



WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW? SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Spoken language can be formal (e.g. speeches written to be read loud, presenters on the news), semi-formal (e.g. television chat show interviews) or informal (conversations between friends and family).

Interactions can be phatic (establishing and maintaining relationships), interactional (personal and social), transactional (getting things done, communicating information), or conative (influencing attitudes and behaviour).

Turntaking

the structure of turns in speech

e.g. the speaker who says the most in an exchange is the dominant participant.

What is distinctive about turntaking?

1. the dominant speaker establishes the **topic**
2. **transition relevance places** mark where the turn changes and another participant speaks
3. **back-channel features** allow speakers to give feedback e.g. supportive affirmations or challenges
4. **overlaps** mark places where speaker-turns occur at the same time – usually one will stop speaking
5. **interruptions** mark places where one speaker prevents another from finishing their turn
6. **latch-ons** occur where one speaker picks up a turn with no gap or hesitation.

Grammatical features

the distinctive structural features of speech

e.g. Ø You going t'night? (omission of aux verb)

What is distinctive about the grammar?

1. **loose structures** with repeated coordination are common e.g. I was there and I saw you and then I...
2. **elliptical utterances** omit part of the structure e.g. Ø Don't blame you. (subject omitted)
3. **deixis** is common, referencing the physical context of the interaction e.g. It's over there.
4. **comment clauses** stand apart from the grammatical structure of utterances (mark opinion) e.g. you know, I think, I admit, mind you, I dare say
5. **Non-fluency features** break up the structure e.g. fillers, unintentional repetition, voiced/timed pauses, false starts + reformulation, repairs, hesitations.

Pronunciation

the way a speaker voices words

e.g. gonna (going to), d'ya (do you), fallin' (falling).

What is distinctive about pronunciation?

1. **accents** affect the way words are pronounced according to the region or social group of a speaker e.g. /kʊt/ Birmingham for cut /kʌt/ SSB (RP)
2. **idiolects** represent the distinctive features of an individual's speech e.g. extended speech ve:::ry
3. **informal pronunciation** reflects common speech features that are found across regions/social groups e.g. glottal stop in forget /fɔ:geʔ/ vs /fɔ:geɪ/ SSB
4. **assimilation** describes sounds changing as words come together in speech e.g. /kæŋgəv/ for can go
5. **elision** marks the omission of sounds in speech e.g. /prhæps/ for perhaps /pəhæps/ SSB.

Prosodics

vocal cues used by speakers to add meaning

e.g. I MUST have a turn (increased volume).

What is distinctive about prosodics?

1. **emphatic stress** identifies words with semantic importance e.g. Have you **really** forgotten my birthday? (Adv)
2. **pitch** marks a change in tone to reflect mood – it can be ↑raised↑ (e.g. surprise/excitement) OR ↓lowered↓ (e.g. disappointment/sadness)
3. **intonation** marks a change in attitudes/emotions OR grammatical mood (e.g. ↗rising marks a question; ↘falling marks the end of an utterance)
4. **pace** can be fast (*accel*) e.g. to show excitement or nerves OR slow (*rall*) to create drama or show uncertainty; **pauses** can change the pace
5. **volume** can increase to mark anger or frustration.

Sample analysis: extract from an informal conversation (anecdote)

The speaker is telling a story in an extended turn where interruptions are unlikely. The utterance is loosely structured with repeated coordinating conjunctions (“/ən/”, “so”) – the polysyndetic list of clauses allows the speaker to sustain the turn. The deictic prepositional phrase “over there” marks the context of the story, which is being told about familiar, local places. Emphatic stress (e.g. verbs “block”/“blamed”; adjective /pɑ:ti:klə/) and rising intonation (nouns “foot”/“brother”) draw attention to semantically important words. Informal pronunciations (assimilated verb “/ju:stə/”; elided conjunction “/ən/”) are common in connected speech, but the extension of the adjective /pɑ:ti:klə/ and the verb “wa:shed” are features of the speaker’s idiolect.

we /ju:stə/ go /ən/ **block** the
bridge up over there so the water
got about two ↗**foot** /ən/ then
we /ju:stə/ go /ən/ /ən/ **swim** /
ən/ one /pɑ:ti:klə/ time part
the bridge got **wa:shed** ↘**in** so
you see my ↗**brother** /ən/ some
boys got **blamed**