Text: Earl Spencer's speech

/ I stand before you today / (0.8) / the representative / of a family in grief / (1.0)
/ in a country / (.) / in mourning / (1.0)
/ I before a world / (.) / in shock / (2.0)

/ we are all united / (1.0)
/ not only in our desire / to pay our respects / to Diana / (0.8)
/but rather / (.) / in our need / to do so / (1.0)
/ but such was her extraordinary appeal / (0.8)
/ that the tens / of millions / of people / (0.6)
/ taking part in this service / (0.5) / all over the world / (0.7)
/ via television / and radio / (0.7)
/ who never actually met her / (1.0)
/ feel that they too / (.) / lost / someone / (.) / close to them / (0.5)
/ in the early hours / (0.8) / of Sunday morning / (1.4)
/ it is a more remarkable / tribute to Diana / (0.7)
/ than I can ever hope / to offer her / (.) / today / (2.3)

/ Diana was the very essence / (0.7) / of compassion / (0.5)
/ of duty / (0.7) / of style / (.) / of beauty / (1.0)
/ all over the world / (.) / she was a symbol / (.) / of selfless humanity / (1.5)
/ a standard bearer ? (.) / for the rights / (.) / of the truly downtrodden / (1.0)
/ a very British girl / (.) / whose con – who transcended / (.) / nationality / (1.0)
/ someone with a natural nobility / (0.7) / who was classless / (1.0)
/ and who proved / in the last year / (0.5)
/ that she needed / no royal title / (.) / to continue to generate / (.) / her particular
brand / of magic / (2.0)
/ today / (.) / is our chance / to say thank you / (0.5)
/ for the way in which you brightened our lives / (1.0)
/ even though God granted you / (.) / but half a life / (1.0)
/ we will all feel cheated / (.) / always / (0.5)
/ that you were taken from us / so young / (1.0)
/ and yet / we must learn to be grateful / (.) / that you came along at all / (1.0)
/ only now you are gone / (.) / do we truly appreciate / what we are now without / (1.0)
/ and we want you to know / (.5) / that life without you / (.) / is very / (.) / very / (.) / difficult

Extension

1   Earlier when discussing the structure called the 'three-part list' it was
suggested that three as a number seemed an important aspect of folk-
lore. Explore the concept of 'three' in a range of texts, for example,
fairy stories, religious tales and jokes. If you are familiar with more than
one set of cultural traditions, consider whether the number three is
commonly referred to cross-culturally.

2   Although the idea of contrasting structures and three-part lists has been discussed with reference to spoken texts, can you find any evidence that these same structures are used in writing? If so, are they used in particular types of writing – for example, writing that is trying to be interactive rather than monologic?

3   Political speeches are readily available from political party headquarters. Analyse them from the page or, if they are being broadcast on radio or TV, consider the speaker's sense of timing and response to applause.

4   Consider how the audience affects the nature of the speech: for example, examine transcripts of speeches made just for broadcast. These include the Queen's Christmas message and party political broadcasts. Speeches given by authority figures forced into resignation can also be very interesting, mixing the personal with the public voice.

Conversation

The analysis of political speeches is part of a long-standing academic tradition termed 'rhetoric', which goes back to Ancient Greece. In contrast, analysing conversation, particularly the kind we might call 'casual', is a relatively recent enterprise. For one thing, the fleeting and transitory nature of much everyday dialogue has eluded our hitherto clunky pieces of recording equipment: it wasn't *that* long ago that tape recorders were heavyweight pieces of reel-to-reel technology that involved bringing the speakers to the machine instead of vice versa. And positioning speakers round a large machine with external microphones has always been a sure-fire way to kill the art of conversation.

Technical problems aside, there are perhaps further reasons why conversation does not have a long analytical tradition. Historically, it has not been considered as highly skilled as, say, delivering a political speech or composing a poem. We seem to have had the idea that 'chatting' was something anybody could do, whereas performing as an orator or poet was a skill possessed only by an elite few. As a result, conversation as a form has been relatively neglected and its practitioners downgraded.

There is now a growing interest in the analysis of so-called 'ordinary' language use, and contemporary research on everyday dialogues has revealed, as you would expect, considerable complexity in how conversation works: just because most people engage in conversational interactions in their daily lives does *not* mean that what they are doing is easy; it *does* mean that they have learned some complex skills that, as mentioned earlier, they are probably unaware of using.

When looking at conversation as a whole, the idea of complexity can be explored in a number of different ways. For example, as well as managing to collaborate with at least one other speaker on any one occasion to make meaning, speakers engage in different types of behaviour depending on which sub-genre of talk they are engaged in, and depending on whether the conversation is face to face or mediated by an aspect of technology, such as the phone or the computer. You can sense some of these potential differences just by looking back at this page and observing how many different words have been used to refer to types of talk: dialogue, conversation, casual conversation, chat. Some of these variations will be explored in this section. However, you need to realise that one section of a unit can only be a starting point. There is much more to say about talk than space in this book allows.

Activity

Make a list of all the spoken interactions you have been involved in during the past couple of days, then, working with a partner, try to come up with some categories to enable you to group your examples together. There is no set answer for this activity: its aim is to get you thinking about the various dimensions that affect the type of interaction you have, and also to get you to identify those types of interaction you might call 'conversation'.

Think about the following dimensions:

- Is *physical setting* a factor that determines the type of talk you engage in? For example, are there some places where casual conversation seems inappropriate?
- How far does the *purpose* of talk affect the way interactions work? For example, does gossip have a different 'shape' from, say, a service encounter in a shop? What about teaching–learning interactions? Would you call any of these 'conversation'?
- How far do your spoken interactions vary according to *medium*? For example, how would a face-to-face casual conversation with one of your friends compare with a phone conversation with the same person?
- How far does the *relationship between the participants* determine the nature of talk? For example, do you have regular co-conversationalists for informal talk, or can you engage in casual conversation with anyone?
- The origin of the word 'conversation' is the Latin *conversari*, 'keep company with'. To what extent is this idea still at the centre of what we call 'conversation', particularly of the casual type?

'REAL' TALK – WHAT IS IT LIKE?

Later in this unit we will be exploring in some detail the idea of how talk has been represented in fictional writing. For now, though, it's important to realise that because ordinary, real talk has been so little researched, we may have notions in our heads about talk that derive more from our experience of made-up dialogues than our real encounters.

Activity

Below are two face-to-face dialogues from a familiar situation – at the hair-dresser's.

The first dialogue would be called a 'service encounter' or 'service transaction' because it is very goal-oriented (concerned with getting something achieved); the second text is slightly different from this, although in the same setting, because the conversation takes place between two customers, rather than, as in Text 1, customer and stylist.

One of the dialogues is made up, and comes from teaching material aimed at people learning English as a foreign language; the other dialogue is from a real encounter. Can you tell which is which? How do you know?
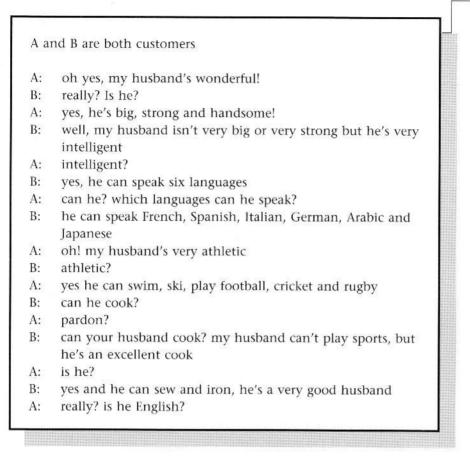
Text: Hairdressing 1

(A = stylist's assistant; B = customer; C = stylist)
* * = overlapping speech

A: do you want to come over here?
B: right, thanks [3 secs] thank you
A: tea or coffee?
B: can I have a tea, please?
A: do you want any sugar?
B: er, no milk or sugar, just black thanks
C: right
B: I hate it when your hair gets just so, you know a bit *long*
C: *yeah*
B: and it's just straggly
C: right
B: it just gets to that in-between *stage*
C: *yeah*
B: doesn't it where you think oh I just can't stand it any more
    [2 secs] I think when it's shorter it tends to, you notice it
    growing more *anyway*
C: *mm*
B: you know it tends to grow all of a sudden

Text: Hairdressing 2

A and B are both customers

A: oh yes, my husband's wonderful!
B: really? Is he?
A: yes, he's big, strong and handsome!
B: well, my husband isn't very big or very strong but he's very intelligent
A: intelligent?
B: yes, he can speak six languages
A: can he? which languages can he speak?
B: he can speak French, Spanish, Italian, German, Arabic and Japanese
A: oh! my husband's very athletic
B: athletic?
A: yes he can swim, ski, play football, cricket and rugby
B: can he cook?
A: pardon?
B: can your husband cook? my husband can't play sports, but he's an excellent cook
A: is he?
B: yes and he can sew and iron, he's a very good husband
A: really? is he English?

CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS

One area of study that has contributed to our understanding of the assumptions underlying conversation came originally from the discipline of logic and philosophy. This is speech act theory, referred to earlier. An academic figure associated with this school was H. P. Grice, who in 1975 formulated a number of maxims by which he claimed speakers operate in a general sense. Grice posited that conversation was essentially a co-operative enterprise where speakers follow certain unspoken rules that are never spelt out but come to be understood and used as part of the process of language acquisition and early socialisation. He called this the **co-operative principle**, and the associated maxims are as follows:

1   maxim of **quality**: speakers try to tell the truth
2   maxim of **quantity**: speakers give the right amount of information
3   maxim of **relevance**: speakers try to stick to the point
4   maxim of **manner**: speakers try to present their material in an orderly fashion.

Robin Lakoff (1975) added three further maxims which she termed the **politeness principle**:

1   Don't impose
2   Give options
3   Make your receiver feel good.

These scholars were not suggesting that we follow the rules above in any simple way; in fact, just as important in their concept of interaction is the idea that we break the rules as well as keep them. Breaking rules, however, proves that rules exist.

Activity

Below are some expressions that are often heard in conversations. How does each of the expressions show participants' awareness of some of the rules above? Can you add any further expressions like this to the list? (Note: there is no commentary on this activity.)

To cut a long story short
I know you're not going to believe this, but . . .
I'll spare you all the grisly details
Correct me if I'm wrong, but . . .
I know I'm going round the houses here, but . . .
What I forgot to say before was that . . .
I'm not saying we have to discuss this right now, but . . .

Breaking the rules, according to Grice, is a marked activity: it tells us that we need to look for reasons why someone has deviated from what is expected.

Grice calls the process of inference that results from rule-breaking behaviour **conversational implicature**. Rather than being an isolated phenomenon, implicature is at the heart of many of our utterances, including all the language we might call 'non-literal', and much of our humour. For example, metaphor regularly expresses something that cannot be literally true; **hyperbole** rests on wild exaggeration of the truth; and **irony** is all about saying the direct opposite of what you mean.

Below is the opening of a telephone conversation between participants who know each other well.

How does this conversation illustrate Grice's maxims? Think about:

◎   the operation of implicature, and its role in humour
◎   the way the speakers use ellipsis. How might Grice's maxim of quantity vary according to how well the speakers know each other?

(Note: there is no commentary on this activity.)

Text: Telephone opening

S1 = male speaker
S2 = female speaker

S1:   hello
S2:   hello
S1:   I've died
S2:   what?
S1:   I've died
S2:   what do you mean?
S1:   I've got my Somerset County Cricket club membership through / its annual report / and under obituaries it says / Mr A Nettles
S2:   oh dear
S1:   yeah / unless there's another one / but seems unlikely
S2:   when did you die?
S1:   well it doesn't say / I died in the last year
S2:   I'm going out / with a ghost
S1:   you are / spooky
S2:   full spectral / er yes / so have you got all your fixtures / for the year?
S1:   yep
S2:   gosh
S1:   yep
S2:   do them early / don't they?
S1:   yeah / got my summer holiday sorted out

SEQUENCING IN CONVERSATION

Another area of study that has revealed something of the skill we all employ in understanding conversational practices has come from socio-logy. An influential figure here was the analyst Harvey Sacks, who is often referred to as the founder of the approach called Conversation Analysis (CA) (see, for example, Jefferson, 1992).

Researchers working in the tradition of CA are interested in how conversation is sequenced: that is, how one element leads to the next and how certain elements can only occur in a particular order. This is termed **adjacency**. For example, a question expects an answer, a greeting calls forth another greeting, a summons may be responded to by an expression of compliance, as follows:

> how are you?
> fine thanks
>
> hello
> hi!
>
> come on Jane, hurry up!
> ok, ok, i'm coming!

This makes conversation appear very simple, but, again, what Sacks and other CA analysts were engaged in was mapping out some of the 'norms' or underlying patterns of conversational routine which are then clearly departed from all the time. For example, the following is a straight-forward request–agreement sequence:

> A: will you post this letter for me, please?
> B: ok

but more often than not, we put other utterances between sequences such as the above, for example:

A: will you post this letter for me, please?
B: has it got a stamp on?
A: no
B: but there's nowhere to buy stamps
A: there's a machine on the side of the box
B: have you got some change?
A: it takes a pound coin, here's one
B: ok

Such intervening utterances are called **insertion sequences** in CA.

Activity

Schegloff, another researcher working within the CA tradition, has proposed the following routine as that which characterises telephone openings in English-speaking cultures:

summons–answer
identification–recognition
greeting–greeting
initial enquiries

before first topic introduction, usually the responsibility of the caller (Schegloff, 1986).

◎ **summons–answer:** the ring of the telephone is the summons, and when the called person picks up the receiver, this counts as the answer.
◎ **identification–recognition:** in English-speaking cultures, the called person is the first to speak. The fact that they do so allows their voice to be recognised by the caller.
◎ **greeting–greeting:** both speakers exchange greetings, such as 'hello', 'hi', good morning', etc. Speakers don't have to exchange exactly the same words, of course.
◎ **initial enquiries:** these are about participants' health, general state of things, etc.

Read through the telephone opening below, which is between a student and his/her tutor. The student has phoned the tutor to get some help with an assignment. The tutor has just returned from America.

Which parts of Schegloff's model can you identify, and how do they work? (For commentary on this activity, see p. 307.)