starts and repetitions, but professional commentators are exceptionally fluent.

10.5   What to look for in spoken language

The following checklist can be used to identify key features in transcripts of spoken language. There will not be examples of all the features listed in every extract, but the list can be used as a guide. The points made are general so discussion of specific examples will need to be adapted to take account of the particular context, participants and function in the discourse.

The following are helpful questions to ask.

Register

1 What is the **mode**? – spoken.
2 What is the **manner**? – the relationship between participants: formal or informal? personal or impersonal? status? dominant speaker? co-operative?
3 What is the **field**? – the lexis will reveal the kind of subject matter that forms the basis for the speech encounter.

Topic management

1 Is there **one clearly focused topic** or are there a number of apparently **random topics**?
2 How are the **topics chosen**? – directly related to the context (job interview, lecture)? related to the interests and experiences of the participants?
3 Are there any **topic shifts**? who introduces the new topics?
4 Do new topics emerge **logically** from previous topics or do they appear to be **unconnected**?
5 Are there any linguistic signals after an interruption where a speaker tries to **return to an earlier topic**?
6 How is the **end of a topic** marked?

Structure

1 Are there any examples of **adjacency pairs**? – questions and answers? greetings? a command and a response?
2 What kind of **opening** is used? – neutral? self-related comment? other-related comment? social greetings? hospitality tokens? vocatives to personalise the discourse?
3 How is the **turn-taking** organised? – dominant speaker? equally shared turns? latching on? overlaps? efficient recognition of linguistic and paralinguistic clues signalling the end of a turn?
4 What kinds of **speaker moves** are used in the main body of the discourse? – framing? initiating? focusing? supporting? challenging?
5 What kind of **closing** is used? – reference to something outside the speech encounter? repetition? delaying tactics? formulaic utterances? self- or other-related remarks?

Prosodic features

1 Do **intonation patterns** vary in order to convey the speaker's attitude? to mark the end of grammatical utterances? to distinguish between new and old information? to indicate the end of a turn?
2 How do the intonation patterns relate to the **semantics** of an utterance? – rising? (question); falling? (statement or completion); rising-falling? (reprimand or denial); falling-rising? (surprise or disbelief).
3 Does the **pitch** change to reflect the speaker's involvement in the discourse? – high? (excitement or enthusiasm); low? (formality or seriousness); midway? (everyday speech encounters).
4 Is **emphatic stress** used to highlight key words?
5 Does the **volume** change significantly to enhance the meaning of utterances? – 'forte'? 'piano'? 'cresc'? 'dimin'?
6 Does the **pace** change? – 'alleg'? 'lento'? 'accel'? 'rall'?
7 Does the **style of delivery** change? – 'stacc'? 'leg'?
8 What are the functions of the **pauses**? – to create emphasis? to dramatise an utterance? to mark hesitation? to allow the speaker to breathe? to make the speech encounter informal? to let the speaker search for a word? to mark the grammatical end of an utterance?
9 Is the transcript marked with any **vocal effects** or **paralinguistics**? how do these relate to the words actually spoken?

Lexis

1 Is the language formal or informal?
2 Is it subject specific or general?
3 Are there examples of **high-frequency** conversational clauses – *you know, I see, I mean*, and so on?
4 Are there any **colloquial idioms**? or **collocations**?
5 Is there any evidence of an **abbreviated code** based on shared knowledge or shared expertise?
6 Are there any **ambiguities**?
7 Is **modification** used to create an atmosphere?

Grammar

1 Are the **clause structures** simple? compound? complex? a mixture?
2 Are **loosely co-ordinated** clauses more common than **subordinated** ones?
3 Are there any **minor 'sentences'**? – which clause elements are omitted?
4 Are **phrases** complex or simple? – NPs? AdjPs? VPs? AdvPs? how do they relate to the topic and manner of the speech encounter?
5 Are **different grammatical modes** used to add variety? – direct speech? reported speech? quotations? changes in mood? changes in voice?
6 Are there any **grammatically inaccurate** or **incomplete utterances**? – do other participants show any awareness of these?
7 Are there any **marked themes**?

11.1 The nature of newspaper language

In the eighteenth century, newspapers were used by the government as a means of promoting their own interests. The structure and style were therefore formal. By the nineteenth century, however, what can be described as 'modern journalism' began with the appearance of newspapers still popular today: by 1829, *The Times* was very powerful; 1821 marked the first printing of the *Manchester Guardian*; later in the century, this was followed by the *Daily Mail* (1896); and at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the *Daily Express* (1900) and the *Daily Mirror* (1903). Newspaper reporting became more scandalous, and style and form changed to suit the new approaches. The British press became renowned for their distinctive headline styles and their personal and idiosyncratic reporting.

Today, there is much debate about what makes a good news story. Journalists and academics study newspaper reporting and find great variation in what different newspapers will print. Anything **unexpected** or **dramatic** is newsworthy and 'bad news is always good news' for the journalists and editors trying to meet tight deadlines and sell papers. Equally, **élite persons**, whether royalty, pop stars or politicians, make the front pages because many readers like to know about the lifestyles and the scandals of the rich and famous. Editors look for **relevance** in the stories they print, which means that the content must have a direct bearing on the people of Britain in some way: culturally, socially, politically and so on. Certain **élite nations** will receive more coverage too – we are more likely to read about America, for instance, than about a smaller country that has fewer cultural, social and political links with Britain. **Continuity** is important and newspapers like to be able to develop running coverage of an event. To make abstract issues like politics and economics more approachable, journalists try to **personalise** them: John Major is foregrounded, rather than his role as Prime Minister; the Princess of Wales is portrayed as an individual with ordinary emotions, rather than as a distant princess to whom the ordinary public cannot relate. The NEWS VALUES of a newspaper govern the kind of stories which editors print. Choices are ultimately made based on what will sell newspapers, both to readers and advertisers.

Newspapers are often divided into two main categories: **tabloid** and **broadsheet**. This is a very basic distinction and the terms mean different things to different people. In very general terms, a TABLOID paper is printed on A2-size paper, which is folded to A3; this is therefore smaller than the full spread of a BROADSHEET, which is printed on A1 and folded to A2. All the mass-circulation papers are tabloid. The divide between 'big' and 'small' papers goes further, however: broadsheet papers are also known as the 'serious' or 'quality' press; tabloid papers are known as the 'popular' or 'gutter' press.

Normal non-fluency features

1 Are there any **overlaps** in the speech turns? – for how long do they last? what causes them? how do the participants respond? do the overlaps mark an intentional challenge, a supportive minimal vocalisation, or a misreading of linguistic clues?

2 Are there any **voiced hesitations**? – are they preventing interruptions? prolonging a turn? providing thinking time?

3 Are there any **false starts**? or **repetitions**?

Dealing with problems

1 Are there any **repairs**? – self-corrections? other corrections?

2 Are there any **topic loops**? – after a minimal response or a negative evaluation? which topic is reintroduced? why is it considered a safe topic?

3 Is the speaker aware of **listener responses**? – self-monitoring? use of direct address? use of questions requiring some kind of response? restating or rephrasing of points made?

4 Are there any **silences**? – lack of response to a question? failure to introduce new topic? utterances misheard?

Summary

An **analysis of spoken language** is central to any linguistic study because it is speech rather than writing that is dominant in society – it is at the centre of our daily lives and we deal instinctively with the demands of each spoken encounter as it arises. We all have a range of repertoires on which we can draw, and we are all experts, able to make decisions about the kinds of language appropriate for different people and different contexts.

There are many **varieties** of spoken language, all with their own distinctive features. However, it is possible to pinpoint some features that are common to most forms of spoken discourse. Where speech is spontaneous, even if the context is formal, there will be grammatical inaccuracies and incomplete utterances. In written language, these would be unacceptable – in speech, they often remain unnoticed. Because we all assimilate the 'rules' of spoken language from an early age, most speech encounters take place within a co-operative framework – turns are taken in an orderly way; participants find topics that reflect their shared interests; and a wide range of language is accepted as normal.

The **immediacy** of speech makes it an important social tool – it forms the basis for face-to-face interaction in both formal and informal contexts.