

# Conversational Style

Работу выполнила  
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The aim of this section is to analyse variations that occur in natural spontaneous, everyday speech. It is the most commonly used type of intonational style and consequently a variety which will be more familiar to the vast majority of English-speaking people than any other. That is why it is called familiar. Phonetic stylists call it conversation. Some scholars also call it informal, because this style occurs mainly in informal external and internal relationships in the speech of relatives, friends, well-acquainted people and so on.



**Conversations** are one of the most complex forms of human behaviour. One starts to examine in depth even apparently trivial conversations, the complexity soon becomes obvious and, as with most other aspects of language study, new dimensions to the study appear.



Clearly, a **conversation** consist of more than verbal language. **Communication**, to be effective, relies on other features than language and great deal on that is not said. A measure of common understanding has to exist between speakers.

The verbal part of the communication plays a very important role and has its own systems. The full effect is achieved and meaning are exchanged even with strangers and about unfamiliar topics.

In a **conversation** we do not just listen to words, we derive the meaning consciously or unconsciously from a number of other communicative systems and it could be that a lift of an eyebrow, a twitch at the side of mouth, or a silence tell us more than a dozen sentences.

Another complexity in carrying out researches in this type of speech lies in the procedural difficulties of obtaining reliable data. It is well-known that most people behave differently if they are aware of being tape-recorded, but unfortunately linguists cannot analyse everyday language without making tape recording first.





Spontaneous,  
colloquial, informal  
conversations  
display certain  
common linguistic  
characteristics.

# Spontaneous Conversations

The speakers rely very much upon the extralinguistic factors context, kinesics, etc. This manifests itself in “incompleteness” of many utterances as the context makes it clear what was meant by the speaker, thus making redundant its vocal expression:

Jane: *Well... maybe, but... take responsibility; the... the... you don't need as great a sense of responsibility for you... your kind of work as you do in teaching – all those children, all those parents...*

Brenda: *No, but you do have your... your... your colleagues at work – you have a certain amount of responsibility to them.*

# Spontaneous Conversations

Sometimes the speakers even abrupt the speech suddenly and tail off into silence but the listeners understand them, catch the meaning, because the participants have a common personal background and the explicitness is tolerated or even taken for granted and is diagnostic of conversation.

# Colloquial Conversations

Conversations are characterized by the lack of planning and the randomness of subject matter. They are very often unpredictable, not guided to an overall theme as, for example, in the first conversation. This is the most changeable variety of the language.

One can easily spot phrases of speech etiquette functioning in colloquial talks such as questions to keep the conversation going, asking for information, expressions leading up to questions, polite formulas for attracting attention, requesting, agreeing and refusing, expressing gratitude and others.

# Informal Conversation

Informal spontaneous conversation style is characterized by a high proportion of “errors” involving hesitation phenomena, slips of the tongue and all sorts of overlapping and simultaneous speech:

Bob: *I think I'd much better prefer to go in for teaching.*

Jane: *Jolly good.*

Bob: *because...er...well, you get long holidays.*

# Some more important characteristics:

Entire range of vocalic clusters, sounds, non-verbal signals are common in conversation, e.g. *mmmm, sshh, ah, brr, ets*

Also, one can hear whistles, laughs, giggles, clearings of the throat, snorts and sniffs.



# Grammatical Level

On the grammatical level informal conversation provides delimitation of utterances and sentences.

Minor sentences are extremely frequent in responses, many of them are incomplete. There are a few other points to be noted on the grammatical level:

- High proportion of parenthetical compound types of sentence introduced *by you see, you know, I mean, I say* and others.
- Frequent use of interrogative sentence types and very few imperatives.
- Common use of vocatives, especially in initial position.
- Rare use of nominal groups as subjects; the personal pronouns are more in evidence, the informal *you* is quite common in its impersonal function.
- A great number of question tags.
- The use of all sorts of repetitions and repetitions structures. Even adverbial intensifiers such as *very* may be repeated several times.
- The occurrence of contrasted verbal forms (*he's. I'll, I've*).
- The frequency of colloquial ellipses.



The most noticeable aspect of everyday conversations is their vocabulary. It is characterized by colloquial idioms, the use of words simple in structure, the avoidance of phraseology; also the informality of the text is achieved by the use of words and phrases specific for such conversations, e.g. *Yeah. Right. O.K. I see. Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Oh, lovely. Oh dear. Alright. Sure. Good heavens! Thanks! Jolly good! Really? Come off it! Oh, no! Hey! And others.*

On the prosodic level the researchers provide us with data that help us to do some generalizations.

- Conversations fall into coordinated blocks, consisting of suprasegmental and supraphrasal units tied up by variations within the length of pauses, speed, rhythm, pitch ranges, pitch levels and loudness.
- Since there are no restrictions on the range and depth of emotions which might be displayed in conversational speech situations they will allow entire range of prosodic effects.
- Intonation groups are rather short, their potentially lengthy tone units tend to be broken. These short interpausal units are characterized by decentralized stress and sudden jumps down on communicative centres, e.g.

*Jane: →That's ,going... | to→make you very un'fit, you know.*

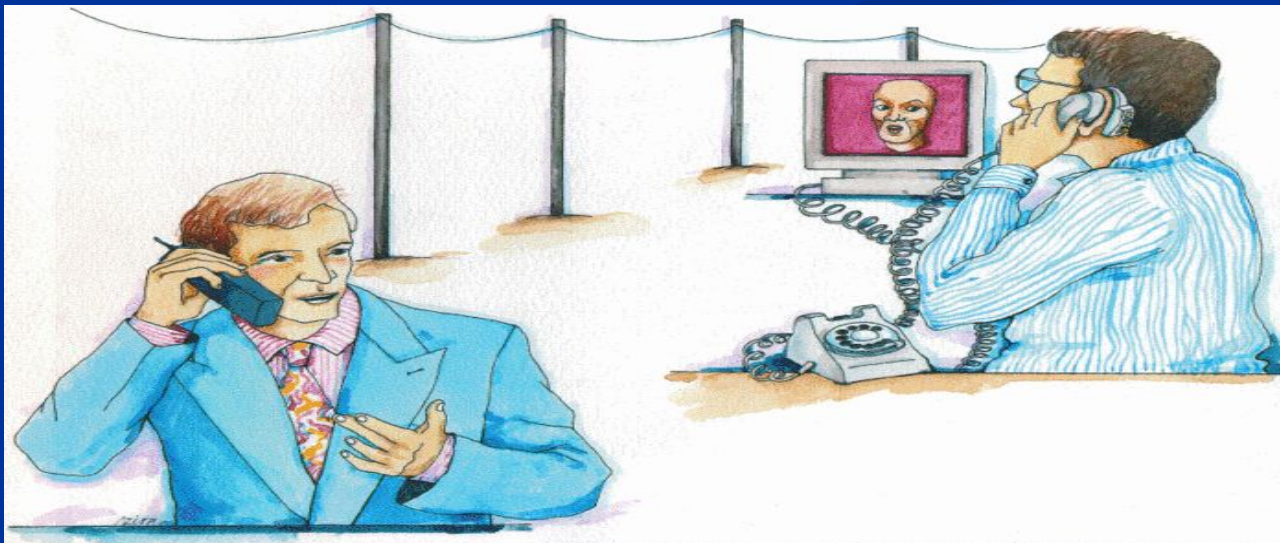
- The heads are usually level, or rarely, falling. Falling heads occur only in groups consisting of several stressed syllables.
- As for the nuclei, simple falling and rising tones are common. Emphatic tones occur in highly emotional contexts. High pre-nuclear syllables are very frequent
- The tempo of colloquial speech is very varied. The natural speed might be very fast but the impression of “slowness” may arise. The speakers may have no pauses between their parts, very often they speak simultaneously, interrupt each other
- Interpausal stretches have a marked tendency towards subjective rhythmic isochrony

# Telephone Conversations

It's very specific register of conversation style. This sphere of communications limited in certain important respects by the special situation, which imposes of restrictions.

The telephone conversation is quite unique being the only frequently occurring case of a conversation in which the participants are not visible to each other, so there is some uncertainty in keeping up the give-and-take between the participants.

The “talkers” avoid long utterances without introducing pauses. Pauses cannot be long, because anything approaching a silence may be interpreted by the listener either as a breakdown of communication or as an opportunity for interruption which may not have been desired.



Vocabulary is characterized by the use of colloquialisms, idioms and vocalization. The opening and closing of a telephone conversation are marked by the use of the same formulas, the linguistic devices carrying out these operations are not numerous and always predicted.

Telephone conversation differ from others: one is an active speaker, the other is an active listener.



It is the talk between speakers with all sorts of phrases showing personal concern and interest, like: *What Then? So what? And? Well? And so on.*