

Unit one

Introduction

Aims of this book

Conversation consists of spoken language. Not only do the features of spoken language differ from the features of written language, but the methods used to analyse conversation have to consider that conversation exists within a social context which determines the purpose of the conversation and shapes its structure and features. Though we are largely unaware of the rules that govern conversation, we operate daily using them.

It is obvious, therefore, that learning to speak also means learning to talk. Those who produce written texts such as novelists, poets and journalists are often given great respect for their ability to craft texts. Perhaps, because in conversation so much has to be taken on trust and is dependent on the speakers' sensitivity to both language and cultural expectations, we should give more respect to those who craft and use oral texts well.

By examining transcripts from a variety of conversations, the aim of this book is, therefore, to explore the complexity of conversation in an attempt to understand and appreciate it more.

What is conversation?

We communicate daily with each other by talking. It is 'the most basic and widespread linguistic means of conducting human affairs' (McArthur, 1992) but though we speak and operate regularly in conversation, it is only rarely something that we plan or analyse.

'Discourse analysis examines how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social and psychological context, become meaningful and unified for their users' (Cook, 1989). This book deals

with discourse analysis, but chooses to focus on naturally occurring spoken language or conversation rather than written texts and looks, therefore, at spoken language in use between speakers and listeners in a variety of social contexts. Conversation, therefore, is any interactive spoken exchange between two or more people and can be:

- ⊙ face-to-face exchanges – these can be private conversations, such as talk at home between the family, or more public and ritualised conversations such as classroom talk or Question Time in the Houses of Parliament;
- ⊙ non-face-to-face exchanges, such as telephone conversations;
- ⊙ broadcast materials such as a live radio phone-in or a television chat show.

What does conversation consist of?

Obviously, conversation is constructed with spoken rather than written language. Speech is usually spontaneous and, by its nature, temporary because it has gone as soon as it has been spoken. It can, however, be made permanent through recording and transcription, where transcription is an attempt to represent, in a written form, the sounds and words of the spoken language. The difficulty, however, of transcribing accurately clearly illustrates the differences between spoken and written communication. Conversation is obviously far more than words. Communication can take place through body language, through **prosodic features** such as **intonation**, speed, stress and volume and even through silence or laughter. It is worth exploring, therefore, the specific features of spoken language used as the building blocks of conversation.

To operate efficiently in conversation, however, our knowledge has to stretch far beyond an awareness of individual sounds or words. Instinctively, it seems, and usually without any formal training in the rules of conversation, we are nevertheless capable of structuring and building conversation appropriate to the situations in which we find ourselves. It seems that our early years of language acquisition and our subsequent years of talk have taught us all we need to know.

Activity

The following remarks are all likely to be spoken by parents attempting to teach young children the finer points of conversation. Consider them and discuss what rule of conversation they could be asking the child to learn.

- ⊙ Don't interrupt me while I'm speaking. ↑↑
- ⊙ Speak when you're spoken to.
- ⊙ What's the magic word?
- ⊙ Don't tell me what to do.
- ⊙ Don't say that in front of your gran.
- ⊙ Don't say 'what', say 'pardon'.

Commentary

Turntaking and structure

- ⊙ Don't interrupt me while I'm speaking.
- ⊙ Speak when you're spoken to.

The first remark targets one of the basic rules of conversation: people take turns. In British culture, you need to know when to talk and how to gain a turn. Simply breaking into a conversation whenever you feel like it is not considered good conversational behaviour. It does, of course, occur (and the reasons for this are discussed later in this book) but for the young child, parents are often quite happy to explain that it is better not to interrupt. Levinson (1983), in fact, tells us that 'less (and often considerably less) than 5% of the speech stream is delivered in overlap (two speakers speaking simultaneously)'.

Parents are equally keen that their child should not remain silent at the wrong time. As teenagers well know, silence after a question can all too easily be interpreted as deliberately challenging or controversial. Not to answer the greeting 'Hello' with a similar response is also treated as a deliberate flouting of the rules and regarded as rudeness. Presented with the information that 'Tea is on the table', every self-respecting cook expects an acknowledgement and not receiving one is likely to produce the question 'Did you hear me?' These expected pairings of question and answer, greeting and greeting, information and acknowledgement are known as **adjacency pairs**. They are also often likely to provide much of the predictable structure of a conversation.

Introduction

To analyse conversation, therefore, means we have to examine how and where we take turns and how these turns are built on to each other to structure the conversation as a whole.

Politeness and negotiation

- ⊙ What's the magic word?
- ⊙ Don't tell me what to do.

In a subtle process, probably unacknowledged by both parent and child, these two utterances are helping the child acquire the knowledge needed to operate politely. There are two main ways to get someone to do something for you. To get what you want, you can always ask politely or choose instead to issue a straight command. Placed alongside a request, the word 'Please' smooths its progress and often makes a favourable response more likely. Thought is always recommended, however, before the use of a straight command. Backed by the authority of parenthood and age, adults may risk giving children a straight command. Even then, as every child knows, this may not be successful. The opposite way round, a child issuing a straight command to a parent, is even more likely to be unsuccessful. Not only will the child not get what they want, they will probably also be told in no uncertain terms that their command-giving is not acceptable conversational behaviour. Conversation is, therefore, not just about passing on information or getting things done. It is also about the way speakers relate to one another and choose to co-operate or not to co-operate with one another.

Content and conditioning

- ⊙ Don't say that in front of your gran.
- ⊙ Don't say 'what', say 'pardon'.

Little by little, we are shaped to understand not only what is acceptable language to use, but also what are acceptable topics. What you do or don't say in front of your gran depends, of course, on the nature of your gran and, to some extent, on the situation where the conversation takes place. What gran might accept in public might be different from what she'd accept in the sanctuary of her own home with no other witnesses present. What you choose to talk about might also be conditioned by the type of family of which you are a member, your gender or even your class.

Purpose and context

What is also intriguing is how any conversation with gran or anyone else will alter according to its purpose. The purpose of a conversation is not always immediately obvious from the surface meaning of the words chosen. The intention behind an utterance can even mean that, as they are spoken, the words actually achieve something beyond what's being said. For example, the bride at a wedding ceremony saying 'I do' has the legal status of performing the act of marriage. These words perform a **speech act**. Speech act theory, derived from the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), refers to what is being done when something is said, for example, warning or promising. The speech act can be indirect if the apparent meaning is different from its underlying real meaning. The purpose of the utterance 'Can you pass the salt?', for example, is to try to get the hearer to do something rather than a request for information.

Understanding conversation properly, therefore, means looking at the purpose behind the words spoken. This is as important as looking at the words themselves. It is interesting to consider how many different purposes conversations can have. By what we say, by the way we say it and sometimes even by what we don't say we can influence or reflect the purpose or function of a conversation.

Activity

Go through your day and see if you can list some of the conversations you have had. Choose ten conversations and try to decide what their purpose was. What did you hope to achieve with these conversations? Consider what you most value conversation for.

Commentary

It's fascinating how many reasons we have to talk and how much we achieve through conversation. The linguist Halliday (1973) tried to separate conversations according to their purpose. Some conversations satisfy a practical need, either to service our relationships with others or to regulate their behaviour. Sometimes, we use conversations to learn either about our world or to learn about ourselves and express our personalities. Sometimes we use our imagination and conversations to entertain ourselves, represent new possibilities and propositions or to create imaginary worlds.

Looking back over the conversations you've held today, many of them initially seem unimportant and trivial. In fact, some of the conversations we hold are like islands of predictability. In most families, the morning grunting ritual is a 'safe', predictable conversation. So too are those ritualised exchanges when you bump into a friend who asks 'How are you?' Almost involuntarily, the predictable response is 'Fine. How are you?'

Some types of conversation are less predictable but also occur frequently. When a friend asks 'Guess what I did at the weekend', and then proceeds to tell us, as a listener, we are involved in storytelling. Many conversations do, in fact, simply involve an exchange of stories as we spend time listening to each other's stories and telling our own.

Conversation often provides people with the opportunity to evaluate and discover themselves. Not all people choose to use conversation in this way to explore personal topics but even in the discussion of impersonal topics such as sport, TV programmes or even the weather, a bonding takes place between speakers who keep the channels of communication open with one another. This can lead to interesting negotiations of ideas and feelings and a conversation can evolve using a structure and language that facilitates this.

In other conversations where we feel the people talking are not of equal status, often the function of the conversation can be different for each of the speakers involved. Parents and teenagers talking to one another can, for example, have different purposes in their conversations, as a parent tries to discover what their teenage son or daughter has been doing and the teenager tries to withhold this information.

Classroom conversation too, for example, is structured in a completely different way from the normal relaxed chat between friends. Both student and teacher, respecting the learning purpose behind talk in the classroom, know the conversational role they should play and structure the conversation accordingly. It seems that we have, in fact, produced a particular type of conversation to achieve learning in the context of the classroom.

Certain talk situations do tend to be repeated. We are bound, for example, to ask for services at a shop or restaurant more than once in our lifetime. As similar contexts and purposes for talk re-occur, it appears that we have developed a reasonably set method of talking or a conversational genre that covers that particular talk situation. We have created particular **speech events**.

Activity

Look at the following examples of spoken language. Decide what type of conversation or genre you feel the example has come from. Explain what language helped you define the nature of the conversation.

- 1 Guess what I did at the weekend!
- 2 Thank you very much for listening and if there are any questions, we'll just take them now.
- 3 I put it to you that, at the time of the accident, you were doing in excess of the speed limit.
- 4 Good morning. Barnet Leisure Centre. How can we help you?
- 5 Hello number one, what's your name and where do you come from?
- 6 Right, we're going on, come on, shush please, we're going on today to look at
- 7 How do you do?

Guidelines for taping spoken language

The only way to conduct research on conversation is to tape it, but be sure to follow the guidelines given below.

- ⊙ You need to get permission from speakers before recording them.
- ⊙ Often, at the beginning of the recording, the speakers can be either nervous or very self-conscious. This can make the conversation appear to lack spontaneity. As the speakers warm up, however, they forget the tape recorder is present and relax into more 'normal' conversation.
- ⊙ We can never be entirely sure, however, what is 'normal' conversation. As soon as we attempt to record it, we experience what is known as 'observer's paradox', that is, we cannot be sure how far the observation of a conversation has influenced what has been said.
- ⊙ It would be easier, therefore, at times, to record conversation without people knowing that this was happening. In this situation, ask the person's permission to use the material recorded when the recording is over.
- ⊙ Preserve the anonymity of your speakers and change their names on the transcription.

Notes on transcription

Obviously, capturing spoken language in a written form can be a time-consuming and difficult process. The physical context of the conversation which can be integral to its understanding does not, for example, form part of a transcription. Nor does body language, such as gestures or facial expressions, though sounds such as laughter or swearing can be described in brackets, for example (*laughter*).

Different types of transcriptions capture different levels of the conversation. The prosodic features (speed, stress, volume and intonation) can be indicated.

The exact pronunciation of the speakers can also be indicated by the use of the phonemic alphabet: *pub*, for example, indicates the northern pronunciation of the word *pub*, *bæʊ* shows the short 'a' sound, again part of northern accent. Words are not always pronounced as individual, separate units, so *wanna* could indicate the informal pronunciation of 'want to'.

Pauses, silences and sounds, such as voiced pauses, e.g. *er* and *um*, where the speaker hesitates, should also be marked, as should overlaps, where speakers talk simultaneously.

In a transcription, normal punctuation does not apply, and the following principles have been adhered to in this book:

- ⊙ Prosodic features are not marked though question marks and exclamation marks have been used where helpful and indicate some change in intonation.
- ⊙ Noises which are not proper words but still communicate have been indicated, e.g. *argh* or *wow*, as have other sounds such as laughter. Where the tape has become inaudible, this too has been indicated.
- ⊙ Pronunciation has not been concentrated on. The phonemic alphabet has not been used, though informality is shown with words such as *yeah*.
- ⊙ Voiced pauses indicating hesitation or thinking time have been transcribed, for example, *er*, *erm* or *um*.
- ⊙ Brackets with a dot (.) indicate a brief pause but one which, for a particular speaker, is longer than the normal pause at the end of a grammatical unit. The number of seconds paused, e.g. (2), has been recorded in brackets for even longer pauses.
- ⊙ Where speakers overlap and speak simultaneously, this has been marked by underlining.
- ⊙ Where sources are not given, the data are from my own or my students' transcriptions of the conversation of family, friends and acquaintances.

Unit two

Features of spoken language and oral narratives

Aims of this unit

One of the most common ways to communicate is storytelling. This unit, therefore, examines various spoken stories. Starting with the examination of the one-sided discourse of joke-telling, first, the unit explores the features of spoken language and, second, by comparing spoken and written forms of the same story, we are able to highlight the features expected in a narrative. Because oral stories, however, appear in a different context from written stories and oral storytellers have to interact with their listeners to attract and keep their attention, the rest of the unit examines the use and structure of oral storytelling in two different contexts: a live TV show and a personal conversation.

Activity

In order to have relevant spoken data to analyse, students in a sixth form class were asked to record themselves telling a joke. The following joke was told and recorded in the classroom by 18-year-old Andrew Herterich. It was told to an audience, but they were not supposed to interrupt. This is the spoken version of a joke. Produce the written version of the same joke and discuss:

- ⊙ what features you left out;
- ⊙ why they were present in the spoken version.

If you would prefer to work on your own data, record a speaker telling a joke or story, transcribe it and then construct your own written version.

Text: Joke

right (.) three men sat in a pub (.) and er sat there having a quiet drink (.) and in walks this really drunken old man (.) and he staggers in and he's all over the place he's knocking drinks over (.) he's er standing on people's feet and (.) um all the rest of it and um he walks over to the bar this old man (.) and he orders a pint of lager (.) he er gets his pint (.) and downs it fast as he can in one (.) and then he staggers over to these three men (.) these three men are looking at each other nudging each other (.) right what does he want (.) and ur (.) this man walks over he says (.) I'vehadyermam I'vehadyermam and one of the men says (.) piss off! so (.) this this old man he staggers away and he goes to the bar and he orders another drink (.) another pint of lager and downs this even faster (.) he staggers back over to these three men (.) and he says I've had your mam I've put cream on her body and I've licked it off (.) guy stands up again he says look go away (.) so er this old man staggers back to the bar (.) all over the place he orders another pint (.) this one downs even faster and he comes and again again he comes back over to these three men (.) he says I've had your mam I've put cream on her body I've done things to her you wouldn't understand (.) well they've had enough so (.) one of the men stands up he says look dad you're drunk go home.

Commentary

Your written version will probably have involved several changes. The pauses (.) and voiced pauses (*er* and *um*) disappear. They provide thinking time in the spoken version which is necessary due to the spontaneous nature of spoken language and obviously unnecessary in the planned written version.

The written version will be divided into separate sentences and the heavy use of the co-ordinating conjunction 'and' in the spoken version will have been edited out.

There is frequent repetition in the spoken version. For example, 'this man this man' is repeated twice as the speaker hesitates and takes thinking time to sort out his ideas clearly. The repetition in 'another drink another pint of lager' occurs because the speaker wants to add extra information. The redundancy of this repetition also enables a listener to have the necessary time to understand the joke properly. In a written text, where the reader can refer back to the text and need not understand everything first

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time through, a writer uses time to plan the text and this repetition will have been edited out as unnecessary.

The words 'right' and 'well', known as **discourse markers** because they indicate the structure of a spoken text, would no longer be necessary in a written text.

Some text will have been added to or modified in the written joke. The phrase 'guy stands up again' – will have been written as 'the guy stands up again'. **Ellipsis** or missing out odd words or phrases often occurs in spoken language where the situation or the speaker himself can make the meaning clear. The word, 'guy' and the expression 'he downs this in one', might have been considered too colloquial and they might have been changed for more formal vocabulary. Depending on the context of the written joke, the taboo language 'piss off!' might also have been considered too challenging for a formal written text, and have been changed for a less taboo phrase.

Any dialect used will have disappeared. The words, 'three men sat in a pub', which open the joke, show ellipsis. This is the compressed form of the regional dialect 'three men were sat in a pub'. In the written version, this would appear in the Standard English past continuous, 'three men were sitting in a pub'.

The **vague language** 'and all the rest of it' would probably have been made more precise in the written version. Throughout the joke 'this' and 'these' have been used – 'this old man', 'these three men'. The original incident took place in the past and the use of 'this' or 'these' brings the characters to life making them more immediate and 'present' rather than distant and past. The words almost imply both speaker and listener can see the men being described. Written language, though, aims for complete clarity and may have rejected 'this' and 'these' as being too imprecise.

In a similar way, the written text would probably have edited out the liveliness and directness of the tense change in the spoken version where the past tense 'sat', at the beginning, changes to the present tense that the rest of the joke is then told in.

The reason for telling a joke is to entertain the audience and the person telling the joke has used spoken language to put on a performance for the listening audience. At times, the speaker has acted out the roles played by the characters in the joke. For example, he has imitated the way he imagines the drunken man would speak, saying 'I'vehadyermam'. These aspects of performance and the prosodic features of intonation, speed, stress and volume are very difficult to capture in a written text.

Activity

- 1 Design a chart that illustrates the differences between written and spoken language.
- 2 Can you write a list of features found in spoken language? (A checklist of these appears at the end of this unit.)
- 3 Can you list the features of a narrative?

What is a narrative?

A basic story or narrative consists of the following:

- ⊙ a plot – something interesting takes place;
- ⊙ characters;
- ⊙ chronological structure – references made to time;
- ⊙ an opening;
- ⊙ an ending which provides some resolution;
- ⊙ a setting in time and place.

Activity

The joke obviously displays the basic characteristics of a narrative. Can you now suggest ways in which the speaker has attempted to make his story more alive and vivid for his listener?

Commentary

You might have included the descriptive detail the speaker provides. For example, we are given several details of the drunken man. We are told he was 'knocking drinks over' and 'standing on people's feet'. In the same way, we know the three men he speaks to were 'nudging each other'. Even the use of the verb 'staggers' instead of the more commonplace 'goes' enables the listener to see the character more clearly. Often, description such as this is used to make a story more vivid.

The characters are also given dialogue. The speaker has made an attempt to imitate the drunken man's slurred speech, shown in the transcription by the way in which his words are blurred together 'l'vehadyermam'. The dialogue is direct and realistic: 'piss off', 'look dad you're drunk'.

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The change of tense from past to present and use of 'this' and 'these' also bring the scene alive.

Jokes and chat show stories

The joke we've just looked at is quite stylised. It can be divided into three separate but repeated episodes which build to the final climax. The repetition of episodes allows the audience to share the joke more fully with the teller. As children enjoy the familiarity of a repeated episode in their bedtime stories, so in the same way a listener to this joke can 'predict' the story. The listener 'knows' what's coming next until he's finally surprised by the unexpected and, therefore, amusing end.

Activity

The following transcription is an extract from the TV programme *This Morning*, hosted by Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan. This magazine programme appears regularly on weekday mornings and is divided into several sections that deal with items such as fashion, cookery, advice giving and interviews with TV personalities. In this transcription, the hosts are talking to their expert psychologist Raj Persaud. They have been discussing how parents should deal with children asking questions. Raj has already said that parents should praise children for asking questions even if they don't know the answer to them. Read through the transcription and consider the following questions.

- 1 How does Richard signpost to his listeners that he is about to tell a story?
- 2 What function does the word 'right' play in the telling of this story?
- 3 How does Richard want us to evaluate the story?
- 4 Why does Richard tell the story?

Text: *This Morning*

RAJ: and another good answer is I don't know the answer and let's go and find out together

RICHARD: I'll tell you one thing when we moved to London and we'd been here for about a month and we were just driving around looking at the sights and we were driving past Buckingham Palace right and Chloe's in the back of the car right this is so funny um and she said there it is there's Buckingham Palace woah woah oh we should open the window oh and the Queen lives there oh look the flag's up the Queen's in there now and she said is that the Queen's house then? and we said yeah she said ooh fancy building a palace next to the main road

RAJ, R & J: (*laughter*)

JUDY: on the main road (*laughs*) which is logical

RICHARD: which is very observant absolutely why did they do that she said and actually I couldn't think because the road was probably there when they built it although there wouldn't have been cars on it

RAJ: I hope you praised her for making a good point

RICHARD: well we fell apart

Commentary

Richard starts his story with the words 'I'll tell you one thing', a sign that he's going to interrupt the discussion and take a longer turn than usual to tell a story. He starts by giving the background information to the story – the who, what, where and when. The characters are Richard and Judy and their daughter Chloe. The story is set in London near Buckingham Palace after the family has moved there. They're in the car because they're driving round to look at the sights.

The background information is separated from the rest of the story by the two uses of the word 'right'. The main bulk of the story is told in rapid dramatic dialogue, building up to the climax which is Chloe's unanswerable question.

Just before the dialogue, Richard prefaces the story with the words, 'this is so funny', which tells the listeners how he wants them to interpret it. As they all laugh at the end, it is obvious they share and support his evaluation. Richard then explains that he couldn't answer the question that Chloe asked and Raj picks this up, relating back to the previous discussion on children's questions by saying 'I hope you praised her for making a good point'.

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Richard has a clear reason for telling his story. Just before Richard started to tell the story, Raj had been making the general point that if parents are faced with a question to which they don't know the answer, they should admit this and investigate the answer together. Obviously, this has triggered Richard into remembering a specific story that illustrates how he felt as a parent when faced with a question he couldn't answer. Stories often provide a specific example to illustrate a general point, as a way to make the general point more personalised and understandable.

Judy and Raj have instinctively understood this and have collaborated with Richard at the end to show the relevance of the story – Judy with her appreciation of Chloe's question as 'logical' and Raj by pulling the conversation back to its original topic – parents dealing with children's questions. The story has therefore provided a light-hearted way to learn and reinforce ideas on this topic.

Labov's narrative framework

Richard's story can also be analysed by using Labov's theory of narrative structure (Labov, 1972). According to Labov, in an essay entitled 'The transformation of experience in narrative syntax', narrative is natural to both written and spoken language and its structure can be divided into the following:

- ⊙ abstract (signals that a story is about to begin; is a brief explanation of what the story is about);
- ⊙ orientation (context in which the story takes place, the who, what, where and when of the story);
- ⊙ action (the 'what happened' element of the story);
- ⊙ resolution (what finally happened);
- ⊙ coda (signals end of story and can link back to the present situation);
- ⊙ evaluation (comments, gestures running throughout the story to show how this is interesting).

All these elements are not always present, but this is a useful framework for evaluating oral stories. The elements usually occur in the order given, but evaluation can occur at any point.

Activity

Analyse Richard's story to see how it corresponds to Labov's framework.

Characters

We spend much time in our conversation talking about the people or characters in our lives. To illustrate their general characteristics, we tend to tell stories about what they do; the specific episodes we tell allow us to define the general nature of their personalities.

Activity

In the following transcription, two friends, both male and in their early forties, are sitting at the table after finishing their evening meal and discussing their relatives. Read through the transcription and consider the following questions:

- 1 What stories does John tell about his aunt? How do these stories illustrate her personality?
- 2 What phrases can you find in this discussion which show the speakers' evaluation of their aunts?
- 3 How do the two men support each other's storytelling in this conversation?
- 4 How does John attempt to bring his story alive?

Text: My aunts

JOHN: you should see m..my aunts
were um (.) they lived just round
the corner from us I had (.) uh
three aunts I've still got (.) three
aunts they're all still alive now all
the uncles

STEVE: yeah yeah

JOHN: have all died and just three
have stayed they had the most
wonderful sort of existence

because they lived in a complete
fantasy world one

STEVE: yeah

JOHN: of my aunts was certain that
she was being followed home
constantly

STEVE: (laughter)

JOHN: you know someone was
always following her down the
street

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STEVE: oh yeah

JOHN: she'd have

STEVE: yeah

JOHN: to run down the street to get in the house quickly you know it's a pure fantasy (.) all of well two of them well (.) one of them the one that's the real fantasy one had never got married um, er, she

STEVE: yeah yeah

JOHN: lived with my two uncles three of them that didn't get married all lived together (.) and they just um (.) they all had (.) one of my uncles was a bit mentally ill and was not um (.) he's was just very very withdrawn and shy in front of strangers he was

STEVE: oh yeah

JOHN: fine with family you know um but um (.) they used to sort of um (.) feed up his fear all the time of strangers by

STEVE: yeah

JOHN: the way she used to talk you know and oh all three of them they'd be looking out of the window if they saw anyone standing outside a house they were sure they were

STEVE: yeah yeah

JOHN: sure that they were waiting outside for them

STEVE: yeah yeah it's a funny thing I can remember my aunty Vi I can't really remember any of her husbands actually

JOHN: they weren't really around long were they?

STEVE: well I (*laugh*) that's part of it but I think it was (.) I mean I think I can vaguely remember the last one who um (.) he was kind of like um (3) much more quieter I think (.) she er er she was so kind of big character herself

JOHN: yeah

STEVE: actually I think she probably kind of swamped (2) ur ur them in terms of character and things like that (2) so so ah yeah it's kind of like

JOHN: yeah yeah I mean I'll tell you how mad this aunt was

STEVE: yeah

JOHN: when we used to go round at Christmas for um (.) um we always used to go round Christmas Day afternoon and Boxing Day afternoon and we always used to have like a big family tea and ah (.) we'd all sit round in this one room it wasn't very big so it was a bit of a crush crush to all get round (.) and she would never stay in the room because she was always certain me and my brother were going to choke to death on the food she couldn't bear to watch us eat because she thought we were going to choke and

STEVE: yeah

JOHN: you know we'd eaten three meals a day all our lives and she couldn't watch us eat

STEVE: yeah (.) that is odd actually

A spoken story has the following features: characters, action, a resolution at the end, setting in time and place. The story can be brought alive by: dialogue, changes in tense, descriptive detail, exaggeration, suspense, details of character's feelings.

Throughout the story, evaluation can explain how the speakers feel the story should be interpreted. The story can be linked back to the previous conversation in some way and provide a specific example of a general idea.

Extension

- 1 For a ready supply of spoken stories, look no further than daytime TV. The chat shows of Kilroy, Trisha, Jerry Springer, Oprah Winfrey and many others are dependent on people being prepared to come to a studio and tell their personal stories on air. Record and transcribe one of these stories and then analyse it using Labov's framework as a guide. Ask yourself how the speakers bring their stories alive and what relevance is made of them.
- 2 The following two stories come from a 10-year-old girl. Given the title 'The Fairy', she was asked first to tell her story on tape. She was then asked to produce a written version. Compare and contrast the two different stories and explore the ways in which they are effective.

Text: The Fairy

Version A

the fairy (1) there was once a girl (.) called Suzie (.) she was wa . . . she was going to play out in the garden (.) she walked to the bottom of the garden (1) boo (1) who's that (.) wondered uh wondered Suzie (.) and turned round quickly (.) it's me (.) down 'ere (.) Suzie looked down at the floor (.) and saw a little fairy (.) you are Suzie (1) Barber (.) well um (1) yes (.) I suppose I am (.) good well I've come to collect your tooth (1) but you're not supposed to collect my teeth (2) during the day (.) you have to come at night (.) well I'm not coming at night (.) well I'm not letting you have my tooth for then (.) Suzie was used to getting her own way (.) and wanted her own way now (1) you're not having my tooth (.) you're not not not (.) hum (1) said the

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fairy (.) very disappointed (.) you'll have to come at night said Suzie (.) the fairy (.) who was now in a very bad mood (.) said to her (.) I'll be around at night (.) and it won't be to collect your tooth (.) and with that she disappeared (2) that night Suzie was watching television (.) she didn't want to tell her mother (.) so (.) when her mother said (.) Suzie go to bed now (.) Suzie had to do it (.) she went to bed (.) she lay there (.) wondering what was going to happen (.) nothing happened (.) and she soon fell asleep (2) then (1) at about midnight (.) a fairy appeared (1) she (1) was just about to conjure a spell (.) when (.) this bluebell princess said stop (.) she stopped and turned (1) there she saw the queen (1) with the princess (.) they told her to stop (2) she said buta buta but (.) she couldn't say anything else (.) go back home (.) I will deal with you then (.) Suzie had just woken up (.) and for the second time this day (.) she just (.) she saw (.) the fairy disappear again (.) sleep (.) commanded the queen (.) and Suzie fell asleep (1) the end.

Version B

The original spelling and punctuation of the child have been retained.

One Summers day a girl named Sally was playing in her back garden. 'Hey you there' shouted a rude voice. 'I'm sorry to startel you but are you Miss Sally Barber?' 'Well yet I sopose I am, why?' 'Your sposed to come at night and Im not called Silly Sally.' Replied Sally. 'Well Im very sorry and I will come at night but it wont be for your tooth!' and with that the rude fairy vanshied. Sally was worried, what would the fairy do?

'Sally go to bed now!' shouted Sally's mum. 'Going' Replied Sally. Sally walked up the stairs and into her bedroom. She got into bed and thought about the fairy. ZZZ!!! Sally had fallen asleep. The fairy creaped into Sally's room 'STOP!!!' It was Snowdrop the fairy Queen. 'Take Sally's tooth leave some money and go I will speak to you later!' 'Iyea Iyea' said the rude fairy and vanished for the second time that day. 'OH' said Sally who had just woken up 'Sleep' said the Queen fairy and Sally obeyed.

When Sally woke up in the morning she looked under the pillow and found 50p. Sally was very pleased and poped it in her money box. Sally wondered if she would ever see a fairy again She hoped she wouldnt see a rude fairy again but she wouldnt mind seeing a nice fairy though I wounder if she ever did?