AREA OF STUDY 2

Formality

2.0 Setting the scene

> Mr Hutchinson: There is a documentary on BBC2 this evening about "Squawking Bird", the leader of the Blackfoot Indians in the late 1860s. Now this starts at 8.45 and goes on for approximately three-quarters of an hour.
>
> Basil Fawlty: I'm sorry, are you talking to me?
>
> Mr Hutchinson: Indeed I am. Yes, now, is it possible for me to reserve the BBC2 channel for the duration of this televisual feast?
>
> Basil Fawlty: Why don't you talk properly?
>
> [From Fawlty Towers Series One, 'The Hotel Inspectors']

The extract above comes from one of the 12 episodes from the comic sitcom *Fawlty Towers*. Much of the humour of the character Mr Hutchinson in this episode derives from the fact that he speaks in an extremely elevated and florid fashion. He sounds like a book, and it is all bizarrely out of place in his everyday interaction with Basil Fawlty, the owner of the hotel Fawlty Towers where Mr Hutchinson is a guest. The formality of the language also clashes amusingly with his accent (which is not the 'King's English', as might be expected).

Fawlty Towers and the "televisual feast"

Unlike Mr Hutchinson, most people vary their language according to who they are and who(m) they are communicating with (audience), whether they are speaking or writing (mode), where they are and when the utterance takes place (setting), what they are talking about (field), how they feel about the whole situation and their relationship with their interlocutors (tenor). Change any one of these factors, and the style may well change accordingly. In Chapter 1, we gave the example of an informal eulogy in praise of a friend recently deceased. Imagine now a eulogy at, say, a state funeral. It would be a dignified and formal affair, with highly stylized speech.

How speakers create relative formality or informality varies across speech communities. In some places, it is achieved by switching to another language. Consider, for example, the Amish and Mennonite groups of North America. These people are bilingual Pennsylvania German and English and their choice of language depends on a range of social and situational factors, including intimacy and formality. Pennsylvania German is usually only spoken (i.e. not written) and is the language of home and community. English is read and written and is usually only spoken when dealing with non-Pennsylvania German speaking outsiders. In monolingual English speaking communities, however, people choose from a vast repertoire of different linguistic forms and their stylistic choices are tuned to create just the impression they to wish create. We've already seen how for any given utterance (spoken or written), there exists a variety of stylistic choices: not only lexical choices, although these are the most obvious, but also grammar, pronunciation, punctuation and paralinguistic features like gesture and facial expression.

There are many reasons a text is created. At the formal end of things, the purpose of language can include such things as establishing one's authority, reinforcing social distance between participants, showing respect for taboos and social niceties, clarifying information — or perhaps manipulating or obfuscating. Any given text can have more than one purpose; for example, a formal speech such as a eulogy might well have the purposes of informing the audience about the deceased and also commemorating that person; a political brochure could be designed to provide information about the candidate and also persuade the reader to vote for that person. Also important is the mode — is a text spoken or written, for example. And bear in mind, there is no set list of purposes.

We've seen how texts can perform a number different functions; in other words, the broader social and cultural roles that language plays in social interaction and in society more generally. Take, for example, the different functions served by the Transport Accident Commission's (TAC) notorious Road Safety Campaign that featured the line 'If You Drink, Then Drive, You're a Bloody Idiot'. The original brief (back in the 1980s) was to "upset, outrage and appal". This ad clearly wanted to establish a social connection with viewers (the phatic function); it certainly wanted to shock them (emotive function); it also wanted them to take the issue of drink driving more seriously (the referential and conative functions). There are also elements of the poetic function if we consider the alliteration (**d**rink, **d**rive); there is also pun of *bloody* — the visuals invoke the literal meaning of *bloody idiot* (idiot covered in blood) and the expletive *bloody* carries the emotive force of the message. And although barely a taboo word or a swearword in Australian English, *bloody* still raises eyebrows when it appears on an official government advertisement. And our linguistic commentary on this ad campaign is a fine example of the metalinguistic function.

Identify those contexts where you yourself might use or encounter formal English in your life.

2.1.1 Phonology

There is a theory that speech production varies along a continuum that ranges from distinct or clear speech to less distinct or less clear speech. According to this theory, speakers will make just as much effort to speak clearly as is required by their audience in order to understand what is being said (you might have noticed how efforts to reproduce realistic speech in movies and television series can make it sometimes difficult to follow the dialogue).

In the last chapter, we saw that, when you're chatting with good friends, the production doesn't have to be clear because there is so much common ground — in this case, your conversational partner has a good chance of predicting the information and so you can afford to be economical with your articulation. Unless we're being super careful or formal, most of us would pronounce *miss you* as [mɪʃə] and *did you* as [dɪdʒə]. This is simply a matter of our efficient speech organs taking necessary shortcuts. It's exactly this process of assimilation that over time produced the palatal consonants [ʃ] and [ʒ] in the middle of words like *nation* and *vision*. No one these days would think of pronouncing these as they are spelt (it would sound a little theatrical); Mr Hutchison in the earlier exchange actually pronounced *televisual* in "televisual feast" as [televɪzjʊəl], prompting Basil Fawlty to say "Why don't you talk properly".

In more formal situations, especially where speakers are not known to each other, not as much can be taken for granted, and speech is much more likely to be produced with a view to clarity. In other words, speakers will hold back on the natural reductive speech production processes (such as vowel reduction and assimilation) to ensure that the sounds are sufficiently distinct.

Toon, tyoon or choon?

How do you pronounce the following words? What about your class-mates or family members? Describe any stylistic differences you notice (e.g. between [tʉn], [tjʉn] or [tʃʉn] for *tune*).

Tune	Presume	Issue	Assume
Educate	Nauseous	Capture	

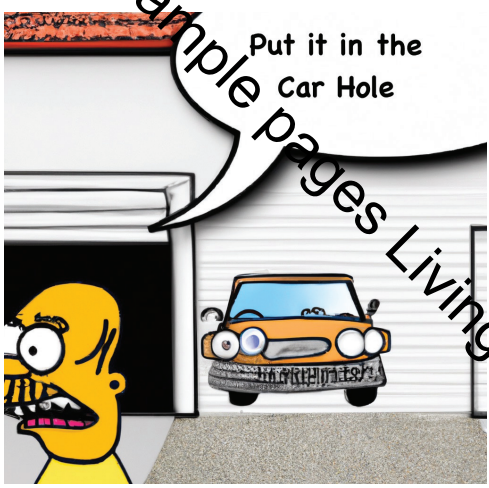
Formality can also be captured by individual words that have socially marked pronunciations. Here the variation can involve different phonemes. French borrowings offer a good example. Consider the following exchange between Homer Simpson and Moe Szyslak:

Homer:
Hmm. I wonder why he's so eager to go to the garage?

Moe Szyslak:
The "garage"? Hey fellas, the "garage"! Well, ooh la di da, Mr. French Man.

Homer:
Well what do you call it?

Moe Szyslak:
A car hole!



How do you say the word *garage*? Many people pronounce it [gəˈrɐːʒ]. This is the pronunciation closest to French, with stress on the second syllable and a final [ʒ] sound (a recent phoneme for English and one which retains a hint of the exotic). Some prefer [gəˈrɐdʒ] (which has the more English 'dg' sound [dʒ] at the end); others prefer [ˈgærədʒ] (the most English of all because it has the stress on the first syllable, and 'dg' [dʒ] at the end). There is a certain amount of snobbery attached to the way we pronounce French words. For extra panache, we often pop in that all-purpose nasal vowel that English speakers specially reserve for French borrowings. Think of words like *lingerie, restaurant, entrée* — for some people, it doesn't matter what the original French vowel is, it is pronounced with the same nasal vowel.

Next we look at some of the phonological features of English consonants and vowels that speakers and writers can exploit for special effect. You have seen how these features work at the informal end of the continuum — we are now looking at the stuff of great literature, poetry and public language.

Alliteration is a frequent rhetorical strategy that involves the repetition of initial consonants. In poetry we find examples like: "In a **s**ummer **s**eason when **s**oft was the **s**un" (a modernized version from the prologue of William Langland's *The Vision Concerning Piers Ploughman*); "Never did **s**un more beautifully **s**teep in his first **s**plendour" (Wordsworth *Upon Westminster Bridge*); "**sl**ow as **sl**udge" (MacMillan's *Return to Westminster Bridge*), and in persuasive speaking and writing examples like: "**p**artisanship and **p**ettiness, **p**oisoned our **P**olitics" (Obama's victory speech); "**S**ilky **s**mooth and **s**ensuous, this is a wine for **s**eduction, as a **s**ymphony of taste **s**ensations **s**aturate the palate" (Winespeak).

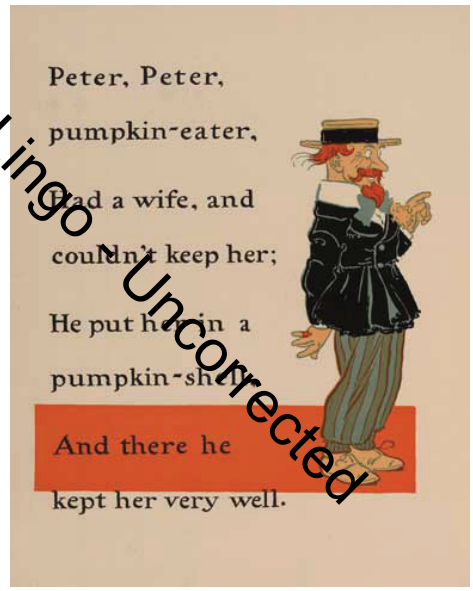
Assonance is another special effect involving the repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds. It is a kind of inner rhyme; for example, "Sn**i**p-snap and sn**i**ck-a-sn**i**ck, Clash the Barber's shears" (Walter de la Mare's *The Barber's*); "Dull would h**e be** of soul who could pass by"; "the very houses

s**ee**m asl**ee**p" (Wordsworth's *Upon Westminster Bridge*). It is also a powerful device in marketing, as evident in advertising slogans such as this one: "It b**ea**ts as it sw**ee**ps as it cl**ea**ns" (an old ad for a Hoover vacuum cleaner).

Rhyme involves the recurrent use of syllables of similar sounds at the ends of poetic lines; for example: "Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently **blows**, And the smooth stream in smoother numbers **flows**" (Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*). The rhyme scheme of Wordsworth's *Upon Westminster Bridge* is straightforward: ABBAABBA CDCDCD (with one pair of rhyming lines more a visual than an actual rhyme: "by" and "majesty" in lines 2 and 3 look like they should rhyme).

Onomatopoeia involves words with pronunciations that echo natural sounds of the world. In the sentence "But when loud surges lash the sounding shore, the hoarse rough verse should like the torrent roar" (Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*), the hissing *s*-sounds imitate the sea smashing on the shore. The *-udge* words ("sludge", "trudge") in MacMillan's *Return to Westminster Bridge* conjure up something solid, heavy and lumpy. Sound symbolism probably also inspires his use of "grudgingly" in line 4. In English, there is a strong connection between the [gr] cluster of consonants (seen in *grudgingly*) and muckiness (think of collections of words like *grimy, grotty, grit, grubby, greasy, gross*; we've even remodelled *gunge* to *grunge*, so that it's more like the other grotty [gr] words); messy filthy images are obviously what the poet is seeking.

Rhythm is the regular recurrence of stresses (or prominent units) in speech. For example in the following four lines the repetition of stressed syllables (in bold), followed by unstressed syllables, creates a lively beat that is typical of this kind of falling rhythm: "**Out** of **child**hood **in**to **man**hood, **Now** had **grown** my **Hia**wa**tha**, **Skilled** in **all** the **craft** of **hunt**ers, **Learned** in **all** the **lore** of **old** men" (Henry Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*). Wordsworth's poem is written in a loose iambic pentametre, the common metrical form for English poetry; it consists of five (that's the *penta* bit) pairs of alternating unstressed and stressed beats. (If you want to remember the rhythm of iambic metre think of the pulse of "i**am**bic **feet** are **firm** and **flat**".)



Peter Peter pumpkin-eater – nineteenth century nursery rhyme

Consonance is a kind of harmony produced by the recurrent use of sounds in a sequence of words for pleasant effect (but not confined to beginnings of words like alliteration); for example, consider the soft gentle tone conveyed by the repetition of the *s*-type sounds (sibilants) in the two lines from Alexander Pope earlier. The poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins shows striking examples of consonance. In the following lines from his *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, there is so much consonance we don't know where to begin the bolding: "How a lush-kept plush-capped sloe Will, mouthed to flesh-burst, Gush! — flush the man .... And frightful a nightfall folded rueful a day ...". MacMillan's *Return to Westminster Bridge* has some lovely examples of consonance: "floating l**i**tter through the c**i**ty air"; "the **t**orn up **t**imetables of cancelled **t**rains which drop like confe**tt**i on emp**t**y bo**tt**les of wine".

"A rose by any other name"

Words are symbolic and their individual sounds (e.g. [e], [p], [n]) are not supposed to have meaning. But this is not how people behave when they talk about words as being 'beautiful' or 'ugly-sounding'. Some sounds just seem particularly appropriate to certain meanings, and this is used to great effect — not just by poets. Advertisers know that the right assemblage of consonants and vowels can create a certain impression or atmosphere and send out a subtle signal to buyers looking for the product that suits their image. As Bob Cohen from the firm Lexicon asks: *Clorox* versus *Chanel* — which is going to be the hard-working laundry detergent and which the new fragrance?

You only have to look at the names of breakfast cereals to see evidence of sound symbolism — all those *pops*, *smacks*, and *puffs* somehow always manage to sound crisp and crunchy. Companies often work with linguists, especially when they are searching for appealing names for new products. Research on the reactions of people to certain sounds has become big business. Try answering the following questions (taken from Cohen 2001: 193), and you'll soon get the idea. Here you are asked to choose between two fictitious brand names for a performance sedan.

Pick a Brand Name

Which car sounds faster?

Sarrant Tarrant

Which car sounds faster?

Faldon Valdon

Which car sounds more dependable?

Bazia Vazia

If your answers were *Sarrant*, *Valdon* and *Bazia*, then you were in good company — most of the 144 students who participated in Cohen's pilot study agreed with you. Fricatives (like [s]) connote greater speed than stops (like [t]); so *Sarrant* would be a more effective car name if speed was your message. And voiced fricatives (like [v]) are more effective than voiceless ones (like [f]); so *Valdon* wins on speed (and *Zarrant* sounds faster than *Sarrant*). Stops (like [b]) are generally better than fricatives at conveying dependability; so you're more likely to go for the more reliable sounding *Bazia* here.

2.1.2 Morphology and lexicology

As we saw in Chapter 1, vocabulary has an impressive range when it comes to style, and we all easily recognize different degrees of formality in expressions, as you can see in the following table.

More Informal				More Formal
to guzzle	to swig	to drink	to consume	to imbibe
on the ball	savvy	intelligent	perceptive	astute
swole	ripped	muscular	burly	powerfully built

Activity

Flesh out this table (with some examples of your own. One way is to look up the synonyms of a word, for example ***cute***, in a thesaurus. Create your own table for the following items: ***drunk, pregnant, poor, dead*** and ***stupid.***

When it comes to style, English vocabulary shows an interesting hierarchical patterning. The levels are a fall-out of the waves of contact that English has had with other languages. A carpet analogy might be useful here (but like most analogies only up to a point and shouldn't be pushed too far). Our native English vocabulary (the words of Germanic origin), provides the basic underlay; in other words, our fundamental everyday vocabulary. Typically these words are shorter, more concrete and stylistically more neutral. They also include grammatical words like *a* and *the* (and, as an aside, the most offensive ones, too — the so-called four-letter words are mostly native English in origin).

In his book, *Words in Time,* Geoffrey Hughes gives an example of a sentence that is made up purely of English words: "Warm, rich, and full of golden-goodness, Fido dog food will give your furry friend health, strength and get-up-and-go". This beautifully captures the basic everyday nature of our inherited Anglo-Saxon vocabulary.

To continue the carpet metaphor, this Germanic foundation supports a quality carpet on top — a kind lexical superstructure comprising those vocabulary items of refinement and nuance that come to us from French. Dotted on top of this quality carpet are the classy scatter rugs. These are the words with connotations of learning, science and abstraction and they come to us from classical languages like Latin and Greek. They are of a considerably higher style. Compare *a black eye* with *a circumorbital haematoma*, or everyday *knee jerk* with *patellar tendon reflex*, and you quickly get the picture. Another simple example involves the words for medical practitioners. We have native English expressions like *quack* and *leech* — neither terribly flattering (*leech* comes from a very old verb meaning 'to heal'; the meaning 'aquatic blood-sucking worm' came later). The French language gives us *doctor* and Latin gives us *physician*.

The hierarchy of English vocabulary

Below are some examples of the levels of vocabulary that now exist in English (and there are hundreds of such examples). Focus here on the stylistic nature of these words. Meaning differences aside, the English forms are always more colloquial, perhaps even slang; the French more formal and the Latin more elevated still.

kingly (English)	*royal* (French)	*regal* (Latin)
rest (English)	*repose, respite* (French)	*imperturbation* (Latin)
guts, pluck (English)	*courage* (French)	*intrepidity* (Latin)

Or how about *intestinal fortitude* — a combination of French and Latin!

It's worth emphasizing again that certain semantic fields will be characterized by their relative (in)formality. Earlier we looked at the many low level slang expressions for vomiting — in the up-down scale of (in)formality, these terms draw largely from the stock of native English words and are clearly 'bottom-heavy'. Other fields are characteristically 'top-heavy' and draw from higher style expressions of usually Romance (largely French) and classical origins. The language of poverty, for example, is full of posh terms like *indigent, impecunious, destitute,* and *impoverished*. One of the reasons for this is that it's an area of social taboo, and this makes it an inevitable target for **EUPHEMISM** — in the case of 'poverty' we have a long chain of obscure vocabulary to avoid saying that dirty word *poor*. Recent times have seen a rise in obfuscating circumlocutions like *economically marginalized, negatively privileged, economically non-affluent, culturally deprived* or even *differently advantaged* — all Romance or classically inspired.

* *Euphemisms* are inoffensive alternatives for taboo expressions.

Also relevant to formality are the structural aspects of words and expressions; in other words, the morphological features. Here are some examples of three different word formation processes, with a focus specifically on how they contribute to new more formal vocabulary.

Affixation is one of the most important word formation process in English. It involves the addition of bound morphemes (or affixes) to the word root (the core of the word) or the stem (root plus one or more affixes). English has a growing number of prefixes (over 60) and suffixes (over 80); they are known as derivational affixes because they are used to derive new words. These affixes include native English items like *un-, mis-, -ish* and *-ness* and borrowings like *-ize* and *-ese*, and they vary a lot in vitality.

The long-winded speech, or the oratorical organ harmonized with sublime and beautiful inflation

In formal language, affixation is typically classical in origin, drawing especially on high-bred affixes from languages like Latin and Greek. Our love affair with these affixes began as early as the 16th century. This was a time when English wasn't seen as terribly respectable, so large numbers of rather pedantic coinages based on Latin replaced what was regarded as vulgar native English vocabulary. Among them were some completely over-the-top scholarly neologisms (new or invented expressions): *deruncinate* (in place of common-or-garden 'prune'), *carbunculate* instead of 'burn', *diffibulate* 'unbutton'; *dentiloquist* 'one who speaks through their teeth'. Instead of 'baking', you might *pistate* a cake, and if you ended up burning it, it would then be *carbunculated*.

Mundifying the Hypogastrium

A good example of the lengths to which people went in creating this grandiose vocabulary is provided by the quacks of the 18th century. Many of them were fanatics, many were total frauds – and many clearly the entrepreneurs of the time. But they all knew the power of language to sell a product. Here's an extract from the extraordinary spiel of one quack in London peddling his so-called 'friendly pills' – like most of the quack 'remedies', these promised to cure everything from gouty toes to lost youth.

> Gentlemen, I present to you with my 'Universal Solutive', which corrects all the Cacochymick and Cachexical disease of the Intestines, Hydrocephalous, Epilptick Fits, Flowing of the Gall and many other distempers not hitherto distinguished by name … 'My Friendly Pills' call'd the Never Failing Helogenes which work by dilating and expanding the Gelastick Muscles, first of all discovered by myself. They clear the Officina Intelligentiæ, correct the Exorbitancy of the Spleen, mundify the Hypogastrium, comfort the Sphincter and are an excellent remedy again Proposop Chlorisis or Green sickness. They operate seven several different ways, viz Hypnotically, Hydrotically, Cathartically, Proppysinatically, Hydragoicially, Pulmatically, and last Synecdochically, by corroborating the whole Oeconomia Animalis".
> (from C.J.S Thompson's wonderful read *Quacks of Old London* 2003: 142)

Even though with time, people grew very critical of scholarly vocabulary, quite a few terms lived on, and these include much of the metalanguage you're now coming to grips with: *linguistics, synonym*, *lexicon* to name just a few. Their survival helped to reinforce this stylistic hierarchy.

Clearly, considerable sophistication still attaches to the morphology drawn from the classical languages. This is spectacularly illustrated by ***nominalization***. This is a process (sometimes called 'nouning') that turns words or phrases into nouns, usually via derivational affixes; for example, *securitization,* which refers to something like 'converting an asset, especially a loan, into marketable securities'. Compare the following nominal versions with their more natural counterparts:

Nominalization: *An agreement was made (by the parties) (to close down the schools).*

= The parties agreed to close down the schools.

Nominalization: *in the event of default in the payment*

= if you don't pay what you owe.

As these examples show, prose that is heavily nominal in style is much more general and abstract than prose that is not. When we do away with verbs, we can omit subjects and objects, and so we can be noncommittal on who is doing what and to whom. This is an extremely useful device for those occasions where it is precisely desirable to conceal this sort of information.

When we turn the verb *agree* into the noun *agreement*, the subject and object can be omitted. So, in the first example, no need to refer to the parties involved, or the school closures — *an agreement has been made*. Throw into the mix some lofty vocabulary (with impressive classical bits and pieces attached), and we can make the sentence even more authoritative (and more befuddling): *A mutually consensual agreement has been ratified and the educational institutions in question are now scheduled for discontinuance.*

More sneaky nominalization

Some years ago the governor of California, when asked why he had allowed a man to die in the gas chamber (a highly unpopular act at the time) replied: "There was insufficient evidence on which to base a change of decision". He could have said ***I couldn't find enough evidence to make me change my mind and decide to spare the man's life***. As linguist Joe Williams pointed out, the nominalizations of the verbs ***change*** and ***decide*** enabled the governor to avoid reference to both the dead man and himself, thereby concealing his own responsibility in the matter (1981:162).

Nominalization can involve significant changes to the structure of sentences, and we return to this aspect later when we consider the syntactic features of formal language.

Compounding is another way of building words by combining two (or more) free-standing morphemes; for example, two that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic are *digital vigilance* 'raising awareness of and guarding against cybercrime and fraudulent claims' and *biosurveillance* 'monitoring the occurrence of contagion in a population'. These two examples illustrate a problem of English — namely, how to write compounds. Typically, you'll find that newer compounds like these will appear as separate words or hyphenated, whereas well-aged compounds will lose their hyphens and appear as a single word. However, both these COVID inspired neologisms show there are many exceptions to this rule.

Compounding is often part of the complexity of formal bureaucratic language and, together with nominalization, it contributes to the overall 'nouniness' of the style. Long complex strings like *prototype crisis shelter development plans* and *young driver risk-taking research* are commonplace. This sort of compounding can take ordinary expressions like *electric fans* and turn them into formal sounding strings such *high velocity multipurpose air circulators* (an actual example).

At this point, we feel we should emphasize that there is very fuzzy boundary between compounding and affixation. For example, the word *cyber* has produced a spate of words, such as *cybersecurity, cyberbullying, cyberthreat,* to name a few. Although it's too early to call *cyber* an affix, it's clearly one in the making. What we've got here is a continuum from compounding to affixation — at no magic point does a root stop being a root and start being an affix.

Coagulated clumps of English

We've highlighted Bureaucratese, but need to point out that complicated compounds are found in many types of formal English, in particular those ending in *-ese* (e.g. Legalese, Educationalese, Linguisticese, and so on). For example, in Educationalese, we might find telescoped noun strings such as *teacher behaviour* in place 'behaviour of teachers' or *student satisfaction* in place of 'satisfaction among students'. This kind of writing has a high proportion of lexical words (such as *teacher* and *student*) as opposed to grammatical words (such as *of* and *among*).

An extreme example is the following extract from an earlier journal of educational research: "Darley and Hagenah point to prestige drives among youth as an important source of OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE VOCATIONAL INTEREST CONGRUENCY". In place of the nominal clump 'occupational choice-vocational interest congruency', we could have the

2.3.1 Non-fluency features

In the following version of the interview, we've added missing features from the audio; these include particles, some of the feedback or back-channel markers (including overlapping) and pauses, false starts and fillers.

1. **Bryan Wrench:** He's **(..)** a peace-loving activist who really wants to **(...) to** get his message across.
2. **Damien Carrick:** And what is his message? I mean, he has many messages.
3. **Bryan Wrench: Hahah (...)**, Look **(..)**, a lot of them are obviously are left leaning. He always has views about immigration, he has views about **(..)** politics, he has **vie-** certain views about politicians **an** and **wh-** what they are doing, but **(..)** his general message is, as his sign **/**; peace, love and happiness.
4. **Damien Carrick:** And he basically wanders the streets of Sydney for **@@@@** anything up to 8 hours a day with **uh** sandwich boards displaying his posters **an** and maybe placards as well **[eh]?**
5. **Bryan Wrench: [Well** yes, **well look** I think he probably works longer hours **tha-** than some people in office, **you know** it's a **[full-time job for him]**,
6. **Damien Carrick: [@@@@]**
7. **Bryan Wrench: an (..)** and he certainly doesn't get paid for it in a **in a** monetary sense. But **he** certainly **(..)** a lot of people do like him, a a lot of people do love him.
8. **Damien Carrick:** And he is quite a well-known figure in central Sydney and inner Sydney, isn't he.
9. **Bryan Wrench: Ah, (..)** Look, he's certainly an institution. **Nah, (..)** I think actually he starred in a few music videos in fact, so much so **(..) So**, He's certainly a character of Sydney.
10. **Damien Carrick: Now (..),** Does he have any kind of criminal record?
11. **Bryan Wrench:** None **(...)**, none whatsoever.

This is a good example of the realities of ordinary language production; when listening to this interview, there was never any impression of disfluency on the part of either speaker. These discourse features are not speech junk but have roles to play in the dialogue. Consider the missing discourse particles — Wrench's initial attention-getting *so* (line 9) highlights the relevance of what follows, and Carrick's initial *now* (line 10) indicates a shift to a new topic.

Breathing pauses combined with different speech tunes function a little like punctuation marks in writing (though recall what is grammatically significant in speech can be quite different from what is significant in writing). Many of the pauses here involved hesitations — drawn-out words, some repairs or else pauses filled with noises like *uh*. It's often hard to interpret these filled pauses. Some were probably genuine tongue slips (after all speaking is cognitively demanding and occasionally wrong words pop out); some could have been to keep the floor (they do make it harder to interrupt), and others could well have been for planning purposes or for emphasis. Importantly also, pauses

help those who are listening – after all, listeners don't have the luxury of pausing and going back to something they didn't follow.

It's true, we tend to favour the fluent speaker, but bear in mind that speech lacking 'errors' and hesitations isn't likely to be spontaneous — it's probably well rehearsed, certainly pre-planned, or is simply a matter of stringing together some pretty well-worn and formulaic expressions. In short, be a little wary of the smooth talker!

2.3.2 Overlapping speech

Overlapping speech on radio can be quite difficult for listeners. The audio of the Law Report interview revealed only two instances of where speakers intersected (indicated above with square brackets in lines 5 and 6). This isn't surprising given that utterances in an interview mostly come in **adjacency pairs** of questions and answers. Of course, the whole purpose of an exchange such this interview is to keep the conversation going and to get the information across as clearly as possible — Carrick (as the host) offers the floor to Wrench (the guest) with a question or perhaps comment; Wrench then provides information about the topic. This arrangement is not unlike the automatic patterns you find when people greet each other or say goodbye. As you've probably discovered, it's actually quite hard to initiate or close any conversation without this sort of routine, which is why you find talkback callers on radio typically ask presenters how they are before they make their comment.

2.4 Discourse strategies and cooperation in formal spoken discourse

Any discourse is like a story, where shifts in focus, changes of players, beginnings and ends of scenes and so on all need to be signaled. The ways in which speakers do these things are collectively known as discourse strategies. In Chapter 1, we saw the hard work that conversations involve. Talk must be opened and closed effectively; it must be sequenced with connections between the things that are said, and implied meanings need to picked up on (at least the ones that are intended). Let's consider some aspects of how this is done in more formal language by visiting again the ABC Law Report interview.

2.4.1 Topic management and turn-taking

When it comes to interactive patterns in an exchange such as this, the topic is more organized, and the interviewer uses various steering and navigating strategies to manage what's being said and to ensure that the discussion progresses successfully. But as we've just seen, formal topic management draws on precisely the same strategies as informal conversations; in other words, discourse particles (such as *look, I mean* and *now*) and adjacency pairs. In this ABC interview, both these features helped with the general ebb and flow of the exchange, by signalling openings or closings, shifts or renewals of topic and so on.

They also marked Carrick's and Wrench's moves by indicating when the floor was maintained or handed over (moves are rarely shared in a formal interview). These moves relate to turns and turn-taking — the exchange of listener and speaker roles back and forth. Recall, how different types of cues signal when someone has finished speaking, and is leaving the floor open for another to respond. It's not clear whether both speakers were in the same studio for this interview; if they

were, cues for a change of turn could be non-verbal (e.g. turning away, smiling). If it were a phone interview, however, signaling the end of a turn would be trickier — crucial would be prosodic cues such falling intonation or the drawing out of a word's final syllable.

Over the years, people have proposed a number of metaphors to describe how people's interactions work. Some have described them in terms of a game of chess, a dance, a traffic crossing in a busy intersection, even the workings of the market economy. Here is George Yule's account:

> *In this market, there is a scarce commodity called the floor which can be defined as the right to speak. Having control of this scarce commodity at any time is called a turn. In any situation where control is not fixed in advance, anyone can attempt to get control. This is called turn-taking. [1996: 72]*

As Yule's description suggests, one of the delicate things about having a chat with someone is figuring out when to start talking and when to stop talking. We have to monitor our conversational partner and try to work out when a change of speaker is possible. And if there's a breakdown, we have to handle the problem and somehow repair it. All this can be difficult. So, there are sometimes gaps and, as we saw earlier, often more than one person can be heard speaking at a time. The peak-hour traffic analogy is really quite appropriate.

Interactions are like games of chess. Image by Beens_Photography from Pixabay

How different this is from turn-taking in this fairly formal radio interview between Carrick and Wrench. What is immediately striking is how well orchestrated the radio dialogue is, and indeed the audio of this interview confirmed that the transitions between Carrick and Wrench were seamless — and there were no gaps and very few overlaps. More appropriate than a peak-hour traffic analogy would be a beautifully choreographed ballroom dance. Everything went smoothly — no one spoke out of turn.

2.4.2 Politeness and face

Even though there is a deep-seated cooperativeness in human interaction, people can go about this in quite different ways. As you might imagine, this can have serious consequences for the way they relate to one another. The most successful conversation is going to be when speakers have the same habits and attitudes about simultaneous talk. But of course no group will be homogenous.

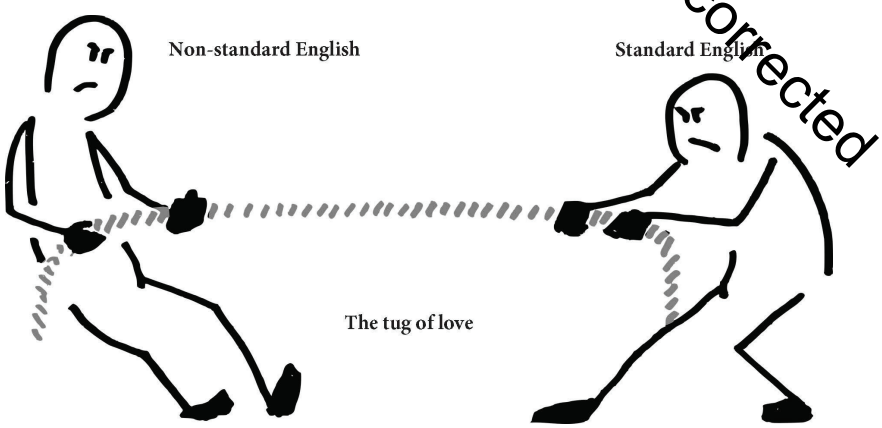
Even individuals within the one community can have vastly different interactional styles. Some speakers are noisy and show enthusiastic involvement by way of questions and overlapping comments. Others seem to almost wait for the floor to be empty before they take their turn; they would never dream of imposing upon another speaker. And it can be difficult when you get two such different speakers together. An interruption suggests you don't care, you're probably not listening, perhaps you're not even interested. But this isn't always the case.

The problem is, speakers who aren't into overlapping may well see any speaking out of turn as a disruptive interruption and be inhibited by it. On the other hand, enthusiastic overlappers may feel hurt by a lack of participation because it suggests to them a lack of support. Is an interruption an act of verbal cuddling or an act of verbal aggression? Face-work is never straightforward, but that is what makes it so interesting.

Of course, media interviews can differ hugely with respect to politeness behaviour. Interviewers generally are skilled in face-work; much like diplomats, they are typically perceptive, and tactful (as Carrick was throughout this interview). However, it will depend on the nature of the exchange. In political interviews, an interviewer may well be moved to introduce views that are potentially hostile or damaging to the guest – the chance of a face-threating act is high.

2.5 The tug-of-love between standard and nonstandard

Standard English is a variety that has an important role to play in establishing the style of texts. There are social forces at work that have for some time been reshaping the relationship between formal and informal language and therefore influencing the sort of language we use and when we use it. We are living in interesting linguistic times with many things now pointing to greater variety, less standardization and more informality (something that will be immediately obvious to you if you compare this book *Living Lingo* or *Love the Lingo* with any textbook written even as recently as last century).



The tug of love between Standard and non-standard English

Standard English

***Thank goodness for textbooks like* Living Lingo!**

Here's an example of an English grammar book published in 1886 (but used well into the 1960s):

> "The Syntax of the language has been set forth in the form of Rules. This was thought to be better for young learners who require firm and clear dogmatic statements of fact and duty. But the skillful teacher will slowly work up to these rules by the interesting process of induction, and will—when it is possible—induce his pupil to draw the general conclusions from the data given, and thus to make rules for himself. Another convenience that will be found by both teacher and pupil in this form of ***rules*** will be that they can be compared with the rules of, or general statements about, a foreign language—such as Latin, French, or German".

Most of us have some idea what Standard English is, yet it is one of those linguistic terms that is notoriously difficult to define. Almost every publication dealing with English has some reference to the standard, but the meaning of the term seems to change every time it makes an appearance. You might have noticed that even how people write it varies — should that be Standard English or standard English? It depends on your point of view (a nice irony, given that the job of standardization is precisely to rule out this kind of variation).

On the basis of the many different definitions or interpretations that have appeared over the years, we can isolate five main features that set Standard English apart from its nonstandard relatives.

1. Standard English is considered by many to be a high sociolect. This means it is usually associated with elite groups, such as the wealthy, the highly educated and those living or working in places that exert much influence on the rest of the nation.
2. Standard English is the variety that is recorded (or **CODIFIED**) in dictionaries, style guides and grammars. People tend to use Standard English as a measure or benchmark.
3. It is a variety without a home; i.e. it is not regionally confined.
4. It is more easily recognizable in writing. All over the world, people write in Standard English, and there's remarkable uniformity. People speak it too, but because of the nature of speech, there is always more variation.
5. It is a variety involving vocabulary and grammar but not pronunciation; in other words, it can be spoken with any accent. (There are more prestigious accents, though these should not be thought of as standard, and here we conflict with accounts in some dictionaries like the Macquarie.)

CODIFIED *Codification* is the process of developing a norm for a language.

Until quite recently Australia based its standard on the British Standard (i.e. the standard variety of England). Even today there are still many who defer to British norms, as opposed to Australian usage. However, the appearance of style manuals like *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* and distinctly Australian dictionaries, such as those published by Macquarie and Oxford University Press, have helped to establish a distinctive standard for Australia.

The Standard English we know today has been constructed over many years, not by any English Language Academy (because there hasn't been one), but by a network of different groups, including early grammarians, writers of style guides and usage manuals, dictionary makers, editors, teachers, even newspaper columnists. However, it has always been something of a linguistic fantasy – a paragon of linguistic virtue that is sometimes called a 'superstandard' (think of it as an 'uberstandard'). Milroy and Milroy (1998) put it clearly: they write about standardization as ideology and the "standard language as an idea in the mind rather than a reality — a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent" (p. 23). You could think of it as a kind of linguistic 'best practice', an ideal we have for our language such that everyday usage will never quite come up to scratch. Even the performances of speakers and writers whose language comes closest to best practice frequently violate the rules of the standard — in a sense, the rules can become 'too correct' (or too formal) and are no longer appropriate. We're sure you'll agree that constructions such as *Whom did you see at the party* and *The data are misleading* are simply too 'ubercorrect' for most speakers today, even for formal occasions.

There are currently all sorts of pressures on our standard language. For a start, the forces of egalitarianism and social democracy all around the English-speaking world are seeing the solidarity function of language gaining over the status function. **COLLOQUIALIZATION**, liberalization and the effects of e-communication now mean nonstandard and informal language is, as David Crystal describes, "achieving a new presence and respectability within society" (2006:408). Many people are now speaking and writing more 'down-to-earth' and with a more obvious stamp of the informal and the local. Grammar that once would never have shown its face in public language is now making regular appearances in newspapers and political speeches, and the familiar tensions between standard and vernacular are relaxing. Moreover, as writing becomes less formal, so we see the norms of speech creeping further into written language (this textbook is a good example of this general trend towards colloquialization).

* *Colloquialization* is the process of incorporating informal speech-like features into more formal language.

Another trend is the increasing influence of newer varieties of English, as well as the diminishing authority of the so-called 'native' English speakers. Non-native speakers now far outnumber native speakers, and many linguistic changes are being initiated by second-language, foreign-language and creole speakers. You can probably think of features of rap or hip-hop that have snuck through controls and now appear in the language of many Standard English speakers. What is deemed good and proper in Standard English, at either the national or international level, is heading towards something very different from traditional English use.

Winifred finna go for a walk

One expression to watch is a potentially new future time marker *fixin' to* or *finna*, slang contractions of *fixing to* (e.g. 'Izzy's fixin' to see that movie'; 'Winifred finna go for a walk'). The form *fixin' to* comes from the dialect of the Southern United States, and *finna* is a feature of African American English. It will be interesting to see whether these are serious rivals to *wanna* and *hafta*, which are both candidates to replace *gonna* (which is pushing *will*, which pushed out *shall*).

In short, globalization, our increasing 'laid-backness' (if this is a word), and the electronic revolution all spell out de-standardization. These sweeping changes also mean that informal, nonstandard, unedited English is now appearing more and more outside its usual domains. What's more, the audiences are generally more friendly and receptive to these changes than they have ever been (at least, since the appearance of Standard English).