

TEACHERS' VOICES 6

Teaching casual conversation

editor: Helen de Silva Joyce



National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research

Teachers' voices 6:
Teaching casual
conversation

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Helen de Silva Joyce

National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
Macquarie University



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Teachers' voices 6: Teaching casual conversation

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Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
ASLPR	Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating
CALL	computer-assisted language learning
CSWE	Certificates I, II and III in Spoken and Written English
ELLS	English Language and Literacy Services
ESL	English as a Second Language
IOTY	<i>It's over to you</i> (distance learning course)
L1	first language
NCELTR	National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
NESB	non-English speaking background
NSW AMES	New South Wales Adult Migrant English Service
OHT	overhead transparency
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
VETAB	Vocational Education, Training and Accreditation Board

Introduction and acknowledgments

This volume of papers is the sixth in the series *Teachers' voices*. In 1999 ten teachers from South Australia and New South Wales took part in the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) Special Project – *Investigating the teaching of casual conversation*. Helen de Silva Joyce of the NSW Adult Migrant English Service (NSW AMES) coordinated the project and Dr Diana Slade of the University of Technology, Sydney was a consultant to the project.

The project was conducted through a series of workshops. Diana Slade conducted two workshops in each state: an introductory workshop into the structure and characteristics of casual conversation; and a second workshop exploring the dimensions of casual conversation in more depth and the implications of recent research for teaching.

Over a period of six months the teachers met to explore their questions about casual conversation and the focus of their research. The consultant and I attended some of these workshops. Nine papers in this volume are the result of the teachers' work.

An additional paper by Dr Penny McKay, Lynette Bowyer and Laura Commins has been edited from a longer report for another NCELTR Special Project – *Towards informal work talk: Investigating the teaching of casual conversation in workplace English*. This was a parallel project on the teaching of casual conversation that a team from Queensland University of Technology conducted in 1999 in conjunction with personnel from the Southbank Institute of TAFE in Brisbane.

Over recent years I have had the privilege to be part of a number of NCELTR action research projects. In each one I have worked with dedicated teachers who are interested in exploring the dimensions of their own work. I am always impressed with their honesty and their ability to look at their teaching objectively. In an era of rapid change in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) I am also impressed with the teachers' continued commitment to their students and to improving their practice.

This NCELTR action research project and the project conducted through QUT show that teachers are concerned to remain abreast with recent research into spoken language and to modify their classroom practice to take account of new knowledge and new technologies. The teaching of casual conversation is an area of increasing interest and it is through papers such as the ones in this volume that we can see how teachers are dealing with this complex area of language teaching.

As coordinator of the project and editor of this volume I would like to thank Diana Slade for sharing her knowledge and research. I would also like to acknowledge the teachers who participated in the project, and Peter Banks and Stephanie Claire who brought the groups together in the two states. Thanks also go to Penny McKay and the QUT team for making their paper available for this volume. My thanks also go to Pam McPherson and Geoff Brindley at NCELTR for supporting the project and to the AMEP section of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs for the funding that made the project possible.

Helen de Silva Joyce

*The nature of :
casual conversation :
Implications for teaching :*

The nature of casual conversation: Implications for teaching

Helen de Silva Joyce and Diana Slade

...we are clear about one thing: no progress will be made towards an improved ESL pedagogy without a clear understanding of the realities of English conversation.

(Crystal and Davy 1975:4)

Until recently, most research into language focused on written texts or on examples of what were considered to be well-formed instances of language. However, in the past decade, the interest in casual conversation as the primary form of language use has increased dramatically. This interest in the study of conversation is leading to new approaches in the classroom and to the development of innovative teaching materials.

For the improved ESL (English as a second language) pedagogy called for by Crystal and Davy, it is necessary to investigate in some detail the nature of casual conversation and the areas of casual conversation which cause learners difficulties. It is also necessary for teachers to experiment with different methodologies for teaching casual conversation and to contribute to the development of pedagogic approaches, as the teachers in this volume have done.

The types and structure of spoken interactions

Spoken interactions can be broadly categorised as interpersonally motivated or pragmatically motivated. In many social contexts we produce texts which are a mixture of both, as McKay, Bowyer and Commins point out in their paper in this volume. For teaching purposes it is helpful to work with a typology such as the following one developed by Eggins (1990) in which she labels interpersonally motivated interactions 'conversation' and pragmatically motivated interactions 'encounters', and sets out a number of subcategories.

Category	Subcategory	Subclassification
Conversation	1 Casual Conversations where the participants have equal power in the interaction.	1a Polite Interactions where little previous and/or future contact is likely and therefore affective feelings between the participants will not be well developed. 1b Confirming Interactions where the participants are in close or continual contact and therefore have developed affective attitudes or feelings towards each other.
	2 Formal Conversations where there is unequal power between the participants in the interaction.	
Encounters	1 Factual Interactions which are predominantly oriented towards giving or seeking information.	
	2 Transactional Interactions which involve obtaining or supplying goods and services.	

(Eggins 1990, adapted from Burns, Joyce and Gollin 1996:12)

Language programs generally include pragmatic interactions because their more predictable structures and formulaic language make them easier to teach. Teachers are able to show students the generic structure of such discourse with its easily recognisable ways of beginning, progressing and ending.

On the other hand, teachers often consider that casual conversation is too unstructured to teach in ESL classrooms. However, more recently, studies have demonstrated that casual conversation does have a consistent and describable structure (Eggins and Slade 1997). Slade (1997, and in Eggins and Slade 1997) argues that casual conversation consists of different types of talk which she has labelled the 'chunks' and the 'chat'. The chunks are those types of talk that have an identifiable generic structure. The chat sections are those parts of casual conversation which do not display such text structure and require an analysis that can describe the move by move unfolding of talk. To analyse casual conversation we need to be able to describe both the chunks and the chat. Talk in casual conversation flows in and out of these highly interactive chat segments to the more monologically structured chunk segments of talk.

Chat segments are defined as highly interactive segments of talk which often involve multiple speakers who manage the interaction turn by turn. In these chat segments speakers compete for turns and establish topics, as in the following extract where three friends establish the topic of banks.

Valerie: *What I don't understand is that yearly the banks declare a massive profit.*

Terry: *Billions.*

Darrell: *I know, [billions.*

Valerie: *[Billions, that's right and our charges keep going up.*

Darrell: *Yes I know so that the shareholders can get more profit. [That's why.*

Terry: *[But I mean there was a time when the banks had a human face. [They were like you know...*

Valerie: *[Well there used to be a time when you could go in and use a teller. They're discouraging that. You've got to use this bloody [machine.*

Terry: *[But I mean for all the money these days we get nothing back [at all.*

Gillian: *[Well... now they are starting to do some stuff, oh I mean some of the banks are starting to have open days now cause they've finally worked out that a lot of old people aren't using the ATMs...*

Valerie: *[And me.*

Gillian: *[...cause they're frightened of them, and you, and so, you know, they're having like classes for them to help them learn how [to use them.*

Darrell: *[Well... that's the point, that's exactly what they should be doing. They should be doing much more of that.*

(de Silva Joyce and Hilton 1999:85) [= overlap

People who participate as competent interactants in casual encounters know when they can claim a turn and when to relinquish a turn. When a participant wants to claim the floor he or she needs to indicate this with the appropriate linguistic signals and, once the other participants give consent, the speaker then proceeds to develop a chunk segment. In other words, the participants in casual conversation weave in and out of telling stories, gossiping, exchanging opinions, telling a joke and so on.

Slade (1997) used the concept of genre to define and describe the different kinds of chunks used in casual conversation in English. Genre is 'a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity' (Fairclough 1995:14). It is an institutionalised language activity which has evolved over time to have a particular text structure.

Slade (in Eggins and Slade 1997) outlines the different genres which occurred in 27 hours of workplace casual conversations she collected and analysed. The different genres were:

- narrative;
- anecdote;
- recount;
- exemplum (a story that illustrates the validity of shared social values);
- observation/comment;
- opinion;
- gossip;
- joke-telling.

Narratives, recounts, anecdotes and exemplums are four different kinds of storytelling texts. These genres each have identifiable generic structures. The following recount about banks illustrates these generic structures.

Abstract	Gillian: <i>Thank you. God, do I need this! Bloody banks! It's unbelievable you know.</i>
Orientation	<i>I've got three ATMs at my bank. Right. I have never seen all three of them working at the same time. I'm down there today, there's one working out of three.</i>
Record of events	<p><i>So I waited in the queue. That was alright. Put my card in, keyed in my PIN, the shutters came down and ate my card.</i></p> <p>Valerie: <i>Oh no.</i></p> <p>Terry: <i>Oh no.</i></p> <p>Gillian: <i>So I had to go inside the bank where the queues are practically to the door and every other person there is a businessman with [you know the thousand cheques.</i></p> <p>Terry: <i>[Oh right.</i></p> <p>Valerie: <i>Oh those big black books.</i></p> <p>Terry: <i>Yeah yeah.</i></p> <p>Gillian: <i>The big black books that all take. . .</i></p> <p>Darrell: <i>There's always one [just in front of you.</i></p> <p>Gillian: <i>[I know. Just trying to stay calm and then finally there's just me and the little old lady in front of me and I thought well she won't take long then she walks up to the teller and picked up this huge shopping bag full of five cent pieces [and I knew she was going to be there another hour.</i></p> <p>Terry: <i>[Oh dear.</i></p> <p>Valerie: <i>[Oh no.</i></p> <p>[LAUGHTER]</p> <p>Gillian: <i>So I left. I just couldn't wait any [longer.</i></p>
Coda	<p>Terry: <i>[You didn't get your card back?</i></p> <p>Gillian: <i>I didn't get my card and I didn't get my money.</i></p> <p>Valerie: <i>It's alright darlin, I'll lend you a dollar.</i></p> <p>Gillian: <i>Oh great! Just don't make it in five cent pieces.</i></p> <p>[LAUGHTER]</p>

(de Silva Joyce and Hilton 1999:84) [= overlap

Having given consent for the speaker to take the floor, the listeners then support the speaker during the chunk segment. This is done through linguistic devices such as:

- expressing surprise or support, for example *Oh dear* and *Oh no*;
- supplying helpful information, for example *Oh those big black books*;
- asking questions, for example *You didn't get your card back?*.

At the end of the chunk segment the speaker usually indicates that the space is available for another speaker to take the floor as in the recount when Gillian says: *So I left. I just couldn't wait any longer*. However, before this particular story is finished one of the speakers asks a question which brings the conversation back to the present and the fact that Gillian does not have a card or money: *You didn't get your card back?*.

The concept of genre is currently being used to develop a description of the internal structuring of these longer turns at talk (Eggins and Slade 1997). The following table outlines the generic structure of obligatory and optional stages in conversational genres.

	Beginning	Middle	End
Story genres			
Narrative	(Abstract) ^ (Orientation)	^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^	(Coda)
Anecdote	(Abstract) ^ (Orientation)	^ Remarkable event ^ Reaction ^	(Coda)
Exemplum	(Abstract) ^ (Orientation)	^ Incident ^ Interpretation ^	(Coda)
Recount	(Abstract) ^ Orientation	^ Record of Events ^ (Reorientation) ^	(Coda)
Other genres			
Observation/ Comment	(Orientation)	Observation ^ Comment ^	(Coda) (Completion)
Opinion	Opinion	^ Reaction ^ (Evidence) ^	Resolution
Gossip	Third person focus	^ Substantiating behaviour ^ (Probe) / Pejorative Evaluation ^ (Defence) ^ (Response to Defence) ^ (Concession) ^	(Wrap up)

(Optional stages are in parentheses; the symbol ^ means 'followed by'.
Adapted from Eggins and Slade 1997:268)

Teaching structure

Native speakers are very familiar with the structure of spoken interactions and this makes it possible for them to talk to one another, to predict the kinds of things someone is likely to say and to successfully take their turns at talk. If this knowledge is integral to native speakers participating effectively in social interactions, then it needs to be an integral part of teaching spoken language to second language learners. This knowledge of text structure helps the second language learners to develop both their listening and speaking skills. Methodologies and materials for teaching conversation need to take into account the structure and characteristics of spoken language.

Despite the growing knowledge about the structure of informal conversational English, there are still problems with the materials designed to teach casual conversation. Many teaching resources still use scripted dialogues. These dialogues are problematic because:

- they are based on the grammar of written English and do not take into account the major features of spoken English;
- they become a means of illustrating language functions or grammatical structures.

Increased knowledge about the structure of spoken language has begun to influence teaching materials. Knowledge of spoken genres is informing teaching practice and making authentic discourse in the classroom more accessible.

A number of papers in this volume examine the issue of producing teaching materials which provide students with authentic and comprehensible dialogues. Nicholson and Butterworth (in this volume) developed model texts for students after analysing authentic discourse for linguistic features and then semiscriting dialogues. With this approach the teachers set the context and purpose of an interaction and then arrange for colleagues to roleplay the situation. The students do not use a scripted dialogue.

Genre analysis of spoken language is concerned with how we structure longer segments of talk in ways appropriate to social and cultural contexts, for example how we make stories interesting, entertaining or worth telling. Analysis of conversational genres means that syllabuses can incorporate these genres in order to develop listening and speaking skills. The teaching/learning cycle of the genre approach to teaching writing is beginning to provide a framework for explicitly exploring transactional talk and the chunks and chat segments of casual conversation. The following table outlines ways in which teachers can approach spoken genres through the phases of the teaching/learning cycle.

Building the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play the dialogues and discuss with the students who the participants are, what they are discussing, where they are talking and so on. • Discuss the purposes students fulfil in L1 (first language) conversation. • Discuss what topics are acceptable in L1 conversation and in English. • Discuss why people use transactional and spoken genres. • Contextualise spoken genres. • Build vocabulary and grammatical structures which the students will hear in the dialogues.
Modelling the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the stages of the genre. • Play the dialogue and ask the students to identify the stages as they listen. • Play each stage separately and ask the students to listen for specific information. • Use the transcript of the dialogue on an OHT and show the students where the stages occur. • Show the students how the speakers set up the genre. • Show the students how the speaker who holds the floor takes the turn to talk. • Discuss the idiomatic and cultural elements which occur in the dialogue. • Show the students how topics taken up in chunk segments are set up by all speakers in the chat segments.
Joint construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record a story, such as a recount or an anecdote, on an audiotape and then analyse it with the class. • Ask the students to work in pairs or in groups to tell a recount or an anecdote. • Prepare a cloze of the different stages of the conversation and ask the students to complete the dialogue. • Provide activities in which students practise micro aspects of conversation such as turn taking, turn giving and appropriate responses.
Independent construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up roleplays where students adopt different roles (the storyteller or the listener) in the development of a conversation.

(Adapted from Joyce and Slade 1997:15)

Teachers can integrate communicative activities into the phases of the cycle to encourage students to practise various aspects of casual talk in English. Methodology needs to incorporate activities where learners interact in contexts which are as realistic as possible.

The longer turns at talk are a major feature of casual conversation in English. Being able to produce short turns of talk, a feature of many scripted dialogues, does not lead to understanding these longer turns. Because of cultural and contextual differences, longer turns can be particularly difficult for ESL learners. For these reasons it is essential to include these in language programs.

It is far too time-consuming, if not impossible, to try to teach students to deal competently with every type of spoken text. Teachers need to generalise about the common elements of text types and to identify the stages through which a text moves in order to achieve its purpose. Identifying the stages is a very effective learning tool, especially with intermediate and advanced students. Nicholson, Butterworth and Banks (in this volume) also use this approach to teaching casual conversation with low level learners.

Teaching the micro features of casual conversation

The skills of conversation are based not only on knowledge of structure but also on an ability to use the micro aspects of discourse. It is the micro aspects, such as adjacency pairs (for example question/response, offer/acceptance), interactional strategies and formulaic expressions, which keep discourse flowing. Language learners can have difficulties in opening, closing and maintaining conversations because they cannot manage the micro elements of conversation. They have difficulties because they:

- do not recognise standard formulaic expressions;
- abruptly and inappropriately end conversation, for example *Oh, I must go to the to go classroom* (Banks in this volume);
- do not follow the discourse at the clause level and give inappropriate feedback, for example:

S1: *No she wasn't at home. She had security alarm but unfortunately he came from another side. The alarm didn't...*

S2: *Where she live? Where she live?*

S1: *Not this year it was last year.* (Joomjaroen in this volume)

- mistime turn taking and turn giving and can give the impression of being aggressive or reticent, for example:

S1: *I am talking about the...Sunday afternoon I picked up my children...and...*

S2: *Yes.*

S1: *We went to the park...to take off bored...and it was a beautiful day.*

S2: *Yes.* (Banks in this volume)

- fail to follow the shifts in topics as the talk progresses and cannot use conversational strategies to open a topic, to keep a topic going, to return to an earlier point, or to bring a topic to a close;
- cannot ask questions to encourage the participation of others in the discourse.

Such analysis of student problems can lead to more effective teaching approaches. This analysis can be done at a general level of likely errors in student language or teachers can record student performances and analyse these for individual difficulties (Banks,

Reade, Joomjaroen in this volume). This in turn can lead to modified teaching practices that provide students with insights into their own errors and that provide more guided practice.

Conclusion

Casual conversation is an aspect of language which has central importance in the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. Native speakers manage the complexities of casual discourse without too much difficulty. However, even native speakers differ in the ease with which they handle this aspect of communication and they also differ in the range of contexts in which they can successfully undertake casual talk. To be a shy person or a stranger in any group can mean that even making small talk can be an arduous task.

For learners of English, casual talk is one of the most difficult areas to learn and for teachers one of the most difficult to teach. Learners find it difficult to enter casual conversations, to maintain their involvement and to close their participation. Even higher level learners who have a good command of English grammar and vocabulary can find involvement in casual conversation highly problematic.

Cross-cultural casual communication can lead to misinterpretation and negative reactions on both sides of the interaction. Native speakers in such interactions are not likely to recognise that miscommunication is caused by systematic linguistic and cultural differences. Teachers and materials designers need to be aware of the characteristics of casual discourse and attempt to explore these from a cross-cultural perspective with learners.

Specifically constructed and simplified conversational texts are not appropriate for teaching casual conversation if they omit many of the language features of real spoken discourse. A more explicit approach to teaching casual conversation which presents models of casual conversation and enables students to explore the structure and features of casual talk needs to be fostered in the classroom if students are to be able to participate in social interactions.

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SECTION ONE

Casual conversation teaching materials for low level learners

1 *Casual conversation texts in Listening to Australia*

Anthony Butterworth

2 *Dealing with attitude in casual conversation for low level students*

Patti Nicholson

Introduction

Teaching casual conversation to beginner level students through authentic texts is problematic. Authentic texts require a set of complex language resources on the part of the listener and finding relevant examples is not easy.

(Patti Nicholson)

The two papers in this section examine the issue of developing materials to teach casual conversation skills to low level learners. For many years teachers believed that casual conversation was too fragmented and unsystematic to teach to learners at beginner levels. However, for ESL learners casual conversation is an important way into the second language environment. The ability to deal with the interpersonal elements in social exchanges can mean the difference between isolation and engagement.

Interpersonal encounters are not necessarily complex or limited to a particular social context. They form part of the everyday pragmatic encounters learners need to undertake in commercial and administrative contexts outside the classroom. The ability to participate in social and transactional encounters can make communication a more pleasant and less fraught experience for second language learners. Therefore, it is important that low level students have the opportunity to begin to see the significance of the interpersonal elements of language use.

What materials are appropriate to teach spoken language to low level learners is a vexed question. Using authentic texts presents difficulties but the question arises whether fully scripted dialogues assist learners to come to terms with the characteristics of spoken language.

The two writers in this section were working on low level listening materials at the time they joined the NCELTR project. They explain how they worked from recordings of authentic conversations to develop casual conversation materials for low levels learners.

Anthony Butterworth is an experienced NSW AMES teacher who has worked in various programs with low level and higher level learners. He has also written student resources. In his paper, Anthony discusses the reasons for using authentic dialogues as the basis for scripting texts for listening purposes. He discusses the need to avoid developing texts which focus on a particular grammar point or function. Anthony describes an approach which enables the material developer to retain many of the features of natural spoken discourse while still developing texts which are comprehensible to beginning students. He describes the movement from authentic to pedagogic texts and outlines his decisions about what to eliminate from the authentic dialogues, what to retain and what to modify.

Patti Nicholson is also a very experienced NSW AMES teacher. She has worked on various projects relating to indigenous studies within ESL curricula and has written teacher and student resources in this field. In her paper, Patti discusses how people express attitude in casual conversation and whether it is possible to develop listening texts for beginner learners which incorporate this aspect of casual conversation. She believes that it is possible to present low level learners with short examples of authentic texts. It is only through the presentation of such teaching materials, she believes, that students can become aware of the linguistic features which enable them to express their attitudes to everyday topics.

1 Casual conversation texts in Listening to Australia

Anthony Butterworth

Background

At the time of the NCELTR project I was part of a team developing the *Listening to Australia* series of books and tapes for NSW AMES. This resource was to comprise four books and accompanying tapes aimed at four learner levels: beginner, post-beginner, intermediate and advanced. The books were to incorporate the following range of spoken texts:

- transactional or pragmatic texts, such as service encounters or making enquiries;
- monologic texts, such as announcements in stores and weather reports;
- casual conversations.

For the past few years, there has been an emphasis on text authenticity in second language teaching. As the author of the listening resource for post-beginners, I had to decide how I would deal with authenticity in the listening texts.

For the beginner and post-beginner resources we decided to script the listening texts. This would allow greater control over the content, the topics, the length of the texts and the lexis. We also decided to record the texts using actors to ensure good sound quality. The authors of the two higher level resources decided to semiscript dialogues.

Although I was going to use scripted texts, I wanted to avoid the pitfalls of scripted dialogues. For example, I would not write the texts to illustrate a particular grammar point or function. However, I would script them to include as many features of natural spoken discourse as possible, while making sure they remained comprehensible to beginner and post-beginner students. As a result, I developed a method of collecting examples of spoken language. These examples would form the basis of the scripted dialogues.

This report discusses how I collected examples of spoken language and why I started with authentic examples. It also describes the move from authentic to pedagogic texts by examining what parts of conversations I eliminated, what I retained and what I modified. The spoken texts in this report may or may not appear in the final publication of *Listening to Australia*.

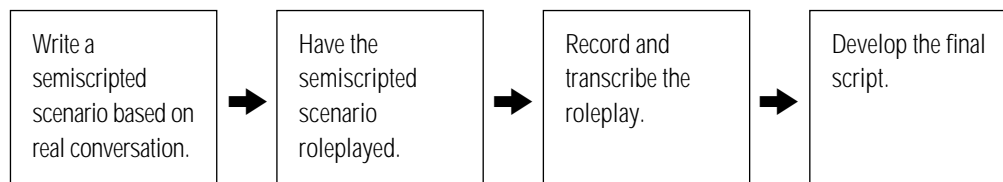
Collecting spoken language

It was not possible to spend time collecting spoken language at random and sifting through it, and I wanted to include certain themes and contexts. Consequently, in developing the casual conversations for the listening resource, I used two main approaches: semiscripting texts and giving a group of people a topic to talk about.

Semisc scripting texts

For contexts where it would be logistically impossible to collect authentic texts, I set up roleplays with colleagues using semisc scripted scenarios and then transcribed the roleplays. The transcriptions formed the basis of the final conversation scripts (see diagram below). I used this method to obtain several conversations between neighbours, for example. Most of these semisc scripted texts were very like real conversations I had had.

Developing semisc scripted texts



The following is an example of a semisc scripted scenario.

Asking a neighbour to feed the cat
Background: Anna and Terry are neighbours.
Sequence:

- 1 Terry sees Anna in the street outside his house and greets her.
- 2 Terry tells Anna that he and his family are going away for a week and asks her to feed the cat.
- 3 Anna replies that she is glad to do it as Terry has fed her cat on a previous occasion.
- 4 Anna asks where they are going.
- 5 Anna asks questions about what to do.
 - how often the cat eats;
 - what the cat eats;
 - how much the cat eats;
 - where the cat bowls are.
- 6 Anna asks when exactly Terry is going away.
- 7 Terry tells her and gives her the key to the side gate.

The scenario of asking a neighbour to feed the cat poses an interesting question. Is it a transactional text or casual conversation? While acknowledging its pragmatic nature I would classify it as casual conversation. Both participants have equal social roles – Terry is not paying for the service and Anna is not being paid to provide the service. Apart from the need to have the cat fed, the conversation is driven by the need to maintain a harmonious social relationship between neighbours.

Much conversation with neighbours has a pragmatic purpose, for example to find out what a delivery of bricks is for or to find out what the neighbours are doing about the termite nest in their shed. Here is another example of a semisc scripted scenario between neighbours.

Doing a bit of building?

Background: Terry is inspecting pavers he has just had delivered when his neighbour Peter walks past.

Sequence:

- 1 Peter greets Terry, comments on the pavers and asks Terry what he's building.
- 2 Terry tells him.
- 3 Peter comments that it's a lot of work.
- 4 Terry tells him that some young friends are helping with the digging and his wife is doing the paving.
- 5 Peter registers surprise.
- 6 Terry explains that she has recently done a course and likes to make things.
- 7 Peter comments that Terry is a lucky man.
- 8 Terry agrees and Peter departs.

Giving a group a topic

Other conversations were the result of giving two or more people a topic to talk about and recording their conversation. Because I was recording them, they were initially hesitant but once they relaxed the conversation became authentic or authentic-like.

In one conversation I related a funny travel story to a group of friends. Members of the group then followed with their own stories.

In another conversation I asked a colleague about her weekend away. The fact that I was planning to go away myself emerged in our conversation. My planned destination was of real interest to my colleague who was also considering going there. She then began to question me about the place and a natural text arose spontaneously from a more self-conscious text.

Why start with authentic texts?

Analysis of genuine samples of spoken English has served to show how very different this form of the language is, not only from the written code but also from idealised notions about what spoken language ought to sound like.

(Maley and Moulding 1981:101)

Maley and Moulding (1981) point to the differences between genuine spoken discourse and those spoken texts found in English language textbooks. Slade and Gardiner (1993) point out that many of these dialogues are constructed to illustrate a grammar point and lack many of the characteristics of authentic casual conversation.

The 1980s in general was a period when authenticity in texts became a key issue in English language teaching. Use of authentic written and spoken texts in the classroom was considered best practice. However, collecting authentic written texts was always easier than collecting authentic spoken texts. Maley and Moulding (1981) describe two major difficulties of collecting authentic spoken discourse:

- the problem of poor recording quality due to background noise;
- the banality of the content.

Their solution is to semiscript dialogues resulting in partially controlled content which displays most of the linguistic features of ordinary spoken English.

Some authors have used original recordings of authentic texts for listening material. In Australia, the most notable examples are *Coffee break* (Economou 1985) and *Teaching casual conversation* (Slade and Norris 1985). As well as original recordings, Slade and Norris also included re-enacted versions to produce a higher quality recording.

Most authors of course books, however, still choose not to use authentic texts. This is probably due to the difficulties and the time involved in obtaining authentic examples of spoken discourse. Others probably see dialogues as an opportunity to focus on particular structures or functions. In more recent years textbook writers have made their listening texts more like authentic discourse. And texts that are totally scripted now feature an increased use of feedback and continuity devices.

Analysis of spoken discourse has increased our understanding of the features of authentic spoken language and has driven changes in the teaching of spoken discourse. Such analysis has focused on transactional discourse and casual conversation. Eggins and Slade (1997) present the most comprehensive framework for analysing casual conversation and Cornish and Lukin (1998) provide a brief outline of the features of spoken discourse. Burns, Joyce and Gollin (1996) discuss the different language features of scripted, semiscripted and authentic spoken discourse.

This report does not attempt a comprehensive comparison of authentic and scripted spoken discourse. However, I think that the key linguistic features missing or undersupplied in scripted listening texts are:

- ellipsis;
- false starts;
- feedback moves that indicate the listener registers or acknowledges the speaker;
- interruptions with their associated appending moves where a speaker completes a move after being interrupted.

Slade (1986:79) describes the importance of feedback moves:

Feedback is a term referring to the ways in which listeners show they are following the conversation and speakers check on the attention of their listeners. Feedback shows agreement, disagreement, interest and attention and is essential for maintaining conversation. To some extent, the form and rate of feedback is culturally specific: inappropriate or apparently absent feedback can contribute to the breakdown of cross-cultural conversation.

Slade's comments about the rate of feedback are particularly apposite. In the project *Listening to Australia* we discovered that the rate of feedback in the dialogues we collected was much higher than in the dialogues found in many of the course books we had used.

What I cut from the authentic texts

A major problem of using authentic texts in the low level classroom is their length. Both pragmatic and casual conversation texts are too long to use in the classroom with post-beginners. Therefore I decided to abridge texts. First, however, I had to decide what I could cut from the spoken discourse while maintaining cohesion and most of the authentic features of spoken discourse.

Generally speaking, little was cut from the transcriptions of the semiscripted dialogues as the scripting prescribed the length and much of the content. For the discourse collected by giving participants a topic to talk about, cuts were much more significant. Less control of the discourse led to greater volumes of talk. I used the chunk segments of the talk (Eggins and Slade 1997), for example where people told anecdotes. The anecdotes I used were the ones that seemed most appealing.

Where the discourse was of a chat nature (Eggins and Slade 1997) I deleted some parts because they were private in nature or simply banal, and other parts because they were impossible to understand without being party to the long-term relationships of the participants. However, I retained references to persons, events and places outside the conversations and provided contextual information, if necessary.

Before deleting sections of authentic texts, it is necessary to know the boundaries of an 'exchange'. Eggins and Slade (1997:222) define an exchange as follows:

An exchange can be defined as a sequence of moves concerned with negotiating a proposition stated or implied in an initiating move.

That is, an exchange begins with an opening move and includes all the continuing moves until another opening move occurs. For some of the dialogues included in *Listening to Australia* I deleted exchanges to shorten the text. Thus the deletions correspond exactly with exchanges.

A conversation I recorded about a housefire was quite long with much elaboration. I deleted this elaboration to reduce the length of the text and make it manageable for post-beginner students. The following two examples from a casual conversation illustrate how more subtle deletions occurred.

Example 1

Authentic text

Tony: *Did you have guests that night?*

Kath: *No, we were just, we just decided we'd have a really nice dinner. You know, just the three of us because Mark was leaving home, I think, that weekend, and we sort of thought, you know, well, we'd just relax, and it's holidays, and, you know, we'd enjoy a glass of wine and have a decent dinner.*

Abridged text

Tony: *Did you have guests that night?*

Kath: *No, we were just, we just decided we'd have a really nice dinner.*

Example 2

Authentic text

Kath: *Up through the cupboard, and the extractor fan, which is above the stove. And black smoke everywhere. And my husband and son came rushing, sort of in at the backdoor, cause there's two doors into the kitchen. They came in at the back door and they just shouted at me, 'Shut the door and get out'.*

Abridged text

Kath: *Up through the cupboard above the stove. And black smoke everywhere. And my husband and son came rushing in and they just shouted at me. 'Shut the door and get out'.*

One of the main motivations for scripting and recording the texts was to control the pace of delivery. Experience had taught me that pace is a prime stumbling block with low level learners. I have experimented with recordings of identical texts recorded at different speeds and found that the slower ones are, unsurprisingly, comprehended much more readily. Authentic speech is generally rapid and semiscripted dialogues also tend towards the pace of natural speech. As a bridge for low level learners I have no hesitation in modifying the pace of spoken discourse.

Overlapping is also a common feature of casual conversation. I reduced the overlapping in the listening texts except readily comprehended overlaps such as laughter, *mm* or *yeah*. I avoided the overlapping of more extended information.

What I retained

I retained original grammar features such as tense and voice. This included features such as past perfect tense which is not usually taught to low level students. I also retained discourse features such as feedback, repetition, false starts and ellipsis.

Gathering the authentic texts proved to be quite illuminating. We all know that people frequently say *um* and *yeah* and *oh* in authentic discourse but if you believe that these features are unimportant then their inclusion may not matter. However, Eggins and Slade (1997) reveal that these textual adjuncts indeed have functions within discourse. They describe three kinds of adjuncts: conjunctive, continuity and holding adjuncts.

Conjunctive adjuncts

These link the current clause with prior talk by expressing a logical relationship.

For example:

A: *I can't go this weekend.*

B: *Oh no.*

A: *But the following weekend's OK.*

Continuity adjuncts

These signal a coherence with prior talk without expressing a particular logical relationship. There are some continuity adjuncts particular to spoken interactive contexts, such as *well*, *oh*, *mmm*, and these indicate a speaker's orientation to the interactive continuity of their contribution (Eggins and Slade 1997:84).

Holding adjuncts

These allow a speaker to retain a turn while organising thoughts. For example *Anyway, I'll just have to work something out.*

The underlined features in the following short extract illustrate the proliferation of these adjuncts.

Asking a favour of a neighbour

Terry: *Oh, we're just going up north, um, to visit my wife's family for a week.*

Anna: *Oh, where is that, exactly?*

Terry: *Oh, up near Byron Bay.*

Anna: *Oh, that'll be nice.*

Terry: *Yeah. Should be good.*

Anna: *All right. So, what does your cat eat?*

Terry: *Oh, well, she just eats tinned stuff, um, and bit of biscuit, too.*

Anna: *And how much will I give her?*

Terry: *Oh, about half, just give her half a can of tinned stuff every evening, and leave some biscuits in her bowl, too. She can eat that when she likes.*

Anna: *So, just once a day.*

Terry: *Yeah. Just one meal a day. In the evenings.*

Eggs and Slade (1997:208) tell us that repetition of a speaker's words, paralinguistic expressions such as *mm* and *uh huh*, and ritual exclamations such as *oh my goodness* are all ways of the listener showing he/she is paying attention to the speaker. *Yeah*, for example, can show that the listener agrees with the information the speaker has given, or it can indicate that the listener has knowledge of the information given.

I removed some false starts when they occurred in confusing proportions. I thought they might make the dialogue too difficult for low level students. However I kept others as in the text below:

Tim: ...*It turned out* – we got to a point after about fifteen or twenty minutes...

I also retained repetitions. These are a realistic feature of casual conversation and I felt that they did not add any cognitive load for learners.

Eggs and Slade (1997) describe how ellipsis is the norm in many types of moves in casual conversation. They describe how, like reference, it contributes to the coherence of a text. However, ellipsis can present particular problems to second language learners. The absence of explicit subjects, verbs or interrogatives can make conversation difficult to follow. I made a conscious decision to include the instances of ellipsis in the authentic texts and in some instances to teach it directly. This short extract illustrates ellipsis:

Asking a favour of a neighbour

Anna: *Okay. Where do you keep the bowls?*

Tim: *Oh, just around near the back door.*

Conclusion

Not only do people engaged in politics, pedagogy and parenting routinely resort to simplification, most people do so when, as part of ordinary living, they seek the right means to ease the traffic of ideas across borders.

(Tickoo 1993:v)

Writers of ESL teaching materials have addressed the issue of authenticity in various ways. Some have opted to use authentic materials only, but this has limited the range of materials to those situations where they can be easily collected. Others have semiscripted materials to expand the range of situations and to ensure improved recording quality. Others have completely scripted their conversations with a variety of intentions and a range of success at replicating authentic spoken discourse. The post-beginner level of *Listening to Australia* attempts a compromise which I hope will provide another bridge to authentic casual conversation for students.

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2 Dealing with attitude in casual conversation for low level students

Patti Nicholson

Background

When I joined the NCELTR project I was working on a unit as part of a NSW AMES project developing a listening resource book called *Listening to Australia*. The unit was for beginner level students and its theme was swimming. I had chosen this theme because:

- water safety and skin protection are important issues in Australian life;
- the love of sport, and especially swimming, goes deep into Australian culture. Swimming provides a focus for our social activities, family relationships and is often a part of childhood;
- famous Olympic swimmers such as Dawn Fraser, Murray Rose, Kieren Perkins, Ian Thorpe and Susie O'Neill are a source of national pride.

Providing migrants with the linguistic means of walking through this cultural door gives them a chance to appreciate and participate in our culture.

The unit on swimming covers a range of text types: monologic texts, such as an announcement about swimming between the flags; transactional texts, such as enquiring about swimming lessons; and casual conversations, such as talking about the beach and the pool.

Project focus

I particularly wanted to look at how we express our attitudes in casual conversation as an 'important device for constructing and signalling degrees of solidarity and intimacy in relationships' (Eggins and Slade 1997:116). I also wanted to see if it would be possible to develop listening texts for beginner learners which incorporated this aspect of casual conversation.

Teaching casual conversation to beginner level students through authentic texts is problematic. Authentic texts require a set of complex language resources on the part of the listener and finding relevant examples is not easy. However, I believe that the use of short authentic texts can help students develop an awareness of the linguistic features of casual conversation. Through guided practice students can come to recognise the linguistic features needed to express attitudes to simple everyday topics. In this way it is possible to help them build their understanding of the importance of the interpersonal aspects of communication.

For the NCELTR project I focused on the following part of a casual conversation that took place at my workplace between three colleagues who were discussing their attitudes towards the beach and the pool.

A: *So do you and your daughter go to the beach?*
B: *We don't go as much now, but yes we go to the beach.*
A: *I love it.*
B: *Yeah we go to the beach a lot but the pool's just down the road, so... whereas the beach is on the other side of town.*
A: *But the pool smells of chlorine I reckon.*
B: *Yeah no I don't, I don't like the pool but anyway Raffaella's going to start swimming lessons soon at the pool.*
A: *So Megan did your kids swim in the pool when they were little?*
C: *Oh yeah. But they were in nippers.*
A: *Is nippers a surf...?*
C: *Surf lifesaving for little ones, you can start when you're four and five.*
A: *Really?*
B: *Yeah I might get Raffaella into nippers.*

I decided to present this part of the conversation to beginner learners because:

- it would give the students some background knowledge about swimming in Australia;
- it was an appropriate length;
- it developed a chat segment of conversation (Eggin and Slade 1997) before a topic change.

For the listening material, *Listening to Australia*, the conversation segment would be recorded using actors. A professional recording would ensure good sound quality, making it possible for beginner level students to follow the interaction.

By the time I presented the conversation segment, the students had learnt about how swimming and surfing fit into Australian culture through working with a range of text types and picture-based activities. I had also used various extension activities to increase their awareness of the interpersonal aspects of communication. The students were then well prepared to listen to the short segment.

Sequence of activities

My main aim for this particular conversation was to examine how the speakers express their attitudes. I developed the following activity sequence to build student awareness about this aspect of interpersonal communication.

Activity 1: Understanding how the speakers feel about the topic and each other
Listen to the conversation and answer the questions.

How many people are talking? 1 2 3

What do they like? the beach the pool

Do they agree with each other? Yes No

Activity 2: Focusing on vocabulary

Read the words below. Listen to the tape again and number the words in the order you hear them. The first one is done for you.

- your daughter
- the beach
- swimming lessons
- smells of chlorine
- love it
- the pool

Activity 3: Matching expressions of attitude to a topic

The words on the left show how the speakers feel. The words on the right show what they are talking about. Listen to the conversation again and match the attitudes with the topics.

Attitude	Topic
I love it	the pool the beach
smells	the pool the beach
I don't like	the pool the beach

Activity 4: Listening for agreement between the speakers

Listen to how the speakers agree. Complete what the speakers say to each other.

- A: I love it.
- B: Yeah we go to the _____ a lot.
- A: But the pool _____ of chlorine I reckon.
- B: Yeah I don't _____ the pool.

Activity 5: Listening for prepositions

Listen to the conversation again and complete what the speakers say.

- The pool's just _____ the road.
- The beach is _____ the other side of town.
- We go _____ the beach a lot.
- Raffaella's going to start swimming lessons soon _____ the pool .
- So Megan did your kids swim _____ the pool when they were little?
- Surf lifesaving _____ little ones.

Activity 6: Practising the pronunciation of expressions

Listen to how we join these words when we speak. Now you say them.

swim in the pool = swimin the pool

love it = lovit

don't go as much = don't gowas much

Listen to the stressed words. Now you say them.

We **don't** go as much **now**.

Yeah, we go to the **beach** a **lot**.

I **love** it.

I **don't** like the **pool**.

The sequence of activities concluded with the following activity designed to help students take part in a short casual conversation in class. The focus was on topics they might need to discuss at their children's school or in a social context.

Activity 7: Taking part in a casual conversation

Which do you prefer, the beach or the pool?

At what age should children learn to swim?

What do you need to be careful of at the beach?

Conclusion

I am currently trialling the teaching sequence outlined above with a range of students at beginner level before incorporating it into the listening resource, *Listening to Australia*. It will be interesting to see if low level students can begin to understand how we use casual conversation to develop interpersonal relationships and to convey our attitudes and feelings.

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SECTION TWO

Taking a close look at student performances

1 *Measuring student performance in casual conversation*

Peter Banks

2 *Lost opportunities*

Helene Reade

Introduction

The conversation seems full of lost opportunities to get the information which the students seem to want at the beginning because a long time is spent teasing out meaningless detail.

(Helene Reade)

It is easy to view the spoken language performances of ESL learners negatively. Errors in accuracy seem to dominate and their lack of fluency impedes an objective assessment. That is why it is always interesting to capture the spoken language performances of students through audiotape or videotape. Transcribing these performances can be very time consuming but it is always worthwhile because it provides an opportunity to focus on language which is usually ephemeral. It gives insights into the specific features of language that impede students' ability to communicate effectively but it also makes clear the skills students are able to apply successfully. Transcriptions make it possible to focus on specific aspects of students' spoken language, such as their ability to ask questions, give feedback or listen and respond appropriately.

Recording is a necessary step in assessing student achievement in spoken language. However, transcripts can also provide evidence of how well students will be able to communicate outside the classroom or how well they have learnt what has been taught. Analysing student performances in detail can provide insights into teaching and how to modify it so that students can participate more effectively in spoken interactions.

Depending on their level, students find reviewing their own performances intriguing, particularly if they focus on specific aspects of language use. They enjoy being able to identify their errors and to discuss them.

Peter Banks teaches in English Language and Literacy Services (ELLS) in Adelaide and has pursued his research interest in casual conversation through two NCELTR projects. In this paper he is concerned with issues of assessing casual conversation. He proposes that the structure of casual conversation means that teachers can systematically teach and assess it. He believes that student performances can be measured in a way that is meaningful to both students and teachers. Peter recorded, transcribed and analysed four conversations where students told personal stories. He analysed their structure and a range of language features. He concludes that recent research into casual conversation should lead to richer descriptions of casual conversation which can inform assessment criteria.

Helene Reade also teaches in ELLS. Her keen interest to explore the dimensions of her own teaching has led to her participation in a number of NCELTR projects. Her interest in this particular project grew from an unease about how she was intervening in the development of casual conversation skills. She found that her students had difficulties in asking questions to keep a conversation going. They found it difficult to frame questions and felt that people might think they were not interested or rude. Consequently, in her research she examines the role of questions in casual conversation. Helene transcribed two conversations with the same group of four students. One conversation was recorded when she was a participant and the other when she was absent. She was aware of the dominant role of the teacher in conversations but she wanted to investigate, through a close analysis of the transcripts, exactly what effect this role had on what students could say.

1 *Measuring student performance in casual conversation*

Peter Banks

Background

Many ESL teachers feel that casual conversation is too spontaneous to teach in the classroom. They feel that the most a teacher can do is to teach discrete language functions, structures and gambits, and to correct obvious errors. It is assumed that over time, with plenty of practice, the students will acquire the ability to have a conversation.

I have taught conversation skills to students from ASLPR 1– to 2 for the past six years and over this time I have come to a different conclusion. I believe that casual conversation does indeed have a structure and that teachers can both systematically teach and assess it.

In a previous NCELTR action research project in 1998 I explored ways of improving students' conversation abilities within a competency-based curriculum. I have followed up this research with the action research described in this paper. It is an attempt to show that student casual conversation performances can be measured to the satisfaction of both the students and the teacher. For my research I recorded, transcribed and analysed four student performances.

The class

When the NCELTR project began I was sharing a class of twenty medium-paced students with another teacher. The students' spoken language levels ranged from ASLPR 1 to ASLPR 1+, and they were from various language backgrounds: Bosnian, Albanian, Serbian, Chinese, Hungarian, Russian, Vietnamese and Polish. I was teaching speaking and listening skills while my co-teacher was teaching reading and writing skills.

I was tentative for the first three weeks of the course because I had a number of students from the former Yugoslavia. I was concerned about pair and group activities where the students would have to change partners frequently. However, this proved not to be a problem as this was not their first class and they had come to terms with classes of mixed nationalities.

Course content

During the course I taught and consolidated:

- present and past tenses, simple and continuous;
- question forms – yes/no, information, tag and intonation-based;
- the use of polite language forms, such as modals;
- the generic structure of casual conversation;
- gambits – clarification and feedback;
- language skills for talking about shared experience;
- beginning a conversation;

- telling a recount or an anecdote;
- continuing a conversation.

The students also had weekly one-hour structured and unstructured conversation activities with volunteer tutors. These provided vital opportunities for the students, especially the quieter ones, to talk about what was important to them and to ask about vocabulary. These conversations encouraged them to mix with and to get to know each other and improved communication in the classroom. The students became more relaxed and confident and could practise the conversation skills they had learnt in class.

Methodology

At the beginning of the term I gave the students the following worksheet which describes the generic structure of a simple casual conversation.

Conversation skills
Objective: To describe the language skills needed to have a simple conversation with an acquaintance.

Start

- Greetings.
- Talk about a shared experience or situation, for example the weather, something around you, asking for information, asking a small favour.

↓

Continue

- Ask each other questions.
- Ask for and give each other clarification.
- Give each other feedback.
- Tell a story.

↓

Finish

- Say you have to go.
- Give a reason why.
- Say when you will meet again.
- Say goodbye.

I told the students that this worksheet was like a road map from Adelaide to Melbourne. We would work through the stages and by Week 7 of the course we would reach our destination. I explained that they would talk in front of the class and listen to themselves on tape, and so show that they could have a successful casual conversation.

The main difficulties for the students lay in beginning a conversation and talking about a shared experience. They tended to become too personal too quickly and needed to learn to talk more generally. They also had difficulties with continuing a conversation as they spent most of the time on clarification.

I then began to teach storytelling. Initially the students were hesitant and said that they had nothing to tell as nothing special happened to them. However, when I asked them to talk about positive, embarrassing or negative experiences they all had a lot to say.

In the first seven weeks of the course the students undertook many spoken activities in pairs and groups. They performed some of these in front of the class and we also taped some and then played them back for assessment. The students became accustomed to the microphone and to the sound of their own voices, and to analysing their errors in a positive environment.

Assessing conversation skills

I came to the conclusion that any teacher looking for a description of casual conversation and a way to measure student performances is not adequately informed by the performance criteria and range statements as described in Competency 8 of the CSWE II (*Certificate II in Spoken and Written English*). Competency 8 is described below.

Competency 8: Can participate in a short casual conversation.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Range statements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least one minute in length; • face-to-face; • topic should be culturally appropriate; • telephone for Distance Learning students; • dialogue with two speakers; • sympathetic interlocutor; • may include a few grammatical or pronunciation errors but errors should not interfere with meaning. |
| Performance criteria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses appropriate expressions for greeting and closing; • uses interaction strategies as required, for example opening, closing, clarifying, seeking feedback, giving feedback; • uses appropriate vocabulary; • uses grammatical structures appropriately to ask and answer questions. |

I developed a range of worksheets and assessments grids which I gave to the class. These contained a combination of features which expanded on the performance criteria and range statements outlined in Competency 8. Features included generic staging, functions, structures and grammar.

In Weeks 8 and 9 of the course I gave the students the following assessment sheet. While students performed a conversation in front of the class, their peers assessed them.

<p>Conversation skills Objective: For you to practise the language you need to have a short conversation with an acquaintance. Instructions: Listen to each conversation. Did the two speakers:</p>		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greet each other? • talk about the weather? • talk about something round them? • ask for information? • ask for a small favour? 								
Continue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask questions? • give feedback? • seek clarification? • tell a story? 								
Finish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • say they had to go? • give a reason why? • say when they would meet again? • say goodbye? 								
<p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conversation should be more than one minute long. • Each speaker should not be difficult to understand but they can make a few pronunciation and grammatical errors. 									

Student performances

The transcripts of four conversations in which students tell recounts and anecdotes are below. I have provided some comments on each performance.

Conversation 1

The following conversation occurred in front of the class between a woman from the former Yugoslavia (S1) and a Chinese woman (S2).

- 1 S1 *How you?*
- 2 S2 *I'm fine. How are you?*
- 3 S1 *Well, well. And you? Today is hot day.*
- 4 S2 *Yes, it's very hot like summer and it's windy today.*
- 5 S1 *Okay. You like hot day?*
- 6 S2 *Oh sorry. I don't...*
- 7 S1 *You like hot day?*
- 8 S2 UNINTELLIGIBLE
- 9 S1 *Oh yeah, oh yeah, I know. I know. Er... what did you do on the weekend?*
- 10 S2 *Er... so so. Em... on the Saturday Sunday, Saturday... on... the weather was very sunshine. I with my mother and my brother... children went to the Chinatown restaurant... eat Chinese food, Chinese food. Very yummy.*
- 11 S1 *Oh very... oh that's good.*
- 12 S2 LAUGHS *and eat... eat erm... spring roll... er... Chinese steam... steam egg... and steam cake and noodle.*
- 13 S1 *Oh.*
- 14 S2 *Yeah. Very yummy.*
- 15 S1 *Yeah, I'm sure.*
- 16 S2 LAUGHS *Then we... we were going to Central Market... buy food... for dinner.*
- 17 S1 *Oh.*
- 18 S2 *Er... after we went go home. After then... we... take the bread... went to the... with my brother... children... went going to the... riverside... looked at the ducks.*
- 19 S1 *Watching.*
- 20 S2 *Ducks.*
- 21 S1 *Uhum.*
- 22 S2 *Umm... when I the er... bread on the floor... some ducks were... flying... some ducks were... running eat... eat ate the bread.*
- 23 S1 *Yeah?*
- 24 S2 *It very interesting.*
- 25 S1 *Oh yeah.*
- 26 S2 *Oh LAUGHS*
- 27 S1 *It's great.*
- 28 S2 *And you?*
- 29 S1 *Oh, I had a quite interesting weekend. On Saturday I was very busy all day. In the morning I woke up earlier than usually on Saturday because I had a driver's lesson in the morning at 9 o'clock. After that I went shopping and in the afternoon I coming all the house kitchen, everything because on Monday came my agent visit house and in the evening I was very tired and er... I just relax in front of the TV... and watch movie. And on Sunday... on Sunday it's my day.*
- 30 S2 *Yeah.*
- 31 S1 *Yeah. I enjoyed it. I had a great time.*
- 32 S2 *Mm.*

33	S1	<i>I went to the soccer with my husband. He played soccer and I like watch him.</i>
34	S2	<i>Mm.</i>
35	S1	<i>I enjoyed.</i>
36	S2	<i>Yeah.</i>
37	S1	<i>All the time with my friends and my kids played with another children. I had a really good...</i>
38	S2	<i>Altogether.</i>
39	S1	<i>Yes yes yes.</i>
40	S1	<i>Very happy.</i>
41	S2	<i>After that we went to the dinner in house my brother-in-law.</i>
42	S1	<i>Yeah.</i>
43	S2	<i>And I had really good time on Sunday.</i>
44	S1	LAUGHS <i>Very happy.</i>
45	S2	<i>Yeah.</i>
46	S1	<i>Oh, I must go to the to go classroom.</i>
47	S2	<i>Oh really.</i>
48	S1	<i>Yeah. Next time see you?</i>
49	S2	<i>See you. Bye</i>
50	S1	<i>Bye.</i>
51	S2	<i>Bye Sandy.</i>
52	S1	<i>Bye bye.</i>

Conversation 1 is an interpersonally motivated conversation and is casual and confirming of the relationship. The generic structure of the conversation is outlined below.

Start	Greetings	Turns 1–3
	Shared experience	Turns 3–8
Continuing	Storytelling	
	• recount S2	Turns 10–27
	• recount S1	Turns 29–37
Finish		Turns 46–52

It is a face-to-face conversation between two students who sit next to each other. They have good feelings towards each other although they probably would not talk to each other outside the teaching centre. They have come to know each other over a ten-week course through classroom activities, extended conversations in coffee breaks and structured and informal conversations with volunteer tutors.

The conversation is obviously a conversation between two learners of English. It exhibits some positive characteristics of casual conversation, as well as some areas of difficulty:

- use of clarifying questions, for example:
S2 *Oh sorry. I don't...*
S1 *You like hot day?*;
- an interruption when S1 suggests the word watching;
- little competition for turns as both are telling their recounts;
- frequent pauses by S2 as she searches for words; consequently she speaks in short phrases;
- abrupt closure of conversation by S1 (*Oh, I must go to the to go classroom*) shows she is not yet skilled in moving from one generic stage to the next; she obviously does not have many conversations in English outside the classroom;
- use of longer phrases and clauses with fewer pauses while searching for words by S1, showing her greater knowledge of lexis.

Conversation 2

This conversation occurred in front of the class between a Bosnian woman (S1) and an Albanian woman (S2).

- | | | |
|----|----|---|
| 1 | S1 | <i>Hello?</i> |
| 2 | S2 | <i>Hello.</i> |
| 3 | S1 | <i>How are you?</i> |
| 4 | S2 | <i>I am fine. And you?</i> |
| 5 | S1 | <i>I am good thanks.</i> |
| 6 | S2 | <i>Erm...how...er...what have you been doing on the...weekend?</i> |
| 7 | S1 | <i>Er...on the weekend...in the morning...I am busy always.</i> |
| 8 | S2 | <i>Yes.</i> |
| 9 | S1 | <i>I am talking about the...Sunday afternoon I picked up my children...and...</i> |
| 10 | S2 | <i>Yes.</i> |
| 11 | S1 | <i>We went to the park...to take off bored...and it was a beautiful day.</i> |
| 12 | S2 | <i>Yes.</i> |
| 13 | S1 | <i>The sun was shining...and the birds were singing. The children started to play and to do some exercises in the park.</i> |
| 14 | S2 | <i>Oh lovely day isn't it?</i> |
| 15 | S1 | <i>Yes it is...I sat on the bench and...I took a book to read. I started to read this book called 'Mother Teresa'.</i> |
| 16 | S2 | <i>Oh lovely!</i> |
| 17 | S1 | <i>Yes. Suddenly I met a woman...she came and she sat next to me...what's what's happened to me.</i> |
| 18 | S2 | <i>Was it Australian woman or...?</i> |
| 19 | S1 | <i>Yes it was Australian. She started to talk with me. In the beginning...</i> |
| 20 | S2 | <i>Yes thank you because my English is not well enough to...</i> |
| 21 | S1 | <i>I...I...I understand her but I didn't know to answer every question well.</i> |
| 22 | S2 | <i>Actually you can erm...</i> |
| 23 | S1 | <i>Yes I understand but it's difficult for me...</i> |

- 24 S2 Yes.
- 25 S1 ...to answer every questions but she didn't...
- 26 S2 Did you say please...can you speak slowly or could you speak slowly please?
- 27 S1 I always...I always when I speak with my neighbour it's...she's Australian.
- 28 S2 Yes.
- 29 S1 And this woman I always 'Oh please, can you speak more slowly. I don't understand you.'
- 30 S2 Yes.
- 31 S1 But start in the beginning. She...we started to talk about weather, then we continued talk about life in Australia and in my country.
- 32 S2 Oh it was one kind woman.
- 33 S1 Yes, yes and very helpful.
- 34 S2 Yes.
- 35 S1 Er...we continue talking about two hours.
- 36 S2 Oh, really.
- 37 S1 Yes but sometimes I was embarrassed.
- 38 S2 Why?
- 39 S1 Because I didn't know well how to speak English.
- 40 S1 Oh I understand you very well because my English it's er...
- 41 S2 But er...I did...she helped me very much and I learned.
- 42 S1 Yes.
- 43 S2 Many words to talk. I must go. LAUGHS
- 44 S1 LAUGHS
- 45 S2 I haven't.
- 46 S1 Really!
- 47 S2 I erm I need erm...
- 48 S1 One cigarette like me.
- 49 S2 Yes. See you later.
- 50 S1 Bye bye, thank you, see you.

Conversation 2 is an interpersonally motivated conversation and is casual. The generic structure of the conversation is outlined below.

Start	Greetings	Turns 1–5
Continuing	Storytelling • recount S1	Turns 6–43
Finish		Turns 43–50

It is a face-to-face casual conversation about an incident in S1's weekend when by chance she had a long conversation in English with an Australian woman in the park. The students have come to know each other over a ten-week course through classroom activities and extended structured and informal conversations with volunteer tutors.

The number of times S2 interrupts S1's story could indicate that there are negative feelings between the two based on old ethnic differences or that there is just a personality conflict. I do not think these students mix outside the classroom.

This conversation is characterised by:

- many overlaps where S2 interrupts S1's recount;
- annoyance shown by S1, for example *I always...I always when I speak with my neighbour it's...she's Australian;*
- use of longer clauses with few hesitations by both speakers;
- an abrupt closure of the conversation by S1 at Turn 43 (*I must go*). This means that she immediately finishes her recount; it may show she is not yet skilled at moving from one generic stage to the next or that she simply wants to finish her conversation quickly with a difficult partner;
- S2's need to show mastery of her newly acquired skills of asking questions and giving feedback. However, in doing so she overuses them and almost derails the conversation. As a teacher and native speaker I had to be a silent listener and restrain myself from showing embarrassment or laughing at S2's excessive questioning and feedback and S1's obvious annoyance of which S2 was unaware.

Conversation 3

This conversation occurred in front of the class between the teacher and a student as part of peer assessment of storytelling.

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | T | <i>So, G, did you have a good weekend?</i> |
| 2 | S | <i>No, no. I...had a very bad... LAUGHS... weekend er...because I...I went to shop...and I bought many many er...food er... meat er...drink and er...when I...er when I er...was...on cashier...I saw I didn't have enough money.</i> |
| 3 | T | <i>Oh, that's terrible.</i> |
| 4 | S | <i>Yes.</i> |
| 5 | T | <i>Oh, how embarrassing!</i> |
| 6 | S | <i>And first time I didn't know...what...what now! Er...I was surprised because I'd...I forgot to saw in my purse... before.</i> |
| 7 | T | <i>Uhuh.</i> |
| 8 | S | <i>But er...cashier helped... helped me.</i> |
| 9 | T | <i>Uhuh uhuh.</i> |
| 10 | S | <i>Er...she asked me er have you maybe...er...credit cards. Er...I...LAUGHS...er I have yes, thank you and I...I...er...I paid with my...</i> |
| 11 | T | <i>Paid some money.</i> |
| 12 | S | <i>Some money er...some money er...and er...I paid with my credit cards. Yes I was lucky.</i>
LAUGHS
(APPLAUSE FROM SYMPATHETIC CLASS FOR COMPLETING HER ANECDOTE SUCCESSFULLY.) |

Conversation 3 is an interpersonally motivated conversation and is casual and friendly. The generic structure of the anecdote outlined below shows that the speaker does not include a Reaction stage.

Abstract	Turn 2
Orientation	Turn 2
Crisis	Turns 2–6
Closing	Turn 12
Coda	Turn 12

In the face-to-face interaction the student tells an anecdote about an embarrassing shopping experience. Despite the unequal power and level of expertise between the teacher and the student, the conversation is fairly relaxed. The student is able to use language to show her discomfort, for example she uses the words *bad*, *surprised*, *lucky*.

The student develops the anecdote through very short clauses as she pauses and searches for the correct language.

Conversation 4

This conversation occurred in front of the class between the teacher and a student as part of peer assessment of storytelling.

1	S	<i>I had a bad experience with er erm...bank cards too...like Gordana because...erm...er I went shopping and erm...er...I bought erm...casa?</i>
2	T	<i>Cashier.</i>
3	S	<i>Cashier.</i>
4	T	<i>Or the checkout.</i>
5	S	<i>Yes and she asked me erm...can I pay er er would I like er pay er to pay with the er er card erm or cash. I didn't understand and she er asked me two times.</i>
6	T	<i>Yes.</i>
7	S	<i>And I felt embarrassed.</i>
8	T	<i>Aah.</i>
9	S	<i>It was about card yes.</i>
10	T	<i>It was the same.</i>
11	S	<i>But er on the weekend on the Saturday morning I went er with my daughter to Hahndorf...went to Hahndorf. It's er...</i>
12	T	<i>Hahndorf?</i>
13	S	<i>Hahndorf.</i>
14	T	<i>Yeah.</i>
15	S	<i>It's a little village...German village near Adelaide.</i>
16	T	<i>Uhum.</i>
17	S	<i>It's about 30 kilometres from Adelaide.</i>
18	T	<i>Uhum.</i>

19	S	<i>And erm we had er nice morning because the er weather was er nice sunshine and er...we met a lot of people also we saw a lot of people.</i>
20	T	<i>Uhum.</i>
21	S	<i>Outside and er we sat outside erm and drank a cup of coffee and we visited a old train musum...old train musum.</i>
22	T	<i>Old train museum?</i>
23	S	<i>Old train museum yes. We felt er...we felt happy but er...I went to home by bus er...er...I forgot to say that I er bought some sausages at the German er shop...and the bad experience em on the end was that I er left sausages in the bus.</i>
24	T	<i>Oh no!</i>
25	S	<i>And I been...I been excited because er...it was too late.</i>
26	T	<i>Oh no. That's terrible.</i>
27	S	<i>It was a good and bad experience for one day.</i>
28	T	<i>So somebody...</i>
29	S	<i>Yes.</i>
30	T	<i>So somebody had some free sausages.</i>
31	S	LAUGHS

Conversation 4 is an interpersonally motivated conversation and is casual and friendly. The student tells two stories. The first is in response to another student's story and the second one is about her weekend trip to a town in the Adelaide Hills. The generic structure of the stories is outlined below.

Story 1: Anecdote

Abstract	Turn 1
Orientation	Turns 1–4
Crisis	Turn 5
Reaction	Turn 7
Completion	Implied at turn 9

Story 2: Recount

Orientation	Turns 11–17
Events	Turns 19–23
Coda	Turns 25–31

In this face-to-face interaction the student describes two experiences. Despite the unequal power and level of expertise between the teacher and the student the conversation is fairly relaxed. The student is able to express her feelings, for example she uses the words *embarrassed*, *excited*, *terrible*.

Both stories have medium length clauses with characteristic hesitations as the student searches for words, for example *because...erm...er I went shopping and erm...er...I bought erm...casa?*

Conclusion

I believe that the students were successful at casual conversation. The transcriptions show that:

- the students negotiated the generic stages of a simple conversation involving telling a story;
- the students were able to clarify misunderstandings and to give feedback when needed, although in Conversation 2 this was excessive;
- the students communicated successfully, that is, they did not begin to talk and then stop because they were not able to say what they wanted to say. The length of each conversation showed that the students were comfortable with talking and continued until they wanted to stop. There were no lengthy pauses when all communication stopped while students struggled with unknown lexis to express themselves.

Very significantly, the students assessed each other using the assessment grids. They thought everyone was successful, and enjoyed and admired their classmates' new abilities to cope with the unexpected challenges of having spontaneous conversations.

In assessing the students according to the rather narrow and vague minimalist criteria in Competency 8 (CSWE II), I consider that each of the students more than achieved this competency. I assessed each student by listening to each one on tape after the class. However, I already knew that each had achieved and exceeded Competency 8 because the assessment worksheets used in class had expanded on the performance criteria.

The volunteer tutors reported to me that the students' new abilities were becoming very obvious in their conversations with the students. Students were initiating conversations both with tutors and other students and everyone had a lot more to say. Very satisfying for me was the fact that students were telling each other stories about positive and negative experiences. This was the most significant proof of success. I felt quite superfluous and could stand back and watch them talk, which is how I would like such a conversation skills class to finish up.

I have described in this paper how I measured student performance in casual conversation at ASLPR 1 to 1+. I believe it is possible to teach casual conversation at this level and to assess students in a way that is meaningful to them. I also believe that lower level students have an intense and natural desire to talk about their experiences and so it is important that we build into our programs an opportunity for them to tell simple stories.

I conclude that Competency 8 (CSWE II) needs to be rewritten to include performance criteria for simple generic staging. Once students understand that there is a simple generic structure for a casual conversation and have internalised it, they can confidently build onto this base the more complex spoken interactions needed at higher levels of the *Certificates in Spoken and Written English* where they are required to deal with problematic spoken exchanges and to retell more complex stories.

References

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2 Lost opportunities

Helene Reade

Background

My interest in casual conversation arises from an ongoing unease about my failure to intervene in the development of student conversation skills. Teaching transactional genres and the genres of anecdote, narrative and so on within casual conversation seems quite straightforward. However, helping students to develop other aspects of casual conversation is less so.

At the time of the NCELTR Special Project I was working with students who were rated at ASLPR 2+ in speaking and listening. I had worked with students of a similar profile over the previous year and was interested in how teachers could help such students make progress in the skills of speaking and listening.

These types of students are generally able to make themselves understood and to understand others in the classroom context. They engage readily in quite complex discussions and can express thoughts and opinions easily and often convincingly. They are comfortable in one-to-one discussions with their teachers about their goals and learning pathways. They are also able to express their needs in relation to obtaining information about future study and job options. However in more informal areas of casual conversation they experience quite major breakdowns in communication.

Over the years it has become clear to me that students can learn the quite complex structures and patterns of different spoken genres which they can reproduce in given situations. They are also able to develop appropriate strategies for coping in spoken interactions because such strategies are often similar to those used in their own language and some are often not language-based. However, these same students can still fail to communicate effectively. As a result they express dissatisfaction with their own spoken performance, express fear of engaging with native speakers and are reluctant to participate in activities available to the wider public. Teachers often make assumptions about the ease with which students will be able to move into the appropriate spoken discourse patterns of the dominant Australian culture.

I am aware that the only time I hear the students speak is when I am present and that I am responsible for many of the classroom interactions. Just what these interactions are and what effect they might have on the development of student conversation skills is a question that I have only recently asked myself.

I decided to gather some data which might help me identify what happens in conversations involving a group of students. My original intention was to compare the student transcripts with native speaker transcripts to see whether or not there were large differences in speech functions and dynamic moves. However, when I started to transcribe the student conversations, I became much more interested in comparing what happened when I was present in the conversation and when I was not. It seemed to me that if I could analyse these two kinds of conversations, then I would be able to incorporate strategies into my teaching which could help students be more effective communicators.

The conversations

Four students volunteered to be part of the project. These students were from different cultural backgrounds, had different lifestyle aspirations and were from different friendship groups within the class.

The recorded conversations took place a week apart, the first with me present and the second when I was absent.

Conversation 1 (teacher present)

Helene: *What did you think about, um, what we just did in class?*

Loc: *That's interesting.*

Helene: *Honest, be honest.*

Loc: *Yeh, that's good.*

Rubab: *Firstly, first time, I found it very difficult because it's very new for me, but when you gave me the second handout, I was, I was more comfortable – yes, and I did altogether, and talking about it and, and thinking about the situation and maybe with a couple friends, where they are talking about and what was the, what was the purpose, purpose of that, er, conversation. I found it clear. Maybe if you give it a little bit more, we will be more confident.*

Helene: *Yeh, so should we do some more?*

All: *Yes./Yes./Yes, we should.*

Helene: *Oh, do you think that sort of thing is going to help your speaking?*

Rubab: *Yes, yes.*

Loc: *Yes, my speaking.*

Frank: *Yes and writing.*

Helene: *And writing?* LAUGHTER

Rubab: *In writing, I always struggle – which one, um, comes first – noun, verb, I always struggle.*

Frank: *I think it's when I writing um, er, using lots of words and then I speaking, I think, but not sure, the writing is always must correct but the speak, it is better.*

Others: *Yes, mmm.*

Frank: *When I speaking I always have a time correcting my speaking and when I writing, no. Just...*

Rubab: *Although you've got time to think.*

Frank: *Yes.*

Lejla: *It is difficult to write.*

Rubab: *My problem is because, because I make sentences in my language and then I try to translate.*

Others: *Yeh, yeh.*

Rubab: *It's very odd, I can't...*

Lejla: *One time.*

Rubab: *And so I make mistakes.*

Lejla: *One time a teacher of mine at school told me 'Don't try to make a...*

Frank: *Translation.*

Lejla: *...to translate a sentence that you make in your own language and then to translate it in other, in second language. Don't even try. Try to think...*

Rubab: *In English.*

- Lejla: *...already in that language that you...*
- Loc: *But how can we? If we don't thinking about own language how can we write?*
- Lejla: *Personally, I think because if I try, have to write something or need to write something, I don't think in my language, I don't think in Bosnian, I don't think in German, but I try to think in English.*
- Frank: *Good on you!*
- Lejla: *I can't even think in German, for example now, how can I explain that in English? It's good, I don't even try. I think it's much easier to do it.*
- Rubab: *I always try mix some tenses.*
- Lejla: *It takes time to do that, yes?*
- Rubab: *So that you are late when you speak. LAUGHTER*
- Lejla: *I know one time, I know one time, we have a had a history lesson in Germany and it was boring, it was so boring, and I tried to write a letter for my friend, and I write it in Bosnian, in my home language, and my teacher saw me not doing same like other students so she was asking me 'So, what's wrong?' and I said 'Yeh, I'm trying to translate everything what you say in my own language to LAUGHTER understand more so that's what I'm writing' and she was okay, she didn't tell anything else, and then after the class she just saw me 'I know it's it's could be hard for you to do everything what we're doing in history, anyway, it's history about Germany and you might be uncomfortable in that, but you don't have to worry – after, at the time you start to dream in, in German, in that language in you have to speak, you will, you can know that that's the point so you can know that you became not just like a native speaker, but you became more comfortable in that language' and I thought to myself 'Oh, God, you already passed this time. I already dream in this – for so long time'. That's the thing I really remember all the time – she was very...*
- GENERAL LAUGHTER
- Helene: *Isn't that awful, though, she was a bit of a...*
- Lejla: *Most of the time I always tried to do, to find some excuse to do something else to do in a lesson if it's really boring, so – I don't want to listen, so I used to...*
- Rubab: *Yeh, fake.*
- GENERAL LAUGHTER
- Helene: *She told a little porky.*
- Rubab: *Also, in our, in one of my classes, two students they are talking in their language and teacher said, I don't want to point out the names of the students and teacher – and teacher said 'What are you talking about?' and she says and she said 'No, no, we are just understanding our language' and said 'No, no, we are planning for evening program LAUGHTER – we are going to cinema or something a movie' and all class she very embarrassing. She's cheating and 'No, we are trying to understand in our language. No, no, we are planning for going to movie'.*
- Helene: *So, she was caught out?*
- Rubab: *Yes.*
- Helene: *How embarrassing!*
- Rubab: *Make fun. LAUGHTER In my country there is a phrase, very famous 'Less eating and less sleeping and less speaking are the signs of wiseness'. LAUGHTER Talkative and so loudly you speak, you are not wise like – foolish people talk too much.*
- Helene: *I don't believe that, of you.*

Rubab: *Yes, but it's a phrase.*
Frank: *I think lots of ladies more talkative.*
Helene: *Do you?*
Frank: *Yes, I think because when I speaking the lady, I'm starting the conversation, and maybe speak five or six words.*
Lejla: *She continues by herself.* LAUGHTER
Frank: *Yes, I'm just hearing and waiting and sometimes I say 'yes' 'oh, really'.*
Lejla: *Not all ladies – come on!*
Frank: *Ah, but, but, lots of ladies, lots of. . .*
Rubab: *Yes, we agree.*
Frank: *Yeh, you agree?*
Rubab: *Women talk too much.*
Helene: *Do you agree?*
Loc: *Yeh, I agree.* LAUGHTER
Rubab: *What's wrong with too much talking?*
Frank: *It's not so bad.*
Lejla: *If you know what you're talking about, it's okay.*
Loc: *When I'm talking with my friends, new friends, Australian friends, I don't know what I'm talking.*
Lejla: *You don't know why? Or about what?*
Loc: *But also he understand what I'm saying.*
Helene: *And you don't? You understand what you're saying?*
Loc: *Yeh.*
Helene: *Good!*
Loc: *Sometimes I understand, sometimes I don't understand, but when I say not enough and hard word but also he understand what I'm saying.*
Helene: *Oh good.*
Loc: *But sometimes I can't understand what he say, but I say 'Yes, okay'.* LAUGHTER
Lejla: *Yes, that's what I'm doing too.*
Frank: *And smiling.*
Helene: *I actually think lots of students do that.*
Loc: *Yeh.*
Helene: *Does that happen sometimes in class?*
All: *No, not in class.*
Loc: *But sometimes I can, when they're talking very slowly, I can hear some words, and I try I don't say to them 'Can you speak slowly?' but, now we are here, in future we may become Australian – we try, we must try – you know, when I was in, from India, when I go out, and anything I'd, I kept a small cassette – put in pocket – when I go out to talking with somebody. After that, going home and then I listen. . .*
Lejla: *Really?*
Loc: *. . . this way of talking.*

Frank: *Good practice is a Woolworth's spokesman. He speak very fast, and very I think, it's Australian accent, and when I came to Australia, I didn't understand, but yesterday, happy, I was happy because I'm just walking and this person just speaking about the sale and I don't know, and I understand!!* LAUGHTER

Lejla: *Which person was it?*

Frank: *The Woolworths. He's always on the street.*

Helene: *That's fabulous.*

Frank: *Yes.*

Helene: *That's a real sign of progress, isn't it?*

Frank: *Yes, but I think it's five months is a very big time in my, in my here.*

Loc: *Helene why don't we have study about singing a song in the class? I studied this* LAUGHTER
No, no, no, that help us know English very well and some very nice – we can understand.

Lejla: *We should write the song about our class.*

Loc: *Yeh, yeh, yeh, yeh.*

Lejla: *And try to sing it, try to make melody.*

Loc: *Yeh, yeh, try try sing it and try to make it how we understand.*

Lejla: *And to sing it at the end of the term.*

Helene: *Great idea!*

Rubab: *Now we start poetry.*

Helene: *Yeh, that's great!*

Lejla: *I can try to write it – I need someone who play some instruments or something like that.*

Rubab: *Who's the poet in our class?*

Loc: *I also studied this in Sri Lanka when I was there and then when I listened English music think I understand something...some...very nice.*

Helene: *Good idea.*

Helene: *Thank you for those ideas. We'd better stop now because you need to go and have a coffee.*

Conversation 2 (teacher absent)

Lejla: *OK. Let's go.*

Frank: *1, 2, 3.*

Lejla: *Yeh, we was talking last time too much so you guys are...*

Rubab: *Yeh, it's now your turn.*

Lejla: *It's your turn now.*

Rubab: *Best of luck.*

Loc: *Open my mouth.* LAUGHTER

Lejla: *You don't have to open your mouth, you have to say something.*

Rubab: *Could you tell me, could you tell us about your religion because we don't know.*

Loc: *My religion is Buddhist. It's very nice.*

Rubab: *OK.*

Loc: *Do you know the Buddhist?*

Frank: *Yeh.*

Rubab: *Yes, I know, but not too much. Just a bit.*

Lejla: *I was writing, at school, long time ago, about Buddhism. Yeh, I had to write the life of Buddha? Yeh, just the main points about the religion – about what it do...*

Rubab: *Belief?*

Lejla: *...but it was three or four years ago, so I forget everything.*

Frank: *My wife was a yoga, a yogi...*

Rubab: *Teacher?*

Frank: *...course – no, just a learner.*

Rubab: *Learner? Oh, OK.*

Frank: *One years ago, in Hungary, she went to do the yoga course and, er, she had a little Buddha and er...*

Loc: *Did she study?*

Frank: *Er, yes, a little bit and er, moving and er, because the yoga, yoga's er...*

Rubab: *Yoga's difficult or easy?*

Frank: *Difficult.*

Rubab: *You must concentrate?*

Frank: *Yes.*

Rubab: *Uh huh.*

Frank: *Difficult, must some moving...*

Rubab: *Mm mm.*

Frank: *...exercise...*

Rubab: *At the...*

Frank: *...they do some concentration.*

Loc: *They do some meditation before they...*

Frank: *Yes, meditation.*

Rubab: *And concentration and imagine something, think about it, I think.*

Frank: *But, er, but er it does matter what do you eat, the food is very important and the Yogi I think it's a veget...*

Loc: *Vegetarian.*

Rubab: *Can be.*

Lejla: *Yoga.*

Rubab: *Yeh, me too.*

Frank: *Yes, yes.*

Rubab: *Is look like exercise? Exercise?*

Frank: *Yes, yes, maybe, but...*

Rubab: *I think meditation.*

Frank: *...I'm not sure.*

Rubab: *Oh, you don't know about exercises of yoga?*

Frank: *No.*

Rubab: *Ooh.*

Frank: *Just my wife.*

Rubab: *Oh.*

Frank: *How about you?*

Loc: *Me? What about?*

Frank: *About the yoga.*

Rubab: *Are you interested?*

Loc: *No. I'm not in yoga, but I have done meditation.*

Rubab: *Meditation?*

Loc: *In the morning.*

Rubab: *In the morning?*

Lejla: *Come on, tell me, how do you do that? I would like to know.*

Rubab: *Yeh!*

Lejla: *Because I heard something about it, that people can really relax about that... do that.*

Rubab: *Meditation?*

Lejla: *And I would like to do that.*

Loc: *People working very hard and they want like - it's very calm. Before we do meditation we don't thinking anything.*

Lejla: *Uh huh.*

Loc: *We sit down.*

Frank: *How long you are meditation?*

Loc: *Depend your – maybe ten minute or fifteen minute, sometime.*

Lejla: *But how can, how can you do this? Just to slow down and not to think about anything – how can you? I tried to do this on weekend. I couldn't.*

Rubab: *It's not easy, because when I close eyes ideas and planning comes in your mind...*

Lejla: *Yes, automatically.*

Rubab: *...and just thinking about what I have to do in the day and about – yeh, I can't do, I can't do that my...*

Loc: *But what is easy, I told you about meditation. You can do anything when you – when you are cooking, when you are thinking about your cooking, while you cooking, while the food – if you thinking only this – meditation.*

Lejla: *Yeh, that's the kind.*

Loc: *When you working, you thinking, you was – you working – that's the meditation.*

Lejla: *Only when you really concentrate on one thing?*

Loc: *Yeh, one thing.*

Frank: *Try to writing, concentrate hmm, about my writing. LAUGHTER*

Frank: *Yeh.*

Loc: *What you thinking, if you writing, you know about it and then you must write – that's a lot.*

Lejla: *What about praying, praying?*

Loc: *Pray?*

Frank: *Pray.*

Rubab: *Pray, pray.*

Lejla: *Prayer, prayer.*

Loc: *Yeh, yeh, we pray about – in the morning.*

Rubab: *Only once a day?*

Loc: *No – four times a day.*

Frank: *Four times?*

Rubab: *Like us. We are five times.*

Loc: *Soft prayer.*

Rubab: *Soft?*

Loc: *Short prayer, not long, not long prayer.*

Lejla: *Yeh, five minutes, ten?*

Rubab: *Five, ten minutes.*

Loc: *I must have one hour.*

Lejla: *One hour! Really?*

Rubab: *Me – four hours a day.*

Loc: *Yeh.*

Lejla: *Ooh!*

Frank: *Four hours a day?*

Rubab: *Me – one hour one time – so, four times.*

Loc: *Sometimes in the evening we pray – about one and a half hours.*

Lejla: *Is that special time? Special time that you have?*

Loc: *Yes, special.*

Frank: *After or before meditation?*

Loc: *Mmm, after.*

Frank: *Always after?*

Loc: *No, before. After finish prayer, then we sit down and do meditation about.*

Lejla: *But meditation is up to you. If you want to do it, you can, but you don't have to.*

Loc: *You don't have to.*

Lejla: *Yeh, that's just for yourself.*

Loc: *Just in here, we have a lot of people in here – when they do - they work very hard. They want – how they think, how they thinking about – they want to calm and then they came to the temple – we have.*

Rubab: *Because nowadays there is very tension always in the mind, it's very necessary to be calm.*

Lejla: *So, how's it called the house where you're going to?*

Loc: *Mmm, mmm.*

Lejla: *It's not the church, it's not the mosque. How you call it?*

Loc: *Temple.*

Lejla: *Temple?*

Rubab: *Temple's like a...*

Frank: *What is temple?*

Rubab: *...mosque.*

Loc: *Yeh, but I have a Buddha.*

Rubab: *Religious place.*

Loc: *OK.*

Rubab: *Have you got a Buddha idol at home?*

Loc: *Yes, I have.*

Rubab: *Uh huh.*

Frank: *And how big – a little? Or...*

Loc: *In my house, a little one.*

Frank: *A little bit.*

Lejla: *Yes, a small one.*

Loc: *But it's from India.*

Frank: *Uh huh.*

Lejla: *So, what are the the main points in the religion? – what is the – mmm.*

Rubab: *Because we don't believe, in Islam, we don't believe you make Buddha with your hand, with your self hand, now you pray for this one? You don't need – you know. We – there is one God.*

Loc: *Yeh, I know.*

Rubab: *Yes, there's only one God. Nobody can, nobody could make God. Nobody can do this because it's already and um, it's not, er, I think it's very hard to say, what I have to say, it's very hard.*

Lejla: *Unusual.*

Rubab: *Unusual, yeh.*

Lejla: *Someone who believes in God.*

Rubab: *Yes, you just make a Buddha with your hand and now you become pray for this one.*

Loc: *Yeh, I understand I don't know how to talk...but I can explain. I can read a book and you – and then you can understand.*

Rubab: *Umm.*

Loc: *Yeh, you read a book.*

Frank: *OK that's very nice.*

Rubab: *It's nice to see you. LAUGHTER OK thank you.*

Frank: *Bye.*

Questions in conversation

When I came to analyse the transcripts of the two conversations I was impressed with how remarkably different they were. However, questioning seemed to form an important part of both conversations. I compared the questions the teacher asks and the questions the students ask in Conversation 1.

Questions teacher asks in Conversation 1	Questions students ask in Conversation 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you think about what we just did in class? • So should we do some more? • Oh, do you think that sort of thing is going to help your speaking? • And writing? • So, she was caught out? • Do you? • And you don't? You understand what you're saying? • Does that happen sometimes in class? • That's a real sign of progress, isn't it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But how can we? If we don't thinking about own language how can we write? • Yeh, you agree? • What's wrong with too much talking? • You don't know why? Or about what? • Which person was it? • ...why don't we have study about singing a song in the class? • Who's the poet in our class?

In Conversation 1 the topic is familiar and non-threatening as everyone has shared the experience. I make twenty-two utterances of which nine are questions and ten are evaluative comments. I use questions to confirm and encourage, and to ask for opinions. Through my use of questions I set the topic, model discourse features, evaluate and keep the conversation going. The students make seventy-two utterances of which seven are questions. The students seem to parallel the topics I set and they have time to develop anecdotes.

In Conversation 2 when the teacher is not present the exchanges and the anecdotal segments are very short in comparison with those in Conversation 1. Essentially Conversation 2 remains a chat segment (Eggins and Slade 1997). The topic is extremely complex and one which the average teacher would probably not tackle. The conversation seems full of lost opportunities to get the information which the students seem to want at the beginning because a long time is spent teasing out meaningless detail.

Overall there are thirty-four questions, only five evaluative comments, and only three open-ended questions in Conversation 2. The questions are clear, correct and focused but there are no encouraging questions. The questions are used to:

- calm things down and to make sure there's no ill feeling, for example *Is that special time? Special time that you have?*
- keep everyone on track, for example *Come on, tell me, how do you do that?*
- clarify, for example *Soft?*
- check what is said, for example *Only once a day?*
- abruptly change the focus of the participants, for example *Have you got a Buddha idol at home?*
- interrupt, for example *It's not the church, it's not the mosque. How you call it?*

The person who asks the original question *Could you tell me, could you tell us about your religion because we don't know?* never asks another clear, direct question. It is another speaker who takes up this option very late in the conversation: *So, what are the the main points in the religion?*

With questions that occur often in everyday language the students show a degree of fluency and, I think, the benefit of learning through chunking, for example *What about praying, praying?* Some questions show impatience, for example *Oh, you don't know about exercises of yoga?* Many of the questions are challenging, with an element of disbelief, for example *One hour! Really?*

Question chains in conversation

Overall the questions the students ask in Conversation 2 do not encourage them to engage in the discussion and sometimes show little real regard for what the respondent has to say.

When I talked to the students about their conversation skills, they agreed that it was difficult for them to ask appropriate questions to keep a conversation going. They talked about their feelings of inadequacy when communicating with native speakers whom they knew quite well. They explained that when they wanted to know more about what the person was talking about and when they wanted to show their interest, they could not frame their questions. They felt inadequate because they thought that people would think that they were rude or not interested.

One of the exercises we did in a group of four was very revealing. The four students attended an assessment for entry to an advanced English course. When I asked them how we could make the best use of their preparation time, they all wanted to focus on how to keep a conversation going. So I introduced a topic by asking them: *Did you know that I've lived in New Guinea?*

This promoted a conversation that was real and lively. The only time I spoke was in response to their questions. All members of the group asked direct and indirect questions and were eager to write them down. We discussed some of these questions as we went. We commented that often they did not have a question form, but that they were still able to use questions to clarify, applaud, comment and show incredulity or amazement, as well as to get information. We also talked about the register of certain questions, that is, what questions were acceptable in certain situations.

Some of the questions the students did not know how to ask, despite their high level of fluency, are listed below. The list shows the possible sequence of questions which they could have asked about New Guinea in order to keep the conversation going.

- I've heard that you were in New Guinea. Is that right?
- What were you doing there?
- What sort of a place did you live in?
- Is it in the Pacific?
- What's the climate like?
- Is it in the tropics?
- What was life like there?
- Can you tell us more about that?
- Did you learn the language?
- How long were you there?
- Did you teach English while you were there?
- Did you enjoy your life there?

I found that this was a very useful lesson for me as a teacher because it gave me an insight into the lack of confidence the learners experience when trying to frame questions.

How the project has informed my practice

So that I can provide students with opportunities to listen to and analyse spoken discourse I am using the materials outlined below. The activities I use with these materials help students to focus on the role of questioning in casual conversation.

Front up – an interview program on SBS TV

The students list the interviewer's questions and jot down the responses. As the students have to listen carefully for the responses, they direct their attention to the questions. They hear the questions very clearly and can look at the technique of asking questions and the effectiveness of asking the right sort of question.

Teaching casual conversation (Slade and Norris 1985)

- The students predict the questions which might be asked around a particular topic.
- The teacher provides the students with responses from the scripts and the students have to predict the questions they will hear.
- The students listen to the tape and jot down the questions which are asked. The questions are unrecognisable if the students look for normal question forms, and so analysis of the transcripts is essential.

Teacher and tutor conversations in front of the class

- The teacher and the tutor have a conversation of up to five minutes in front of the class.
- The students listen and try to identify questions. This helps them see the wide range of strategies that native speakers use to keep a conversation going.
- As the teacher can never remember what was said, he/she tapes the conversation and plays it back to the students. Some of the language used is very helpful for the learners. The key in this approach is that the tutor is not a teacher and therefore is not conscious about using certain sorts of language. The tutor usually uses many colloquialisms which further build the learners' confidence to participate in real conversation.

Variations on a theme (Maley and Duff 1978)

Analysis of a number of the conversations from this textbook are very popular with students. Although they are not authentic they do provide a range of spoken language in situations that we cannot manufacture in the classroom. The focus on context reminds the learners of its importance. In all of the activities, learners focus on the essential role played by each of the participants. Thinking about what might have been said provides opportunities to become familiar with the subtleties of the language. It also provides a classroom atmosphere where the students can freely clarify their own understanding.

One hundred useful exercises in English (Ward 1987)

- The teacher provides appropriate questions using a gap methodology. This opens up a huge range of question forms.
- The students work in groups to discuss the suitability of a wide range of questions. They have access to the teacher when necessary.
- Subsequent sharing of question forms means the students become familiar with some of the wide range of questions available to native speakers. The teacher comments on what choice might be made and why. In this way, learners become aware of clues to mood, attitude and intention of the speaker, as well as being able to look at the actual meaning conveyed by a particular choice of question form.

- The students examine alternative expressions in the light of different meanings being made. The teacher shows the students how to guess the mood of the speaker and discusses the effect of evaluative comments on further utterances.
- The teacher can use the scripts to highlight the evaluative comments made during conversations.

Conclusion

I am convinced that the way students learn spoken discourse is by listening to and analysing what native speakers say. If they do not get a chance to study such discourse, then their progress towards communicative fluency is slow and they often find taking part in conversation embarrassing. It is impossible to teach students the huge range of question forms available to the native speaker. This means that we sometimes have to change the approach of teaching from presentation to immersion.

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SECTION THREE

Teaching casual conversation for workplace communication

1 *Towards informal work talk: Investigating the teaching of casual conversation in the workplace*

Penny McKay, Lynette Bowyer and Laura Commins

2 *The role of chat in negotiating a problematic spoken exchange*

Ruth Wirth

Introduction

There is... a blurring of the distinction between spoken interactions in the workplace that are person-oriented conversations and those that are information or task-oriented encounters or transactions. Some of the spoken interactions in the workplace appear to achieve both purposes at the same time.

(Penny McKay, Lynette Bowyer and Laura Commins)

Workplace practices are established and maintained largely through spoken language. Over recent years, knowledge about the characteristics and uses of spoken language has been increasing. Spoken language has always been an important part of workplace practices. However, workplace restructuring and technological change have seen the development of new contexts in which it is used and different purposes for using it. It is the interpersonal dimensions of communication which lead to the development of different workplace cultures.

The papers in this section look at various aspects of the workplace in which casual talk plays a role. It seems important that employees from non-English speaking backgrounds understand how informal talk can facilitate work tasks and can help build harmonious relationships in the workplace. Second language users also need to recognise the different types of informal talk which occur in the workplace.

Workplace relationships affect the role which participants can play in spoken exchanges. Employees need to recognise that a conversation between workmates at coffee time is not the same as a conversation with a customer or a supervisor. They need to be able to move from one register to another as they undertake workplace tasks.

Penny McKay, Lynette Bowyer and Laura Commins from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) were involved in the NCELTR project *Towards informal work talk: Investigating the teaching of casual conversation in workplace English*. They worked in conjunction with personnel from the Southbank Institute of TAFE in Brisbane. In their paper, the QUT team focus on the role of social talk in the workplace as a very important aspect of successful work. They are concerned with defining interpersonal exchanges which facilitate work tasks or interactions with clients. They challenge some definitions of casual conversation as being only concerned with conversations between people of equal power in a workplace. The authors feel that definitions need to encompass conversations between people of unequal power as these are more representative of the kinds of conversations that workers have with their supervisors, with management and with clients or the public.

Ruth Wirth teaches in NSW AMES and has taught higher level courses about the workplace for many years. She became interested in how chat, as a component of casual conversation, might be a successful strategy in negotiating problematic spoken exchanges. She developed a teaching sequence which focused on the role of chat in assisting in successful negotiations. The research on casual conversation and her teaching sequence enabled her students to discuss what led to successful negotiation and how much chat was necessary to reach a favourable result.

1 Towards informal work talk: Investigating the teaching of casual conversation in the workplace

Penny McKay, Lynette Bowyer and Laura Commins

Background

This paper is based on a report for the NCELTR project *Towards informal work talk: Investigating the teaching of casual conversation in workplace English*. A team from the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) unit in the School of Cultural and Language Studies in Education, Queensland University of Technology conducted the project over one year. The project team comprised Dr Penny McKay, Lynette Bowyer and Laura Commins and worked in conjunction with Suzanne Jordan, Lynda Hamilton, Alicia Toohey and Elene Claire from the Southbank Institute of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) in Brisbane.

This paper focuses on:

- the definition of conversation in the workplace through a proposed model of informal work talk;
- theoretical approaches which assist in the teaching of workplace conversation.

The research

The aims of the project were to:

- examine the relevance of current research into casual conversation to classroom practice;
- identify successful approaches to teaching and assessing casual conversation and examine its relevance to other skill areas.

We conducted a literature review and collected data through individual interviews and group discussions with four experienced TAFE teachers, individual interviews with two past students, and an observation of a teaching session with one student. We recorded all interviews on audiotapes, and videotaped the observed lesson.

We initially scanned the notes taken in group discussions and the transcriptions of interviews for issues and strategies. Through a later closer analysis of the interview transcriptions we categorised emerging issues and teaching strategies. We analysed the videotaped lesson specifically for teaching strategies.

Defining casual conversation in the workplace

Teachers pointed to the fact that social talk in the workplace is a very important aspect of successful work. They saw their role, among other things, as helping students develop this kind of talk. Teachers said they would not, however, call this kind of talk 'casual conversation' since this term tends to evoke social chats during time out from actual participation in work tasks. It became clear that it would be valuable to find a term to denote the kind of work-related social talk that teachers saw as important in the workplace. The term 'informal work talk' arose out of later discussions after other terms had been rejected.

The teaching of workplace English integrates language and literacy into mainstream vocational contexts. The variety of workplace teaching delivery modes and learner groupings, together with other contextual factors, have an impact on the nature of teaching casual conversation in the workplace. Greater client focus and the new training agenda have resulted in changes in focus with regard to the perceived place of casual conversation in the workplace. Casual conversation is often not seen as a priority by either the workplace management or by the students.

The teachers recognised their role as helping with interpersonal exchanges related to various aspects of work but not with unproductive idle chatter. Their emphasis was on informal talk which facilitates work tasks or interactions with clients, and enhances the level of performance of work-related tasks. Thus the teachers saw informal talk as an important adjunct to new work practices such as working in teams, problem-solving, negotiating, interacting with clients and participating in meetings.

Successful relationships within the workplace are very important for their contribution to team work, problem-solving and the desired presentation of a company to clients and the public. Casual conversations enhance the relationships between people to facilitate these work practices. There is, however, a blurring of the distinction between spoken interactions in the workplace that are person-oriented conversations and those that are information or task-oriented encounters or transactions. Some of the spoken interactions in the workplace appear to achieve both purposes at the same time.

Furthermore, there is a narrowness in the definition of casual conversation that restricts it to conversations between people of equal power. What is called 'formal conversation' between people of unequal power is more representative of the kinds of conversations undertaken with supervisors, with management and with clients or the public.

Exploring the relevance of theoretical insights

To arrive at a conceptualisation of casual conversation that fits more appropriately with the workplace context, we needed to consider various definitions and ways of analysing spoken language.

Halliday et al (1985) describes the chat of casual conversation as a person-oriented, as opposed to a task-oriented, dialogue in which there is some reciprocal engagement. It has a very loose discourse structure in which the following features may appear: greeting, phatic communion, information exchange, opinion exchange and leave taking. He suggests that another approach is to view casual conversation as that type of person-oriented dialogue in which certain norms that are characteristic of conversation in general are suspended, or even neutralised. These can be summarised as:

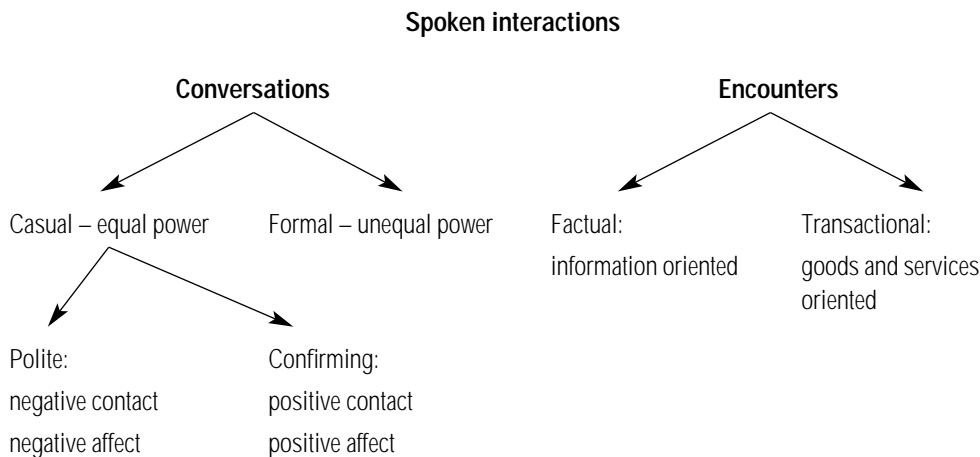
- there are topics, but no topic control;
- there are interactants, but no status relations;
- there are turns, but no turn assignment.

Halliday believes that what defines conversation as casual is that the topic is not controlled by either interactant but drifts as the conversation proceeds, there is a temporary neutralising of inequality and distance, and there is the absence of any mechanism for assigning turns. Thus when we look at it as a form of discourse organisation, it is minimally, but not totally, unstructured. When we look at it as a situation type, it has certain situational features (no topic control or status relations) whereby matters take their course.

Halliday (1985) notes that the chat of casual conversation can occur at the same time as other kinds of encounters. For example, a description or narrative can be embedded within a casual chat, or chat can constitute an element in the structure of a service encounter. The chat of casual conversation provides for a suspension of normal patterns of social stratification and of the normal goal-directedness of discourse by setting up an open-ended interaction that defines its own goals. In other words, you keep going until you want to stop (Halliday 1985:23).

Building on Halliday's work, Eggins and Slade (1997) investigated the social purposes of casual talk. They believe that our purpose in casual talk is constructing interpersonal relationships motivated by our need for solidarity. It is a critical site for the social construction of reality. They note that it is talk we engage in when we are talking just for the sake of talking and it is not motivated by any clear pragmatic purpose such as giving or seeking information or obtaining or supplying goods and services.

Eggins (1990, cited in Burns 1998:102) suggests the following typology of spoken interactions.



Conversations are interactions that are oriented towards interpersonal goals, whereas encounters are pragmatic interactions oriented towards getting things done. Eggins (1990) draws a distinction between two kinds of conversations, casual conversation and formal conversation.

Casual

In casual conversations participants have equal power in the interaction. Such conversations can be *polite* where there is little previous and/or likely future contact and affective feelings between participants are not well developed. They can also be *confirming* where participants are in close or continual contact and therefore have developed affective attitudes towards each other.

Formal

In formal conversations there is unequal power between the participants in the interaction.

Slade (1997) further elaborates on the nature of casual conversation, making a distinction between the chat and the chunk segments in casual talk. Her research has

indicated that the chat segments are those where the structure is managed locally, that is, turn by turn, and the chunk segments, when one speaker tends to hold the floor, are structured in a more predictable way. Chunk segments could be narratives, anecdotes, exemplums, opinions, gossip, joke telling and sending up. Where participants were not personal friends, such as in the workplace, the motivation appeared to be for sharing likenesses and to share ways of seeing the world. Workplace talk is characterised by frequent contact but low affective involvement and serves the purposes of solidarity and identification of similarities.

The teachers in the project were aware of the work by Eggins and Slade (1997) but did not believe it was appropriate in the productivity-driven environment of their workplaces to spend time teaching gossip or anecdote-type chunks of language that are characteristic of interpersonal conversations between equals. Teachers were more concerned with the more immediate and work-oriented skills of casual conversation which facilitate working relationships in the context of workplace tasks.

The teachers felt that the formal category of conversations in Eggins's typology (1990) reflected more adequately the kinds of spoken interactions workplace students needed to negotiate. According to the typology, formal conversations are those where there is unequal power between participants in the interaction. In the workplace, these often occur between workers and supervisors, with clients and with members of the public.

The notions of power, contact and affect which inform Eggins's typology characterise the interpersonal tenor of any spoken interaction. Poynton (1989) elaborates on these as follows:

- Power between interactants can be equal or unequal depending on such things as authority, for example employer–employee; or status which comes from some desirable attribute such as level of education, profession or wealth and expertise.
- Contact can be frequent or infrequent, the extent can be extended or brief, one-off or long-term. People can relate to each other in one or more roles and for either task-oriented or person-oriented reasons.
- Affect between participants can be absent if there is little ongoing contact. If affect is present, it can be positive or negative in terms of the relationship as a whole or an individual episode.

The above contextual variables relating to the tenor of interpersonal relations carry implications for the language used in conversations in the workplace. Politeness and appropriacy involve reading these contextual variables correctly and tailoring language accordingly.

Pragmatics

The teachers expressed their belief that the study of pragmatics was invaluable in highlighting aspects of intercultural communication which were necessary for non-English speakers to interact appropriately and politely. According to Burns (1998), pragmatics can help language users to see:

- how knowledge of the social context and world knowledge enable speakers to determine what meanings are most likely to be attached to utterances;
- what is appropriate to say in a particular context.

Pragmatics gives insights into the link between language and human behaviour and social action.

Pragmatics makes extensive use of Speech Act Theory which attempts to explain

the nature of utterances in terms of what the utterance is about as well as in terms of what the speaker is doing at the same time. For example: *Give me the pliers on the bench* is about a tool and its location but it is also about the speaker directing the hearer to do something. Thus each utterance performs some kind of speech, or illocutionary, act. It contains an illocutionary force component, which is the action side of the speech act, and a proposition component, which is the content side. Pragmatic studies involve understanding the illocutionary force and the various ways it is expressed. It looks at how utterances can be interpreted, what utterances are achieving in interpersonal relationships and how contextual variables impact on language choices in terms of politeness and appropriacy.

Cultural values influence the way people view problems and solutions. When there is no awareness of these differences or any attempt at negotiation, participants can misunderstand each other's intentions and end up with mistaken attributions about intelligence, character and common sense. Such cross-cultural miscommunications can have serious and damaging social consequences (Millen, O'Grady and Porter 1992, Young 1999).

Understanding the values attached to the parameters of social context, that is, social distance, power relations and weight of imposition, helps define what constitutes politeness and the concept of face in any culture. 'Politeness' has become a cover term in pragmatics for whatever choices are made in language use to preserve face in general, that is, public self-image (Verschueren 1999).

Brown and Levinson (1987) make a distinction between positive face and negative face. Positive face recognises the other person's need to be treated as an equal or insider. The speaker considers the hearer to be, in important respects, the same, with in-group rights and duties and expectations of reciprocity. Negative face recognises the other person's need to have freedom of action and self-determination and tries to avoid imposing on the other.

Speakers use politeness strategies to show their respect for positive and negative face. Positive politeness strategies include claiming common ground, in-group membership, focusing on common points of view, attitudes and knowledge, cooperation between speaker and hearer, and fulfilling each other's wants.

Respectful behaviour is at the heart of negative politeness strategies. It performs the function of minimising an imposition of an idea or request and is characterised linguistically by indirectness, hedging and apologising.

The use of modality markers in English can serve two basic purposes. The first is to achieve politeness and preserve face. The second is to convey the speaker's stance in terms of their commitment to the truth and to an expressed intention. Modality markers include:

- modal auxiliaries, for example *should, could, would*;
- minimising phrases, for example *just, sort of, you know*;
- amplification phrases, for example *really, extraordinarily*.

Willing's research (1992) into the use of English modality markers by non-English speakers in the workforce during problem-solving tasks showed that their use of these was very rare. If non-English speakers used modality, it was rudimentary and oversimplified. Thus they conveyed a greater conviction and solidarity in making speculative comments, proposing explanations and suggesting courses of action than they meant to. An unintended skewing of the trajectory of the subsequent conversation could then follow. Willing comments that when such indicators are scarce, or nonexistent, accurate perception of each other's perspectives, diagnoses and estimations is made much more difficult.

Teaching casual conversation

Teaching oral language, according to Burns (1998), is a process of skill-getting and skill-using pedagogical processes. Teaching conversation involves a process of marshalling linguistic items to realise the purpose of the interaction, to convey one's personal meanings, and to interact socially – all in conformance with the pragmatic conventions of conversation in English. Because of this, teaching conversation belongs to the process and strategic dimension of English language syllabuses (McCarthy and Carter 1994).

Various researchers recommend deconstruction of the conversation of native speakers over materials specifically designed for teaching purposes as these do not always portray a true picture of language behaviour in conversation, and so are misleading and disempowering (Burns 1998, Slade and Norris 1986, Nunan 1993 and 1996). A principled pedagogical approach should be derived from analysis of the micro and macro structures of spoken interaction (Burns and Gardner 1997).

There are a number of ways of analysing casual conversation to arrive at a principled approach for teaching its salient aspects, as outlined in the following table.

<p>Systemic Functional Linguistics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual conversation does have a consistent and describable structure at a number of distinct levels (Egins and Slade 1997). • At the macro or chunk level, commonly occurring genres within casual conversation (for example anecdotes, gossip and narratives) can be presented, their stages identified and cross-cultural comparisons made. • The tenor of the conversation and the grammatical features related to modality that realise the roles and relationships between participants can be analysed.
<p>Conversational Analysis (CA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the micro or chat level of clause and move, CA looks at turn-taking management, adjacency pairs, and expectations of turn transfer.
<p>Exchange Structure Analysis (ESA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the micro level, ESA allows for the identification of basic patterns of conversational exchange – the functional slots that are constituted by turns at talk, such as opening, initiating and closing moves.
<p>Pragmatic analysis (PA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA highlights the intentions of speakers within the speech acts which make up a conversation and how they are realised in the grammar and lexical systems. • PA allows for an examination of appropriateness and politeness strategies and any cross-cultural aspects that may be significant for students. • PA can also focus on clarification strategies, strategies for indicating pragmatic intention, and strategies for signalling one's reactions to others' intentions (Burns 1998).

The above approaches focus on the analysis of spoken interactions to raise the level of awareness of learners about the nature of authentic conversations in English. Burns, Joyce and Gollin (1996) report success with these approaches in the Australian context in an action research project involving the analysis of unscripted conversations to teach pragmatic and interpersonal genres.

There are some commercially available teaching resources on teaching casual conversation. Slade and Norris (1986) and Economou (1985) use authentic native speaker dialogues from the workplace for analysis of both the chunk and chat segments of casual conversation. These provide the basis for student practice of strategies that are vital for successful participation in casual conversation. Such strategies include initiating, establishing and concluding contact, giving feedback, asking questions to show interest, indicating surprise, agreeing and disagreeing, asking for clarification and managing shifts in topics.

Slade and Norris (1986) suggest using an exercise typology in five phases to guide students in listening and analysing, and then practising casual conversation skills.

- Phase A prepares students for listening by giving contextual information about the spoken texts students will hear;
- Phase B provides students with activities that assist their listening;
- Phase C is the analytic stage where the teacher draws the students' attention to strategies, language functions or the lexico-grammatical aspects of the spoken text;
- Phase D gives guided situations for students to practise the language;
- Phase E provides students with open-ended activities where they use their new skills in spontaneous, creative ways. This phase uses tapes of student-generated texts as the basis of analytic work on particular linguistic problems.

Findings

The teachers were clear about the importance of helping students to be part of the group and the importance of casual conversation to help them to do this:

It's part of communicating with someone, getting to know about somebody, demonstrating that you care about that person, and for a lot of NESB people they feel left out because they can't join in with the casual conversation, so I see it as a means of empowering them in the sense that they can be part of the group, they can contribute to the group, they can make comments that people are not going to laugh at, they can make appropriate comments, they can respond to what someone has said, they can have the confidence to ask for clarification if they don't understand. Being kept in the dark is a very threatening thing. If you don't know what's going on you feel isolated as though you don't belong.

(Project teacher)

A major aim of the project was to identify successful approaches to teaching and assessing casual conversation. Through our literature review we identified the following strategies:

- **Raising awareness and studying relevant aspects of pragmatics**
Pragmatics helps language users to see how knowledge of the social context and the world enables them to determine what meanings are most likely to be attached to utterances and what is appropriate to say in a particular context (Burns 1998).

- **Raising awareness and studying relevant aspects of sociopragmatics**
Sociopragmatics helps language users to understand how different cultures perceive social distance, power relations and the weight of an imposition, and that different groups make different assessments of these parameters.
- **Providing students with politeness strategies, for both positive and negative face**
Increasing students' skills and understanding in the use of modality markers to achieve politeness and preserving face build their ability to marshal linguistic items to achieve their purpose in an interaction.
- **Highlighting the intentions of speakers within speech acts and analysing how they are realised in the grammar and lexical systems**
Deconstruction of conversations of native speakers provides the basis for student practice of strategies. These strategies include initiating, establishing and concluding contact, giving feedback, asking questions to show interest, indicating surprise, agreeing and disagreeing, asking for clarification and managing shifts in topics.
- **Using an exercise typology**
An exercise typology such as the one on page 51 by Slade and Norris (1986) prepares students for listening and participating in conversation.

Teachers work at many levels in workplace contexts and teach to meet individual needs related to specific workplace contexts. The teaching strategies which emerged from the teacher interviews were set within the broad range of teaching strategies which teachers use to meet student needs in the workplace. The teachers indicated that they manipulated their input, the texts and resources they used, and the type of analysis they undertook in order to work towards developing knowledge, awareness and skills related to student needs in informal work talk.

Much of the needs analysis, teaching and assessment is formative and cyclical, with resources collected and lessons planned according to outcomes and analysis of texts in previous lessons. Needs analysis is supported by teachers' understandings of the needs of the learners.

Underlying all the strategies they mentioned, teachers continually aim for independent learning because of their limited time with students. This independence is gained primarily through raising students' understanding of pragmatics and sociopragmatics, and by providing them with skills related to their specific needs. Such skills include strategies to ensure effective communication and politeness, and conflict avoidance and resolution. Students indicated that this understanding and consequent awareness was the most valued thing that their teachers had given them. Teachers identified the strategies outlined below:

- Pragmatic input and analysis through:
 - analysing language models from the workplace;
 - following a genre-based teaching cycle;
 - using explicit linguistic terms, depending on student ability to deal with these.
- Sociopragmatic input and analysis used to:
 - point out expectations in work contexts (social and work-related) in Australia;
 - discuss students' experiences and observations of the Australian workplace which differ from their home country;
 - raise understanding that differences exist and that adjustments might be needed.
- Strategy development for independent and ongoing learning including:
 - giving students strategies to practise and asking them to report back at a subsequent teaching session;

- giving useful and appropriate phrases and suggestions to deal with communication needs, for example having some ready conversation openers and topics; and to deal with conflict situations, for example giving people permission to tell the student if they are offended.
- Building personal and social knowledge by:
 - examining workplace newsletters and other material for information about others which could be used in conversations;
 - assisting students to publish information about themselves in workplace and other relevant material, that is, giving others permission and knowledge to talk informally with them;
 - helping students to recognise that it is critical to have something relevant to talk about in order to instigate or participate in conversation.
- Skill-getting through:
 - analyses of student and student-relevant workplace texts, focusing on form, accuracy, intonation and pronunciation.

One of the aims of this project was to investigate the place of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in the teaching of casual conversation. Teachers naturally commented on the relevance of speaking and listening to the teaching of casual conversation or informal work talk but they also acknowledged the role of reading and writing. Through the use of written texts, for example sample dialogues, workplace texts and professional articles, teachers can develop students' skills and understandings about casual conversation. The teaching of informal work talk arises incidentally according to need and is integrated with other needs as they arise.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of the teaching of casual conversation in workplace English courses the project proposes a broader typology for informal work talk, of which casual conversation is one category.

It is clear that teachers aim towards successful participation of students in workplace communication and tasks. They do this through awareness raising and the use of pragmatics, systemic functional linguistics and genres to build up understandings of work difficulties and work needs.

The students reported that the raising of their awareness and their understanding of aspects of pragmatics and sociopragmatics was the most important help that their teachers had given them, enabling them to continue to observe, learn and improve independently. Other specific help, such as individual pronunciation, phrase and strategy help was also valued.

The project led to an important clarification of casual conversation and the introduction of the concept of informal work talk which is now available for further more focused explorations. Immediate implications for the raising of informal work talk as a phenomenon in the workplace are that:

- the concept needs further clarification and testing for validity. This can initially be done with teachers in professional development activities;
- workplace competency statements need examining and adjusting to include skills in informal work talk;
- teachers may need professional development in understanding the nature of informal work talk and the implications for their teaching.

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2 The role of chat in negotiating a problematic spoken exchange

Ruth Wirth

Background

At the time of the NCELTR project I was teaching a group of students who were working in the public sector in New South Wales. They were enrolled in an accredited course within the NSW AMES Workplace Communication Short Course Training Framework III. The course was *Advanced Communication Skills for Negotiation*. The students were all assessed at ASLPR 2+ and had already covered some of the language features, skills and strategies needed for successful negotiation.

For the NCELTR project I decided to focus on chat as a strategy in negotiating problematic spoken exchanges. I hoped that this would enable the students to achieve one of the competencies in the course: *Can negotiate a complex or problematic spoken exchange*.

I developed the following teaching sequence on the role of casual conversation in developing interpersonal relationships. I was particularly concerned with the role of chat in assisting in successful negotiations.

Sequence of activities

Activity 1 Discussing segments of conversation

I explained and discussed the chat and chunk segments of casual conversation with particular emphasis on:

- the differences between the chat and chunk segments (in chat there is no generic structure, no real stages);
- the function of chat in exploring attitudes and values;
- the motivation of chat as purely interpersonal.

Activity 2 Identifying the phases of an interaction

I presented the following scenario and model dialogue and identified the purpose of each phase of the interaction.

Scenario

Maria is currently completing a Skillmax course in Effective Spoken Skills. She has been released from work to attend the course during working hours. Having gained benefits from this course, she would now like to attend a further course on report writing. Susan, her supervisor is short-staffed and is finding it difficult to meet deadlines when staff are absent during work time.

M: <i>Hello, Susan. How are things? Cold today, isn't it? If you're not too busy, I'd like to have a quick word with you?</i>	Chat used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish empathy • give the other person the chance to tune in
S: <i>Well, I'm a bit busy right now. But sure, if it won't take long take a seat.</i>	Response
M: <i>I really appreciate the fact that I've been able to attend this course. It's helped me a great deal. However, I feel my report writing skills need brushing up so I'd like to attend another course, which means being released for one morning a week.</i>	Assertive techniques used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show appreciation • express needs • make a request
S: <i>I'm afraid it can't be done. We're so understaffed. You've already done one course and soon everyone will be off doing these courses.</i>	Active listening – lets Maria finish without interrupting
M: <i>I realise you're under a lot of pressure these days with all the downsizing. However, with all the reports I am now required to write I feel I need to acquire further skills in this area. How would it be if I worked back an hour extra every day to make up the time?</i>	Assertive techniques used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trade-off • offer something cheap to give up and valuable for workplace
S: <i>Well, Maria I've noticed improvement in your skills in meetings. You're obviously putting in a lot of effort.</i>	Showing appreciation of effort
M: <i>Yes and I'm confident that if I did a report writing course, I'd be able to contribute even more. You wouldn't have to waste time correcting my reports.</i>	Giving further examples – putting case in terms of workplace needs
S: <i>Okay then. If you're prepared to make up the time, I have no objection to you attending the course.</i>	Resolution
M: <i>Thanks, Susan. I really appreciate your support. We must find time to have a cup of coffee one day.</i>	Chat used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express thanks • make an offer
S: <i>As soon as I've finished this submission and cleared the decks, I'd love to.</i>	Appropriate expected response

Activity 3 Identifying speech functions

I presented the following worksheet and asked the students to identify the range of speech functions and to match them with the appropriate expected responses.

Speech functions

When we chat with one another we use four speech functions: *command*, *statement*, *offer* and *question*.

- 1 Write the appropriate speech function under the following examples on the left.
- 2 Match the speech functions with the appropriate expected responses on the right.

Have a biscuit!

I'd love some.

Hi, how are things? Could I have a word with you some time today?

Yes, I like it too.

Great view you've got here.

Yes, I've been frightfully busy.

Your garden is looking beautiful.

Could we make it this afternoon?
I'm really busy at the moment.

Gosh, it's been cold lately.

Yes, it's great, isn't it?

I haven't seen you around.
Are you new to the organisation?

Yes, the rain's helped a lot.

Did you see the match last night?

Hasn't it just?

I remember you from the last workshop.

Yes, I started last week. I'm Ruth.

How are you settling in?

Yeah, great, wasn't it?

Did you have any trouble finding the place?

Yes, that's right. I was there.

Haven't seen you around lately.

No, no trouble at all.

Nice apartment you've got here.

Everybody's very helpful.

Would you like some coffee?

Thanks.

Activity 4 Roleplaying

I explained to the students the role of negotiation in social and work-related tasks and how much chat is appropriate in social and work contexts. I then asked them to roleplay the following situations. The roleplays were videoed.

Negotiation tasks

Social negotiations

- 1 You live in an area where there are many dogs. People are always walking their dogs in front of your house. There is one particular dog, a Dalmatian, that always leaves its droppings on your nature strip.
- 2 Your neighbour planted a tree in her garden. It has now grown to such an extent that it is blocking the only water view you have. She is very proud of this tree and frequently admires it. You don't wish to alienate your neighbour as you are on very good terms with her.
- 3 Your neighbour's son is always playing extremely loud music. This usually happens when his parents are not at home. Consequently, his parents are unaware of this and in fact view their son as perfect. You don't want to alienate your neighbours as you are on very good terms with them.

Workplace negotiations

- 1 Rhonda is a teacher at a teaching centre. Jack is the manager. Rhonda is trying to negotiate with Jack to buy some new teaching materials for the centre. She has already obtained a quote of \$100 for the teaching kit (video and book). She has previewed the material and it uses the latest, most innovative research and would be ideal for one of the centre's courses. No new materials have been purchased for some time. Jack is opposed to Rhonda's suggestion as funds are limited.
- 2 Eileen is a computer operator. Henry is the IT manager. Eileen has applied for leave for a holiday in April. She submitted her leave form in February. It is now March and she has not heard whether it has been approved. After making a few enquiries, she is told that April is not a convenient time for her to take leave. She has already booked the flights as she had to make the bookings in advance.
- 3 The workstations in an office are being revamped. However management has not consulted the staff who will be using them. There are fears that this will become an OH&S (occupational health and safety) issue. The staff would like to see certain matters considered, such as space between desks, amount of light, and the number of people working in the space. A delegation of staff members insists on having a meeting with the manager before all contracts are signed.

Activity 5 Assessing the roleplays

The students watched their performances on video. They assessed their own and the other students' performances against the performance criteria in the grid below. I also assessed the students. I asked students to pay particular attention to where chat took place during the negotiation.

Assessment grid								
Competency 5: Can negotiate a complex or problematic spoken exchange.								
Indicate achievement by placing a tick in the appropriate box for each student.								
Performance criteria	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Uses appropriate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greetings • pre-closings • closings • chat 								
Keeps dialogue going by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confirming • clarifying • acknowledging • identifying topic shifts 								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes statements as appropriate • Asks and answers questions as appropriate 								
Offers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggestions • opinions • solutions • feedback 								
Links ideas cohesively								
Uses appropriate vocabulary								

Conclusion

Following this sequence of activities the students were able to discuss what led to successful negotiation and how much chat was necessary to reach a favourable result.

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SECTION FOUR

Teaching casual conversation at a distance

1 *Casual conversation by distance*

Jane Graham

2 *Teaching casual conversation at a distance: The challenges*

Linley Joomjaroen

Introduction

Many aspects of language learning can be addressed equitably through distance education. However, when it comes to learning casual conversation, students who are learning English as a second language by distance are disadvantaged. . . In order to practise casual conversation, students need the opportunity to participate in conversation where control of the interaction is equal, where the power relationship between the interactants is equal.

(Linley Joomjaroen)

The AMEP Distance Learning Program caters for ESL learners who are not able to attend classes. This may be because they are on shift work, have family commitments or live in a remote location. The students are provided with course materials entitled *It's over to you* which include books and cassettes. The course has three levels: beginner, post-beginner and intermediate. The units of work are based on situations in community and work contexts.

When students enrol in the program a teacher is allocated to them. They have telephone contact with their teachers once every two weeks. The two papers in this section explore the use of the telephone in developing the conversation skills of distance students and the role of the teacher in these interactions.

Jane Graham is a very experienced Distance Learning teacher in NSW AMES. She has written a range of distance learning and classroom resources. Jane's paper focuses on the role of the teacher as interactant in telephone conversations with students. She is interested in examining the role of the teacher as information seeker which often means that conversations with students become interrogations. Through transcriptions of three telephone calls she investigated the type of casual conversations students in the Distance Learning Program have with their teacher. As part of her research she experimented with strategies through which the conversations could become more interactive.

Linley Joomjaroen is the Coordinator of the Distance Learning Program in English Language and Literacy Services in South Australia. In her paper Linley investigates the use of the telephone to provide more opportunities for distance learning students to practise conversation skills. She describes the use of audioconferencing which enables the teacher to work with small groups of students. For her research project Linley selected a group of four female students with mixed learning experiences. She transcribed three one-hour audioconferencing sessions with this group. The transcripts allowed her to examine in detail the role of the teacher in developing discourse with distance learning students. They also allowed her to closely look at various aspects of student language, such as how they dealt with longer segments of conversation and with communication breakdowns, and how they gave feedback.

1 Casual conversation by distance

Jane Graham

Background

Students in the NSW AMES Distance Learning Program learn English via written materials and through telephone contact with their teachers. When a student enters the program they are allocated to a teacher who sends the appropriate course books. The teacher generally contacts the student once every two weeks for a telephone lesson of about thirty minutes. The telephone lesson follows this sequence:

- the student checks any areas where he/she has had problems;
- the teacher checks that the student has understood the work in the course books;
- the student practises the language he/she has learned.

Since the interaction with the student is one-to-one, a close relationship develops between the teacher and the student. The teacher often becomes familiar with the student's life, problems and sometimes there is contact with other family members. Consequently some part of the telephone call is involved with the development of an interpersonal relationship and so casual conversation becomes a very important component of the telephone lesson.

When I joined the NCELTR project, I was interested in focusing on the role of the teacher as interactant in this situation. It seemed to me that the teacher is the information seeker and as a consequence the conversation becomes an interrogation of the student. The teacher also has the power in the relationship and the student is often reluctant to take on the role of questioner, although occasionally there are students who are not intimidated by the role of the teacher and are keen to find out about the teacher's lifestyle and interests.

In my research I wanted to investigate the type of casual conversations which students in the Distance Learning Program have with their teachers. I wanted to experiment with strategies which would encourage more interaction in the conversations, such as disclosing information about myself and trying to avoid the serial question/answer moves.

The students

I recorded three telephone calls with three different students and then transcribed the sections containing casual conversation.

The profiles of the three students, at the time of the project, are outlined below.

Background	Julie	Iba	Helen
Country of origin	Sudan	Sulawesi, Indonesia	China
Current study	CSWE I	CSWE I	CSWE III
Time in Australia	2 years	18 months	2 years
Where lives	south western Sydney	south coast, NSW	
Lives with...	her family	her Australian husband and four children	her children and looks after her grandson
Language assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her work is consistently good, with exercises from the course books well done • confident with telephone lessons and able to understand most of what the teacher says • able to ask for clarification • when responding to questions, she is not very forthcoming • the only time she offered additional information was to advise the teacher not to travel to Egypt as it was unsafe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initially completely lacked confidence and was very reluctant to speak at all, often saying that her husband laughed at her English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written English developed very well but little progress made with spoken English
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little contact with Sudanese community 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retired gynaecologist • no contact with English speakers in the community

Talking with Julie

The following conversation developed as we were discussing Julie's weekend.

Teacher: *How are you today?*
 Julie: *Fine thanks.*
 Teacher: *Did you have a nice weekend?*
 Julie: *Yes.*
 Teacher: *Yeah?*
 Julie: *Good.*
 Teacher: *Yeah? PAUSE What did you do?*
 Julie: *Today?*
 Teacher: *On the weekend.*
 Julie: *We go to church. After that we go to park.*
 Teacher: *Which park did you go to?*
 Julie: *Chipping Norton.*
 Teacher: *Chipping Norton?*
 Julie: *Yeah near the lake.*
 Teacher: *Near the lake?*
 Julie: *Yes in Chipping Norton.*
 Teacher: *What, is it a large lake?*
 Julie: *Not very large.*
 Teacher: *Hmm I'm just trying to think. Where's Chipping Norton?*
 Julie: *Near Liverpool.*
 Teacher: *Ah it's up around there. Is it near the river?*
 Julie: *Yes.*
 Teacher: *And it's a nice park, is it?*
 Julie: *Yes.*
 Teacher: *What did you go with a group of friends or just your family?*
 Julie: *No no with my family.*
 Teacher: *It was beautiful weather yesterday, wasn't it?*
 Julie: *Yes good.*
 Teacher: *Just delightful.*

This conversation was quite difficult to maintain as Julie only responded to my questions with the most simple responses. I attempted to give feedback in the hope that she would disclose more about her weekend but she did not offer any additional information. This strategy only resulted in a very short response:

Teacher: *Did you have a nice weekend?*
 Julie: *Yes.*
 Teacher: *Yeah?*
 Julie: *Good.*

In another instance I asked for clarification to promote more interaction but this also resulted in only a limited response:

Teacher: *Which park did you go to?*

Julie: *Chipping Norton.*

Teacher: *Chipping Norton?*

Julie: *Yeah near the lake.*

Talking with Iba

This conversation developed as Iba and I were discussing some pages from the Distance Learning Program magazine.

Teacher: *Cos we have a lot here. But it's like the stars.*

Iba: *Yes.*

Teacher: *In the magazines. Have you seen those?*

Iba: *Yes.*

Teacher: *Yeah. Where they talk about the fortune telling about the stars.*

Iba: *Oh yes. Sign star.*

Teacher: *Yeah yeah. Do you know what yours is?*

Iba: *Oh yes.*

Teacher: *Which one?*

Iba: *Oh oh Pisces?*

Teacher: *Pisces.*

Iba: *Pisces. Yes.*

Teacher: *You're the fish.*

Iba: *Yes.*

Teacher: *I'm Scorpio. I'm very sexy.*

Iba: *LAUGHS Oh really?*

Teacher: *No.*

Iba: *Is true?*

Teacher: *No but the star sign says I am.*

Iba: *That's right. Yeah.*

Teacher: *What do they say about Pisces?*

Iba: *Me?*

Teacher: *Yeah.*

Iba: *Ah, I'm lazy lady.*

Teacher: *Are you? Is that right? And is this true?*

Iba: *Sometimes.*

Teacher: *Ahh.*

Iba: *Yes. When I'm talking to my husband, I say 'yeah you know I'm lazy lady' and he say 'No no you're not lazy'. LAUGHS But my husband um doesn't believe that. Don't believe that?*

Teacher: *He doesn't believe in it?*
 Iba: *Yeah.*
 Teacher: *Oh now, well do you?*
 Iba: *But sometimes true.*
 Teacher: *Do you think so?*
 Iba: *Yeah I think yeah.*

The beginning of this conversation consisted primarily of question and answer exchanges with me posing all the questions or initiating all the moves. The shift from the pattern of question and answer only occurred when I disclosed some information about myself while also adding some humour and attempting to shock the student: *I'm Scorpio. I'm very sexy.*

This shift resulted in the interaction following a more natural conversational pattern in which I did not always do the questioning. Some different speech function pairs also occurred, such as statement/acknowledgment as shown in the following table.

Iba: LAUGHS <i>Oh really?</i>	Question
Teacher: <i>No.</i>	Answer
Iba: <i>Is true?</i>	Question
Teacher: <i>No but the star sign says I am.</i>	Statement
Iba: <i>That's right. Yeah.</i>	Acknowledgment
Teacher: <i>What do they say about Pisces?</i>	Question
Iba: <i>Me?</i>	Question – clarifying
Teacher: <i>Yeah.</i>	Answer – confirming
Iba: <i>Ah, I'm lazy lady.</i>	Statement
Teacher: <i>Are you? Is that right? And is this true?</i>	Question – challenging
Iba: <i>Sometimes.</i>	Answer
Teacher: <i>Ahh.</i>	Feedback response
Iba: <i>Yes. When I'm talking to my husband, I say 'yeah you know I'm lazy lady' and he say 'no no. You're not lazy'.</i>	Answer

Talking with Helen

This conversation followed when I asked the student whether she was busy.

Helen: *Tomorrow I go to my family doctor.*
Teacher: *Oh ah.*
Helen: *Now come back at 30 past 12.*
Teacher: *Tomorrow?*
Helen: *Today.*
Teacher: *Oh today.*
Helen: *Come back yes. Wait for you.*
Teacher: *Oh OK. I'm five minutes late. LAUGHS*
Helen: *No. Not late.*
Teacher: *And what did the doctor say?*
Helen: *I take some medicine. I have high blood pressure.*
Teacher: *Oh right. Ah ah.*
Helen: *And and ah osteoporosis.*
Teacher: *Oh really?*
Helen: *Take some Catrick.*
Teacher: *Mm.*
Helen: *Two medicines.*
Teacher: *Right. Is it getting worse?*
Helen: *Not good.*
Teacher: *Ahh. And what about the Chinese medicine? Is that helping?*
Helen: *Chinese medicine?*
Teacher: *Yes. You took that before.*
Helen: *Yes...*
Teacher: *I've got a friend. Well my mother's friend who belongs to the Arthritis Association.*
Helen: *Oh.*
Teacher: *And she said there's new medication.*
Helen: *Oh.*
Teacher: *Yeah. Have you got that?*
Helen: *My family doctor said he may go to apply good medicine.*
Teacher: *Mmm mm. Is it a new one?*
Helen: *They have a new one. Not only Catrick.*
Teacher: *Not on what?*
Helen: *Not Catrick. Now I use the Catrick. He shall give me new medicine next time.*
Teacher: *Oh good. Oh great. Yeah I've heard it's very successful.*
Helen: *Oh.*
Teacher: *Mm. So maybe you'll be in luck.*
Helen: *I can wait good medicine.*
Teacher: *Yes it's important.*

As Helen was keen to report what had happened at the doctor's, this conversation does not only contain short question and answer moves. However, the conversation does not flow smoothly as there are frequent breakdowns in communication which, while they are eventually rectified, interfere with a naturally flowing casual conversation. The first misunderstanding occurred with the following moves.

Helen:	<i>Tomorrow I go to my family doctor.</i>	Statement
Teacher:	<i>Oh ah.</i>	Feedback response
Helen:	<i>Now come back at 30 past 12.</i>	Statement
Teacher:	<i>Tomorrow?</i>	Question – checking
Helen:	<i>Today.</i>	Statement – correcting
Teacher:	<i>Oh today.</i>	Statement – confirming
Helen:	<i>Come back yes. Wait for you.</i>	Statement
Teacher:	<i>Oh OK. I'm five minutes late. LAUGHS</i>	Statement
Helen:	<i>No. Not late.</i>	Statement – countering

Since there was some confusion over the day of the appointment the exchanges were often confirming, checking, correcting and countering what the other person said.

In an attempt to avoid more question and answer moves, I gave Helen some information which I thought would be of interest to her. I hoped that this would result in her acknowledging the information and adding some of her own. However, this did not occur and I only gained information after asking a direct question as can be seen from the following extract.

- Teacher: *I've got a friend. Well my mother's friend who belongs to the Arthritis Association.*
- Helen: *Oh.*
- Teacher: *And she said there's new medication.*
- Helen: *Oh.*
- Teacher: *Yeah. Have you got that?*
- Helen: *My family doctor said he may go to apply good medicine.*

Conclusion

The recordings confirmed my belief that the teacher does dominate the telephone conversations with students and that question/answer moves predominate. My attempts at providing feedback or disclosing information, in the hope that the student would give more information, were not successful in shifting the conversation into a different pattern of moves.

The most successful attempt at moving towards more natural conversation was with Iba who, in response to my joke, was able to ask questions and disclose more about herself. However, this may only have worked because Iba is married to an Australian and is therefore probably more familiar with this joking banter.

Since the techniques of giving feedback and disclosing information about myself to elicit further responses was not successful with all the students, I assume that a more structured approach is necessary. Teachers need to give students structured tasks so that

they can become aware of the features of casual conversation and can use these features to participate more actively in casual conversation.

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2 Teaching casual conversation at a distance: The challenges

Linley Joomjaroen

Background

Distance education can equitably address many aspects of language learning. However, when it comes to learning casual conversation, students who are learning English as a second language by distance are disadvantaged. Whether studying by distance is from choice or necessity, the students are usually isolated from English speakers. They do not have the advantages of the classroom to learn and practise in groups or to participate in associated social conversations. Whilst a few distance learning students work and some even live in English-speaking domestic situations, the majority are extremely isolated. It is common for the teacher to be the only person the student speaks with in English.

In order to practise casual conversation, students need the opportunity to participate in conversation where control of the interaction is equal, where the power relationship between the interactants is equal. This is more likely to occur in conversations between students than in one-to-one interactions with the teacher. This is why it is important for distance learning teachers to examine how they teach casual conversation and to participate in the debate about the explicit teaching of casual conversation.

The course material

We are fortunate in the Adult Migrant English Program to have quality distance learning course materials. The materials *It's over to you* (IOTY) have three language levels. They are continuously being improved according to the latest methodological developments. Students learn to evaluate their progress through the *Your progress* sections of the materials. Through the *Telephone your teacher* components in each unit teachers encourage students to negotiate their learning.

The materials include the teaching of casual conversation at each language level. In Stage 1 Book 1 students use fully scripted dialogues and then progress to roleplays. In Stage 3 they have opportunities for free flowing discussions. At the higher levels they are also able to discuss their language learning progress, including aspects of casual conversation, with their teachers.

Audioconferencing

For a number of years in South Australia, the teachers in the Distance Learning Program have trialed the use of technology to provide more opportunities for distance learning students to practise speaking. Trials began with videoconferencing but it was soon found that teleconferencing (audioconferencing) was considerably more convenient. Students were able to participate from their own homes and their lives were minimally disrupted. They could still attend to their young children and there were no transport difficulties. Audioconferencing meets some of the student needs that

are not addressed through the IOTY materials. However, it requires intense concentration because of the technology, and visual clues to communication are not available so more subtle judgements are necessary.

In some trials we experimented with participants actually meeting face-to-face between audioconferencing sessions. This however proved to be counter-productive because it highlighted some social differences, particularly racial differences, which are less apparent on the telephone. Isolated students have often not dealt with multicultural issues which arise in classrooms. In fact some are living in particularly racist segments of society. On the phone we can imagine the faces more to our liking. If, as we experienced, a student chooses to believe that Eritrea is in Central Europe, it may be counter-productive, in the early stages of an audioconferencing program to dispute this. It is important to begin the group with a positive outlook. We also found that it was not necessarily a good idea to distribute photographs of participants in the early stages of a program.

At the beginning of each term we would select an appropriate teacher for a group of students. The teacher would then arrange three to five one-hour audioconferencing sessions during that term for the group at a time convenient for all the students. Students received information and an introductory letter which included tips for successful audioconferencing. Each audioconferencing group, like each class, is unique and the intensity of the sessions presents different challenges.

The most successful audioconferencing sessions were with Stage 3 all female groups who were working on the same IOTY course book. It is the successes of one of these groups that I would like to present in this paper.

Content of audioconferencing sessions

Initially most groups participated in getting-to-know-you exercises using guided questions. We quickly realised that this needed to be done in pairs so that more natural answering and feedback could take place. While pairs were conversing, the other participants were able to listen for information about the speakers and could use the speakers as models. In later sessions students were able to listen critically to each other and to analyse language features. In these authentic chat sessions pairs of students had to chat until they found something in common. These sessions were extremely effective and in many cases natural personal interest developed.

The Stage 3 Book 4 Unit, *The law and you*, proved to be quite challenging and provided plenty of source material for the audioconference sessions about giving opinions and telling anecdotes.

The following features of casual conversation were the focus of these sessions:

- getting-to-know-you interactions;
- giving feedback;
- giving opinions;
- telling anecdotes.

During the audioconference teachers rarely introduced new content. Teachers would base the conversations on topics from the course books or from specifically prepared materials forwarded to students prior to the audioconferences.

The research group

For the research project I selected a group of four female Stage 3 students with mixed learning experiences. I recorded and transcribed three one-hour audioconferencing sessions. Preparing the tapescripts was very time-consuming but worthwhile as it provided the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of both teacher and student talk.

The following profiles show that although the members of the group had some things in common they would not be likely friends.

Profile 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • older student from European background • very conscientious learner
Profile 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confident student from Middle Eastern background • high levels of formal education
Profile 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thai nurse • retraining • working part-time • overstressed
Profile 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young Nepalese mother • shy • little education • English-speaking home

The teacher's role in audioconferencing

The teacher has many roles in an audioconferencing session. These roles are outlined below.

Preparing for the session

Good preparation for audioconferencing is essential. Time is short and concentration is intense. Prior to the audioconference, the teacher must manage a range of technical and administrative duties such as booking and organising the phones and the link-up and avoiding disturbances.

Selecting the students

Selecting an appropriate group can be quite complex but students working at the same level and on the same material have a common framework. The teacher needs prior knowledge of the students because their lives can provide relevant and interesting subject matter for the sessions. The teacher can then direct conversation to positive aspects of a person's life, as in the exchange below, so that this person is respected by the other participants.

Teacher: *Do you remember some from last time? Ask her about her studies.*

Student: *You must keep going because you are young LAUGHS and you learn more.*

Balancing the session

To be productive, audioconferencing sessions should be a balance between guiding conversation, managing the unpredictable and giving the students as much opportunity as possible to speak in a challenging but comfortable way.

Ensuring comfort

The sessions need to start by informing the students about audioconferencing and ensuring the physical and mental comfort of students.

T: *First I'd like to start by making sure everyone is comfortable and checking everyone's physical situation at the moment.*

S1: *Excuse me. I turn off the heater first, Linley, noisy.*

T: *What's noisy?*

S1: *The heater. It's noisy.*

T: *Do you want to go and turn it off?*

S1: *Yes.*

T: *OK Sujata, are you sitting?*

S2: *Yes and I'm comfortable.*

T: *And how's X?*

S2: *She's fine and she's not at home!*

T: *Oh, excellent, and do you have your books with you? And a pen?*

Practising names

At the beginning of all audioconferences the teacher needs to address each student by name to make sure that all participants pronounce everyone's names correctly. However, as students begin to recognise each other's voices, the use of names becomes more natural.

S1: *Georgeta you come here when you are 74?*

S2: *No LAUGHS I not 74!*

T: *Sujata, not you, Georgeta!*

S1: *Georgeta LAUGHS Georgeta LAUGHS*

S2: *I here now 27.*

S1: *Oh you are 27 Su...ja...ta Sujata.*

S2: *Yes.*

S1: *Young. And Georgeta 75?*

S3: *Yes.*

Intervening

To optimise opportunities for students to practise, the teacher needs to minimise her role but her intervention at times is critical, as shown below.

Example 1

S1: *How long you been doing this course for?*
 S2: *How long I been to Australia?*
 S1: *Yeah.*
 T: *No.*
 S1: *No, the course, you are doing a course?*
 S2: *English course?*
 S1: *No.*
 S2: *Ah nurse.*

Example 2

S: *Yeah the same as nurse but is different because multiskill use multiskill.*
 POOR PRONUNCIATION
 T: *Use what?*
 S: *Use multiskill, different skills.*
 T: *Multiple skills?*
 S: *Yeah, use everything.*

Providing vocabulary

Whilst essentially trying to take a backseat, the teacher may also need to do some modelling. At other times the more competent students can do the modelling and in general it seems to work better when these students go first. As in the classroom, the teacher needs to provide appropriate vocabulary as shown in the following extract.

S: *Last week this happened er in Lebanon, and it was first time, one man he, what can we say? Rae, no with ten-year-old boy he killed him. How to say this? He slept with him and killed him. I don't know.*
 T: *Raped him.*
 S: *Raped him?*
 T: *Mm.*
 S: *Yeah and the mother of the boy asked the president, Lebanon president, to kill him.*
 T: *To?*
 S: *To kill him, the man.*
 T: *Because it's a punishment we don't actually say 'kill'. That's what we use the death penalty for we usually say.*
 S: *In the death penalty... the mother of the victim asked the president to use the death penalty.*

Teaching grammar

Teachers need to deal with grammar in the audioconferencing sessions. When asked, students are often able to readily identify errors such as in this utterance: *How many*

years you work at Lebanon same as nurse? They can often self-correct and this identification of errors can be a sobering activity for many overconfident students.

Correcting pronunciation

Poor pronunciation can be very difficult to manage by distance, particularly if the student is not a particularly responsive and responsible learner. Whilst avoiding repeated interruptions, important opportunities do arise for the teacher to correct pronunciation. For example:

S: *When they say now I can understand like the small towel for face.*
T: *Pardon?*
S: *Small towel for face wash.*
T: CORRECTING PRONUNCIATION *Washer, face washer.*
S: *Face wash, yeah.*
T: *No, face washer.*
S: *Face wash up. Oh, face washer.*
T: *That's it!*
S: *Face washer, they call flannel.*
T: CORRECTING PRONUNCIATION *Flannel.*
S: *Yeah, flannel.*
T: *Fla...nnel.*
S: *Flannel.*

Dealing with miscommunication

As the director of communication, the teacher must be aware of both actual and potential miscommunication because strategic intervention can maintain positive communication. For example:

S1: *You know because I have been working as a nurse eleven years.*
T: *Mm.*
S1: *Yeah and it's hard work.*
T: *Mm.*
S1: *And I was working at yeah cardiology surgical unit and a lot of pressure there.*
T: *Just a minute, I want to check, T, where was she working?*
S2: *She working psychology.*
T: *I don't think so.*
S2: *Sociological?*
T: *Just check.*

Alternatively, the teacher can discuss misunderstandings and strategies for dealing with them during follow-up calls with individuals.

Making the most of the session

Although the teacher essentially chairs the conversation, she needs to ensure that students make full use of the audioconference. The tapescripts provided invaluable data on turn taking. A typical distribution of turns in one hour of active audioconference was:

Teacher: 197
 Student 1: 186
 Student 2: 130
 Student 4: 84

Practising feedback strategies

In developing conversation skills it is essential that the students use feedback regularly. The IOTY materials include activities on giving feedback which the students in the research group had studied previously. However, only one of the students had practised enough to gain any mastery. I emphasised the importance of feedback as shown in the following instructional sequence.

T: *OK. Let's start today with a little bit of a chat in pairs and what I want you to do very carefully is make sure that both people are understanding everything every step of the way, and that the person who is speaking more also checks that the other person can understand. OK?*

Ss: *OK.*

T: *Now, L, because you had to leave early last time you didn't get a chance to catch up with T, as much as I would have liked. You two actually have quite a bit in common so we might start with L and T but I want you to very carefully check that the other person is understanding what you're saying. OK. OK, L?*

S1: *Yes.*

T: *T?*

S2: *Yes.*

T: *Can you chat together and Sujata and I will just listen. OK?*

S1: *So you want us to ask questions like this?*

T: *Like a friendly chat.*

Giving information to students

One of the values in transcribing the audioconferences is being able to examine whether:

- the teacher's language is at an appropriate level;
- the students understand the teacher;
- the overall language is sufficiently complex to be challenging.

The students find it comfortable when the teacher does all the talking. However, analysis of the tapescripts indicated that segments of successful teacher talk occurred when the giving of information to students was limited to between fifty and one hundred words. In the following example, the teacher limits information to eighty-three words before checking understanding.

T: *Look on page thirty-one and what we'll do next is talk about our opinions but not just say the opinion, we have to give a reason for the opinion and from the sendbacks that I've had that's not very well developed yet and that's a very important part of... it's an important part of further study in Australia, but it's also an important part of gaining respect for your opinion. You can't just say something, you have to give a reason for it. OK? Do you understand?*

S1: *Yes I understand.*

T: *T, do you understand?*

S2: *Yes must give reason.*

T: *Yeah, you must give reasons.*

Advising on settlement issues

The distance learning teacher also fulfils the role of settlement adviser. For example, in the following conversation the teacher provides some information about driving.

T: *And Sujata, do you drive?*

S: *Yes I drive, but I don't have a licence yet.*

T: *Well, don't drive.*

S: *I can drive but just, I know how to drive but here you need to... because P [a friend] got the Thailand licence and she has to organise for the exam.*

T: *This is Sujata?*

S: *Because I think rules are very different here good.*

T: *Yeah, yeah.*

S: *Traffic are very bad in Nepal.*

T: *Yeah, but don't drive if you haven't got a licence.*

S: *I don't drive.*

T: *No, it's too dangerous financially. I mean it's dangerous if you have an accident, but it's dangerous if you damage a car and you don't have any insurance cover and so if you really damage somebody, if you hurt somebody you have a problem for a very long time... so it's a really serious thing, driving without a licence and I think in a lot of countries it's not serious but in Australia it is.*

S: *In Nepal also you can run away.*

Discussing learning difficulties

The students were at a high enough level of English to be able to discuss some of the difficulties they had with learning English, as the following two examples show.

Example 1

S: *...because they [the patients] use slang words sometimes I don't know the slang words, you know.*

T: *Mm mm.*

S: *Australia slang words because when you work Australia people they use slang words a lot.*

LAUGHS

T: *Give us an example...*

S: *Like a hop...hop to bed.*

Example 2

S: *...and what I do? I just could you pint for me please?*

T: *Could you what?*

S: *Point point.*

T: *Point. LAUGHS*

S: *Then she point I want this I want this. Oh cardigan!*

The role of the teacher in audioconferencing is similar to the classroom teacher. However, the intensity and concentration needed by all participants requires a highly skilled teacher. Such a teacher must be ready to perform with heightened intensity, clarity and sensitivity in order to maximise the learning opportunities for the students.

Student performance of casual conversation

I incorporated a range of features of casual conversation into this particular audioconferencing program. I anticipated that the chat components of casual conversation (Eggins and Slade 1997) would develop naturally from structured chat to more natural chat as participants got to know each other. On the other hand the chunk segments (Eggins and Slade 1997) involving anecdotes and giving opinions would need the teacher's input and practice.

Each audioconference began with a chat session in pairs with students asking and answering personal questions and sharing personal details. Although the research group was only small, the ability to chat, based on observations of students chatting in their first language and personality, was very high.

In general, higher level students (ASLPR speaking 1+ to 2) develop a range of strategies to deal with misunderstandings whether they are distance learning students or students in a classroom. This table shows some examples of the strategies students used in an audioconferencing session.

Immediate repetition of key words	• <i>what, what?</i>
Repetition and rising intonation	• <i>South Australia University? South Australia University?</i>
Recapitulation	• <i>So you are going to do second year...like this?</i>
Checking meaning	• <i>Not as a nurse, you mean?</i>
Clarifying specific vocabulary	• <i>Use what?</i>
Positive acknowledgment	• <i>Yeah, I got it now!</i>

We discussed the reasons for developing clarification skills. It was surprising that the higher level students frequently did not realise that they had not correctly understood other speakers and, even more often, they did not realise that they had not been understood by the other students. They frequently made assumptions about the conversation that were quite incorrect and when asked about their understanding they felt they had understood everything. In contrast, the lower level students tended to be more aware that they had not understood correctly.

Some students persisted more than others and used a range of strategies to ensure that they understood what was being said. In the following interaction between two highly qualified and experienced nurses, following the teacher's intervention, one of the speakers makes a staggering eight attempts to clarify one significant piece of information before finally saying she understands.

T: *Just check.*
 S1: *Cardio.*
 S2: *What can I spell?*
 S1: *Cardiological surgical unit.*
 S2: UNINTELLIGIBLE
 S1: *Cardio surgical unit.*
 S2: UNINTELLIGIBLE
 S1: *Cardiology, yeah? From heart.*
 S2: *Heart? Oh yeah mmm.*
 S1: UNINTELLIGIBLE
 S2: *Cardio?*
 S1: *Cardio C-A-R-D-I-O cardio.*
 S2: *Cardiogram, like a cardiogram?*
 S1: *Cardiosurgery from surgery S for Sam S-U-R-G-R-Y.*
 S2: *About the heart?*
 S1: *Yeah, like open heart, you know?*
 S2: *Oh open heart and when the heart UNINTELLIGIBLE the way not start like a bypass? Like that? Bypass surgery?*
 S1: *Yeah, it's heart surgery.*
 S2: *Understand.*

Isolated students are often not familiar with a range of accents. Many have quite strong accents themselves and they frequently make unpredictable errors and have limited fluency. Therefore it is extremely unlikely that the students are able to catch every word in a conversation. Consequently, it is essential for both participants in a conversation to have clarifying skills, such as the skills in the following exchange.

S1: *Oh, yes, you come from that decora country decore Romania have that.*
 S2: *In Europe.*
 S1: *Romania have decore cow decore in the movie.* LAUGHS
 S2: *Don't know what means.*
 T: *I don't know either.*
 S1: *Decora.*
 S3: *Dracula*
 T: *Oh, Dracula!*
 ALL LAUGH

The strategy of giving feedback to ensure clear communication was covered in an earlier book in the IOTY series. I dealt with this strategy quite explicitly during the audioconferencing sessions and with individual students between audioconferencing sessions. Consequently, it proved to be one of the most significant areas of success.

Chat management

In casual conversations, participants shared the responsibility of chatting. However, in audioconferencing students often expect the teacher to rescue them when conversations dwindle or when misunderstandings occur. The teacher needs to help students with the skills of introducing and developing topics. Through analysis of the transcripts it became obvious that generally the teacher intervened when she wanted to include other speakers or shift topics.

There were times when students communicated effectively without teacher interaction, as in the extract below. In the research data, participants generated up to thirty-two interactions without teacher interaction. And in some cases this could have been extended.

S1: *Oh, er T, where do you work?*
 S2: *I work in Nursing Home.*
 S1: *Nursing Home, what did you do there?*
 S2: *After I study at three months at the multicultural English I went to two year ago I went to study aged care course and I pay money by myself.*
 S1: *What do you have to do there?*
 S2: *I study about the aged older people.*
 S1: *Oh, to look after older people?*
 S2: *Yeah.*
 S1: *That's good.*

S2: *Twenty weeks, I study.*
S1: *Sorry?*
S2: *Twenty weeks twenty week and after that I get the job and now they change you interesting you just you just study one year course... the first time and after that you go to get a job and you come back study again one year and you have certificate.*
S1: *Oh this is just your temporary job?*
S2: *Oh you can get a permanent job.*
S1: *No no no right now.*
S2: *Pardon?*
S1: *Right now you have just got a temporary job?*
S2: *Yes.*
S1: *Now you'll definitely get a permanent job.*
S2: *And how about you?*
S1: *Oh no I just do cleaning job right now.*
S2: *Are you interesting about the older people?*
S1: *Yes.*
S2: *You must go to study at night I think...*

One topic that seemed to arise naturally in many of the audioconference sessions was age. In a classroom I would point out that in Australia it is often culturally insensitive to directly ask a woman her age. However, on the telephone I have been less interventionist as shown in the following exchanges which occurred within the first five minutes of the first audioconference.

Example 1

S1: *Georgeta you come here when you are 74?*
S2: *No LAUGHS I not 74!*

Example 2

S2: *I here now 27.*
S1: *Oh you are 27 Su-ja-ta Sujata.*
S2: *Yes.*
S1: *Young. And Georgeta 75?*

In the most successful chat interactions, each person's comments were quite short, only averaging about ten words with speakers rarely taking the floor. Taking the floor would happen more naturally in face-to-face situations.

Participants used a range of exchange types, but the question/answer type was the most common. For example:

S1: *When you come to Australia?*
S2: *I came here one year ago.*

It is not common in conversations between native speakers for a speaker to ignore the previous speaker's utterance. It is also not common for a speaker's response to show that he/she has not understood the previous speaker. However, such responses are quite common in the language of ESL students, as shown in the following interaction. This very interesting feature is certainly worthy of further study.

S1: *No she wasn't at home. She had security alarm but unfortunately he came from another side. The alarm didn't...*

S2: *Where she live? Where she live?*

S1: *Not this year it was last year.*

One of the most puzzling aspects of reviewing the tapescripts was trying to determine how well the speakers understood each other. Invariably participants said they could understand everything, although it is doubtful that they understood both surface meanings and deeper meanings. Because the content of the conversations was unpredictable it was very difficult to arrange critical listening tasks.

Dealing with chunk segments

Students had already studied and practised the functions of giving and substantiating opinions. The transcripts show the idiosyncratic communication styles of the students which led to the following clichéd lines and memorised opinions, using memorised intonation patterns.

- *I used to help out in my sister's school.*
- *Like W, very safe, I think, more people, more crime.*
- *I think he should get punished.*
- *I was a teenager when I gave birth.*

The students used linguistic devices, such as the underlined expressions below, to regularly modify their opinions.

- *I think must look about his psychology, because his psychology disorder. He abnormal. I think so I don't know LAUGHING NERVOUSLY I think not kill him because he have a problem, you know.*
- *Excuse me, L, in my opinion, Australia, very safe place but if you compare another country like a developed country like Yugoslavia, you know, because I think it's no war. I think it's safe place.*

One student demonstrated confidence in her conversational skills through her willingness to take responsibility for the conversation, to elicit opinions from others and to keep the exchange going. She used the following utterances.

- *Do you agree? What's your opinion?*
- *What if he not psycho?*
- *And what if he knew?*
- *What if he did it again?*
- *So we wait until he kill somebody. LAUGHS Oh my god! What about S, what's your opinion?*

As the students relaxed personal styles started to become more evident. Through analysis of the transcripts, frequently overused and inappropriate terms become apparent. One of the students said *of course* frequently when stating her opinions, another frequently said *so* and *oh my god*, a third frequently repeated her utterances and the fourth relied on rote learnt lines.

Telling anecdotes was a primary focus of the learning material and the major focus for the final audioconference which was a much more content-based, teacher-directed session. Some of the students made significant improvements in their ability to tell an amusing anecdote. The following interaction occurred prior to the explicit teaching of anecdotes.

S: *This young man came to my house and stolen the golf bag.*
T: *Golf clubs?*
S: *Yeah, my husband.*
T: *Was anybody home?*
S: *No, in the shed he came in the back door it not lock and the police find after one week.*
T: *Oh.*
S: *And police return.*
T: *You got them back?*
S: *Yes.*
T: *Oh goodness!*
S: *Police very good.*

During the final session which focused on anecdotes, the same student was able to elaborate a little more, as is shown in her second anecdote below. I collected a number of models to teach anecdotes but some students experienced difficulties with the structure as can be seen in the following anecdote where the student does not provide a sufficient orientation for the listener.

S: *Ah funny thing happen.*
T: *Mm.*
S: *To my husband. My husband told me story.*
T: *Mm.*
S: *Many years ago before he married with me.*
T: *Mmm.*
S: *He forgot his key and he was he break the window.*
T: *Oh.*
S: *Yeah, at the toilet.*
T: *Mm.*
S: *And the police came.*
T: *Good.*
S: *Took him to the police station.*
T: *Couldn't he show it was his own house?*
S: *Yeah, his own house but he stay alone.*

The student did go on to elaborate on this story which proved to be hilarious, once the orientation had been further developed. Through an improved orientation we discovered that the husband had come home late from a dinner party, had had a few too many, the neighbours had called the police and he could not identify himself.

Unfortunately one of the features of distance learning students is their inflexible or unpredictable family circumstances which can interfere with prearranged appointment times. Two of the students in the research group were unable to participate in the final session on anecdotes. To compensate for this they were offered copies of the tape for listening practice. These tapes could be an invaluable resource for other learners in the future.

Conclusion

The more closely I studied the tapescripts the more apparent it became that there was a disparity of needs and that each student required considerable individual feedback. Individual feedback following the audioconferencing sessions included discussion of the way each individual had handled misunderstandings. In fact one student said that the most important thing she had learnt was to be more conscientious and reflective.

Audioconferencing continues to be an invaluable opportunity for distance learning students to experience controlled practice in dealing with other speakers. Analysis of tapescripts is a fascinating and revealing strategy for reflective teachers.

Although communication by email and other online methods currently relies on typing and print skills, many such communication strategies are similar to those used in casual conversation. Emails require more explicit knowledge about how something is said, particularly in relation to verb tenses, abbreviated use of verb parts and contractions. Chatlines and some emails require spontaneity on the part of the communicator. They draw on language skills similar to those of casual conversation but they have the advantage of immediately providing a tapescript for analysis, without the effort of transcribing. This could prove to be a useful learning tool for developing both written and spoken communication skills.

With the rapid progress of technology it is anticipated that online learning could soon supersede audioconferencing and many of the possibilities remain unimaginable. When students have access to suitable computers they will be able to use email, online chat and videoconferencing facilities, and the teaching skills distance learning teachers have developed through audioconferencing will serve them well in this cyberworld.

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SECTION FIVE

Teaching sequences for casual conversation

1 *CALL and casual conversation*

Dorothy Waterhouse

2 *Talking about a film*

Julie Williams

Introduction

In recent years the realisation that casual conversation has an underlying structure has led to more systematic teaching practices. Explicit methodology has focused student attention on how spoken discourse is structured to achieve sociocultural purposes and on the necessary grammatical knowledge students need to participate in spoken interactions.

The two papers in this section are by experienced NSW AMES teachers. They present activity sequences for teaching casual conversation which adopt an explicit approach to teaching discourse structure and language features.

Dorothy Waterhouse presents a unit of work for intermediate students on tourist attractions around Sydney. She uses a computer program and the Internet to give students opportunities to develop vocabulary and to prepare for extended texts. The unit integrates a range of written and spoken text types and includes guided casual conversation practice.

Finding that her intermediate level class was interested in movies, Julie Williams developed a teaching sequence which enables students to talk about films. By talking about films, students learn to introduce a topic and practise a chunk segment in casual conversation.

1 CALL and casual conversation

Dorothy Waterhouse

Background

As part of the NCELTR project I decided to design a unit of work for teaching casual conversation using a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) program and the Internet. The unit, *Discovering Sydney*, is for intermediate level students and although it focuses on Sydney, it could easily be modified for other cities. The unit integrates a range of written and spoken text types as outlined in the following table.

Written texts	Spoken texts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript of oral presentation • Information texts – brochure, <i>Click into English</i> and the Internet • Report – places of interest in Sydney • Tables to organise information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral presentation • Complex spoken exchange • Casual conversation

The aims of the unit were to:

- research one of Sydney’s attractions;
- prepare a presentation of this attraction;
- write a report about the attraction.

Preparation

Computer resources

Before beginning the unit make sure you have access to:

- a computer for each student attached to a printer, the program *Click into English* loaded on the computer, and access to the Internet;
- a computer for the teacher connected to a projector.

Teaching resources

Before beginning the unit:

- write a model report at post-beginner level and put it on an overhead transparency;
- prepare a worksheet for an Internet search to assist students to organise information (see below);
- prepare a blank map of Sydney for students to insert places of interest;
- collect a class set of tourist brochures, for example *Great attractions of Sydney*;
- collect at least three tourist maps of Sydney;
- collect copies of *Words will travel* video, audiotape and workbook.

Computer skills

To do the unit, the teacher and students need to be able to use a CALL program and the Internet. You might have to do some preliminary work with the students to develop

the necessary computer skills or you could use the unit to develop computer skills in conjunction with the language skills. The skills required for the unit are listed below.

- mouse skills;
- basic wordprocessing skills
- familiarity with *Click into English*;
- familiarity with Windows 95/8/200/NT;
- familiarity with using bookmarks;
- skills in using word documents, navigating and copying pictures from the Internet.

The teacher also needs to be able to demonstrate computer skills using a projector connected to a computer.

Sequence of activities

Activity 1 Revising or teaching report writing

- Show a model of the report at post-beginner level, that is, at Certificate in Spoken and Written English level II.
- Discuss the linguistic features which make a text a report.
- If the students need more work on any aspect of report writing, work through the activities in resources such as *Writing a report* (Graham 1997).

Activity 2 Discussing the aims of the unit

- Discuss the aims of the unit:
 - to research one of Sydney's attractions;
 - to prepare a presentation of an attraction;
 - to write a report about the attraction.
- Explain to the students that they will be building on previous work on report writing so that they will be able to write a more complex report.

Activity 3 Using *Click into English*

- Ask students to open *Click into English* (Intermediate) and to select *Australian cities*.
- Read the model text of a report and revise the text structure and grammar with the students.
- Ask students to complete the following tasks: Vocabulary practice 1 and 2; Ordering sentences; Grammar exercises – present tense; Linking words 1 and 2.

Activity 4 Finding out about tourist attractions in Sydney

- Discuss which tourist attractions the students have visited in Sydney.
- Distribute tourist brochures (for example *Great attractions of Sydney*) and a blank map of Sydney.
- Locate the names of tourist attractions in the brochure and practise their pronunciation.
- Ask the students to work in groups to mark and number the attractions on the blank map.
- Discuss class responses and make corrections.
- Ask students to prepare questions about the attractions and use these questions to prepare a class survey.

Activity 5 Discussing the purpose of casual conversation

- Discuss the purpose of casual conversation and list the students' suggestions on the board.

Activity 6 Listening and comparing conversations

- Play the conversation *Ringling a tradesperson* from *Words will travel* (page 14 of the workbook).
- Discuss the purpose of the exchange.
- Watch the first two scenes of *The Deal* on the *Words will travel* video (Unit 14, page 175 of the workbook) and discuss the purpose of the exchange. (This prepares the students for listening to the conversation, *What will we do this weekend?*)
- Discuss briefly the differences between the two *Words will travel* conversations.

Activity 7 Listening to *What will we do this weekend?*

- Ask the class to listen to the following scripted conversation between three women. Discuss the purpose of the conversation.
- Distribute the transcript and have the students listen again. Ask them to mark the sections where the language changes from the purpose of negotiating what the group will do on the weekend to the next chat segment.
- Discuss together the chat sections and their purposes.
- Ask the class to listen for turn taking and discuss how this is achieved and how the three women are brought back to the purpose of the conversation.

What will we do this weekend?

A: *How about we do something this weekend?*

B: *Sure, any ideas?*

A: *Well, how about a movie?*

C: *That sounds good. Did you have a film in mind?*

A: *Well... they say that the new 007 movie's very good. It's on at Macquarie.*

C: *007? That's an action movie isn't it?*

A: *Um, I think so.*

C: *Well, to be honest, I don't like all that shooting and killing.*

B: *You know you're a real wimp! She really only likes romances.*

C: *Talking about romances did you hear about Mary's new boyfriend!*

A: *Oh no! Don't start on the gossip! Are there any films you'd like to see?*

C: *How about 'Anna and the King'? It's on at Chatswood and I hear it's great!*

B: *Oh no! The review in the paper really bagged it! Maybe we shouldn't see a film.*

A: *It's going to be fine so how about something outdoors?*

C: *Great, any suggestions?*

A: *Well, we could go horse riding?*

B: *You know I can't ride a horse! Did I ever tell you what happened the only time someone persuaded me to try?*

A: *No, what happened?*

B: *Well I had just...*

C: *Stop! Stop! Don't start a story! I've got to get some work done soon so let's decide what we're doing! How about snorkelling?*

C: *Well, to tell you the truth, I've gone snorkelling a few times recently with Bill.*

A: *Oh, have you? And you didn't invite us?*

A/B: LAUGH

C: *OK you two! If we can't agree on movies or outdoors let's do something else. Why don't we just have dinner together somewhere this Saturday?*

A: *Great.*

B: *Good idea, where would you like to go?*

C: *Well I've found a new place called 'Lotus Flower' at Lindfield.*

A: *Hmm, what kind of food?*

C: *They have Asian but if you don't like that we can go somewhere else?*

A/B: *No, no. LAUGH*

A: *Sounds great, what time will we go? Sevenish?*

C: *Great. How about I drive? OK?*

A/B: *Sure.*

Activity 8 Conducting a class survey

- Lead a group discussion on how gender and cultural differences might change this kind of conversation.
- Have the students survey each other about who makes the social arrangements in their family/country.

Activity 9 Practising the conversation

- Ask the students to work in groups of three and read through the conversation *What will we do this weekend?*, concentrating on stress, intonation and pauses.

Activity 10 Completing a cloze conversation

- Ask the students to select a restaurant, choose a film from the newspaper and think of an outdoor activity they might enjoy.
- Ask groups of three to adapt the cloze conversation below to reflect their personal style, the dynamics of the group, ie all male, mixed, all female.
- Have the groups roleplay their conversations.

Cloze conversation – What will we do this weekend?

A: *How about we do something this weekend?*

B: *Sure, any ideas?*

A: *Well, how about a movie?*

C: *That sounds good. Did you have a film in mind?*

A: *Well... they say that _____'s very good. It's on at Macquarie.*

C: *_____? That's _____ isn't it?*

A: *Um, I think so.*

C: *Well, to be honest, I don't like _____ very much.*
 A: *Are there any films you'd like to see?*
 C: *How about _____? It's on at _____ and I hear it's great!*
 B: *No! The review in the paper really bagged it! Maybe we shouldn't see a film.*
 A: *It's going to be fine so how about something outdoors?*
 C: *Great, any suggestions?*
 A: *Well, we could go _____?*
 B: *Well to tell you the truth I've gone _____ a few times lately with _____.*
 A: *Oh, have you? And you didn't invite us?*
 A/B: LAUGH
 C: *OK you two! If we can't agree on movies or outdoors let's do something else. Why don't we just have dinner together somewhere this Saturday?*
 A: *Great.*
 B: *Good idea, where would you like to go?*
 C: *Well I've found a new place called _____ at _____.*
 A: *Hmm, what kind of food?*
 C: *They serve _____ but if you don't like _____ we can go somewhere else?*
 A/B: *No, no.* LAUGH
 A: *Sounds great, what time will we go? _____ ish?*
 C: *Great. How about I drive? OK?*
 A/B: *Sure.*

Activity 11 Conducting an Internet search

In this activity, the task for students is to research online a place of interest for a class excursion. The students have to prepare a written report and a group oral presentation that will persuade the class to choose their place of interest for the class excursion.

- Divide the class into four groups and distribute the worksheet below.
- Draw a ballot for the web sites (for example, the Powerhouse Museum, Centennial Park, the Sydney Aquarium and Taronga Zoo).
- Ask students to discuss the task in their groups.
- Ask the students to complete the worksheet by exploring the web site.
- Ask the students to copy and save any useful text or any interesting pictures to a Word document.
- When students have completed the worksheet and have some information copied in a Word document, the groups compare their work.
- Ask the groups to construct a report using Word. They need to plan their reports and to use their worksheets and the information in their Word document.
- Ask the groups to insert the pictures they have copied from the Internet. They then check their reports carefully and show them to you.

<p>Internet search</p> <p>Name of attraction: _____</p> <p>Web address: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>Opening times: _____</p> <p>Entrance fee: Family: _____ Adult: _____ Child: _____ Concession: _____</p> <p>Location in Sydney: (If you find a map please save it and insert it in this part of your report when you type it in Word)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Transport: _____</p> <p>What can you see there? (If you find any pictures you like, save them and insert them in your report.)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>What can you do there? (If you find any pictures you like, save them and insert them in your report.)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>What facilities are there for buying or cooking food? _____</p> <p>Any other interesting information: _____</p> <p>_____</p>
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Activity 12 Giving a presentation

- Ask each group to give a presentation that will persuade the class to choose a particular place for an excursion. Have groups put a picture or a map on an OHT for their presentation.
- After listening to the presentations, have the students vote for the place they would like to visit the most.

Activity 13 Organising an excursion

- Ask the students to research more details about the destination voted the best by the class by using the Internet, for example bus and train timetables and costs.
- Ask the students to contact this destination about wet weather options, activities and so on.
- Have an excursion to the destination.

Findings

Activities 5 to 10 are based on an activity in Molinsky and Bliss (1989) that students had told me was enjoyable, relevant and useful. I noted the students' use of structures in class, on excursions and in making weekend leisure arrangements with classmates.

I used a group project approach and encouraged the students to take control of their research. They showed great commitment, sharing the work, using the teaching centre's facilities (phones, faxes, photocopiers, OHTs) confidently, and using local resources, such as the local library next to the teaching centre and the tourist information centre opposite.

On the day of the presentation, the groups had allocated each member an active role in the presentation. The atmosphere was a little like an election campaign with the groups using slogans and a variety of other techniques to get the audience's support for their group's destination.

Conclusion

Students are becoming more interested in using computers as part of their language learning. It is important that teachers are able to integrate commercial language learning programs and the use of the Internet into teaching sequences.

References

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2 Talking about a film

Julie Williams

Background

At the time of the NCELTR project I was teaching an intermediate level class of newly arrived migrants. The class was studying a mixed focus competency-based syllabus within the curriculum framework of the NSW AMES Certificate III in Spoken and Written English. A needs analysis had revealed a range of learner needs and consequently I had the class working on competencies selected from the Community Access and Further Study syllabus strands of the curriculum.

The students had been assessed at an intermediate level, that is, between ASLPR (Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating) 1 and 3. They came from a variety of language backgrounds including Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Arabic, Turkish and Japanese. Some of the more proficient students were keen movie goers while others watched television movies.

As the class had indicated an interest in movies, I decided to focus on movies as a topic of casual conversation. Talking about a film enables the second language learner to introduce a topic and practise a chunk segment in casual conversation. It provides an opportunity for the student to 'hold the floor for an extended period' (Cornish and Lukin 1998:4).

Sequence of activities

I recorded and transcribed a conversation with a thirteen-year-old about a film. I developed a teaching sequence around this conversation.

<p>Talking about a film</p> <p>A: <i>Last week I saw a film called 'Good Will Hunting'. It was pretty good. It starred Robin Williams in it. It was...um... I like Robin Williams. He's a very funny actor.</i></p> <p>B: <i>Yeah, so do I.</i></p> <p>A: <i>And um as I said the thing is the movie was 'Good Will Hunting'. It was a good movie because many of the actors were able to humourise... you know... make the movie...</i></p> <p>B: <i>Ah, huh.</i></p> <p>A: <i>...funny but keep the seriousness of it at the same time... and I found that... well, at least I think, it'd be a very hard thing for an actor.</i></p> <p>B: <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>A: <i>Because Robin Williams especially because he's naturally a comedian and it'd be hard to sort of...</i></p> <p>B: <i>Is that why you liked the film?</i></p> <p>A: <i>Yeah. I liked it because it had a good storyline and because it was humorous and serious as well. It had seriousness in it, as well.</i></p>

- B: *So...tell me a bit about the story. Don't tell me about the ending 'cos I haven't seen it yet...so don't spoil it for me.*
- A: *OK. Well, it begins with Will Hunting and his three friends...three friends...and um...well he meets this guy he doesn't like and he sort of bashes him up...and he ends up in court. He was sent to jail and then he was bailed out by this mathematician. This professor of maths...which he thinks, he's a really, really, really smart guy.*
- B: *Ah, huh.*
- A: *I mean like really, really, smart. He's like...like there's the hardest formulas that took like the professors of maths at university...four years to work out...he solved so he's really, really smart at maths...and so he gets lessons...*
- B: *Ah, huh.*
- A: *and ah...that's pretty good...and after that...as part of his parole he needs to go to a shrink.*
- B: *Why does he need parole? What did he do wrong? Does he...*
- A: *Huh? SHOWING FRUSTRATION He bashed up a guy.*
- B: *OK. So is that significant?*
- A: *Yeah. You know...basically it started something big for him.*
- B: *So explain that to me. It seems to be fairly significant in the film.*
- A: *Huh? SHOWING FRUSTRATION He's sent to a shrink. He's sent to a few shrinks and all the shrinks hate him and he plays a few funny jokes on them as well and...*
- B: *Really.*
- A: *Yeah. Anyway he's finally sent to Robin Williams.*
- B: *Yeah...and what happens?*
- A: *In the movie Robin Williams is...in the movie at least, Robin Williams is brought up at exactly the same place as well...which is...I think is South Boston...and um...anyway he goes to the shrink and, you know, they start talking.*
- B: *Ah huh.*
- A: *And, basically. It's quite a good movie and it ends up with them all getting drunk and all that sort of thing...and in the end it's quite a good movie.*
- B: *Alright...so you're saying in the end it's quite a good movie but um...really, what what do they learn from each other? Can you expand on that?*
- A: *Well, he learns to use um...he learns to sort of not be afraid of his intelligence. He learns because he's had past physical abuse and you know, his mother left him orphaned and all that sort of thing and he learns that it's not his fault and he learns to find happiness in what he is and what he does. So, all in all I'd give it about eight out of ten.*
- B: *Thanks for telling me about the film.*
- A: *OK then.*
- B: *Is it a worthwhile film to see? Do you think I'd enjoy it?*
- A: *Yes. Yes. I think you would.*

Activity 1 Listening for general meaning

- I played the recorded segment to the class. The students jotted down any words and phrases they understood. This encouraged the students to listen for general meaning.
- I then established the social context for this kind of conversation.

Activity 2 Identifying the stages

- I distributed a transcript of the conversation and the worksheet below which identified the possible stages involved when talking about movies. The students were already familiar with the concept of stages having previously identified stages in the text type of telling anecdotes.
- In pairs, the students identified and labelled the stages on the transcript. I then asked them to compare their responses with the stages I had identified on an OHT of the transcript.

Talking about a film	
Stages	
Abstract	You signal that you are going to discuss a film. For example, <i>I saw a really good film on the weekend;</i> <i>Have you seen the new Space Wars yet?</i>
Context	You give information about the actors, the characters they play, the genre (comedy, drama, romance, horror, action) and the setting.
Description	You give some details of the story but you don't tell the ending unless the listener wants to know. (You don't want to spoil the film for someone who hasn't seen it.)
Reaction	You describe your reaction to the film and your feelings about it.
Coda	You conclude with some comment or personal reflection on the film. (This stage is optional.)

Activity 3 Identifying language features

The students identified language features in each stage, for example tense markers, modals and linkers. In particular, I pointed out the use of the simple present tense in the Description stage.

Activity 4 Viewing a film

For homework I asked the students to select and view a film on video and, using the following notetaking sheet, to jot down relevant details under the headings. This was a scaffolding device to prepare students for conversation practice in pairs.

Note taking	
Stages	
Film title	_____
Abstract	Signal that you are going to talk about a film.
Context	Introduce the main actors, the characters and the setting. _____ _____ _____
Description	Give a few details about the story. _____ _____ _____
Reaction	Give your reaction to the film and say how you feel about it. (For example, <i>It's a really good movie.</i>) _____ _____ _____
Coda	Finish with a personal comment or reflection. _____ _____ _____

Activity 5 Practising a conversation

The students practised a conversation about movies in pairs or small groups using the notes they had made on the worksheet for homework.

Conclusion

The students easily mastered the Abstract and Description stages of the conversation. However they found the Context, Reaction and Coda stages more difficult. After the first attempt I found it necessary to broaden the students' repertoire for expressing reactions. This was to overcome the tendency of the students to give a flat delivery and to lend some authenticity to their conversations.

Some students were also inclined to put too much detail into the Description stage. They needed to be reminded that the listener is generally more interested in the speaker's reactions and personal comments than on a detailed outline of the story.

