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ABSTRACT

Four aspects of English pragmatics that are often puzzling to students of English as a Second Language (ESL) are discussed and exemplified: certain mechanics (ellipsis; blended words; a-grammaticality); vague superordinates (generic verbs such as "get," "let," "do," "be," "have"; preposition with metaphoric extension such as "up," "in," "off," "through"; minimalist reference such as "stuff," "...or something," "...and all"; contextual anaphor such as "that's IT," "THAT's it"; attitude marking (suprasegmentals; contrast; intensification; intensification/mitigation); and "doing words" (reactions; signals; confirmation checks). Reasons and contexts for misunderstanding are examined briefly in each case. A methodology for raising ESL student awareness of English pragmatics and daily language use is then outlined. Use of videotape recordings of authentic spoken English, where context is both visible and reviewable and where some variables can be filtered out for study, is recommended over exclusive use of materials made explicitly for ESL instruction. Variables to be filtered out include the spontaneous nature of the language, its sounds, visual aspects of the language, and context. Worksheets and a dictation exemplifying this approach are included. Contains 39 references. (MSE)

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BEYOND THE MESSAGE: ENGLISH WITH AN ATTITUDE.

Neil Williams

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BEYOND THE MESSAGE: ENGLISH WITH AN ATTITUDE.*

Neil Williams

Language is essentially pragmatic in character—situational, contextualised and purposive, not intended to be but to do." (Lewis 1993, p.59)

While spoken English has much in common with the English that we teach our students, it also has a great deal that is not. The English that we teach is controlled: all sentences are grammatical, expressing precise meanings through appropriate word choice in textually coherent dialogues or paragraphs. Spoken English as used by native speakers, on the other hand, has no such pretensions. What is a student in a low intermediate class to make of the following dialogue (overheard between two young businesswomen on a New York street)?

A: *Can you believe what that jerk wanted?*

B: *No!*

A: *I swear to God he did. So I'm like, "And just WHO do you think I AM, Buster?"*

And he goes, "Well, I THOUGHT you were a NICE girl..."

B: *What a jerk!*

A: *Well, what can you expect? He's a man.*

B: *Aren't they all?*

This paper attempts to describe some of the phenomena associated with unscripted spoken English and to offer a methodology to raise student awareness of these pragmatic aspects of language use.

* This is an expanded version of a paper presented at the 30th Annual TESOL Convention, Chicago, Illinois, March 1996

A: Aspects of language beyond syntax: The puzzle.

What follows will illustrate and exemplify mechanical and pragmatic aspects of the spoken language in a limited corpus, which intermediate ESL students have found puzzling¹. It is summarized in Figure 1. As much in the realms of pragmatics is speculative, the categories proposed will be nothing if not provisional, nothing radical, merely one heuristic of many alternative heuristics written with the express purpose of alerting students to other possibilities beyond the syntactic grammar they have studied since beginning to learn the language. While much of the description is based on the theories of applied linguists, it does not set itself up as a definitive description of spoken language grammar, nor does it propose itself as a competitor to traditional syntax. It should be considered a series of alternative landmarks (beyond the familiar NP/VP/adjective and adverb), against which the student can orient his or her language awareness. Sometimes a new perspective opens new possibilities of learning². It is thus intended to be seen as a pedagogical overlay to the bare bones of basic syntax, and has proven invaluable in giving students something linguistic to puzzle over while consolidating their grasp of the grammar they thought they already knew and were bored of studying. It has also led to a heightening of their capacities for 'noticing' in the way that Kenny and Murphy (1996) understand it.

[Figure 1. around here]

1: Mechanics

1.1) Ellipsis: Speakers frequently ellipt grammatical features either i) partially—*What's it look like?* where *does* has been reduced to its distinguishing feature, /s/—(which causes intermediate students no end of problems, when they encounter a form they thought they had mastered, only to find that there are other possibilities), or ii) fully—*See that?* where *do/did* is absent—(which causes

LANGUAGE PUZZLES FOR THE ESL LEARNER

A: Mechanics

Ellipsis:

See that? ; What's it look like? ; Beats me; Girls are like slugs. They probably serve some purpose, but it's hard to imagine what.

Blends:

Gotcha. ; Outta my WAY! ; Leggo !. ; I dunno; Whatcha doin'?

"A-grammaticality":

If paper feathers are all it takes to fly, don't you think we'd have heard about it before?

B: "Vague Superordinates"

'Generic' verbs: *GET/LET/DO/BE/HAVE*

Prepositions with metaphoric extension: *UP/IN/OFF/THROUGH*

minimalist reference:

*stuff;and stuff.;or something.; ... and everything.; ... and all;
the/this (*) thing; the (whole) * bit.; this doodad*

Contextual anaphor:

that's IT!; THAT's it.; that's good.; that's that, then.; that's a relief.

C: Attitude Marking:

Suprasegmentals:

Contrast: *this is MY room*

Intensifying: *Oh Geez, RUN!!; What are ya DOIN'?; Get down here NOW!*

Intensification/Mitigation: *I'm so glad to see you/Kind of frustrating isn't it?*

D: "Doing Words":

Reactions:

Uh-oh; mm-hmm; Phooey! GROSS!

Signals:

Well,... Why,....!

Confirmation checks:

Isn't he back yet?; You mean, he's still in the woods?

Figure 1

problems of a slightly different nature: confronted with *beats me, mom*, students either fail to recognize there is an ellipsis, or read the verb as an imperative, and construe the meaning as *beat me mother, I have been bad.*)

1.2) Blends: Words are often not pronounced "cleanly", but rather blended into streams of sound. Even though students understand the principle, they are often dumbfounded at the seeming impenetrability of some blended words. *Leggo!*, for example, is consistently rendered by students as *Let's go*, while *Outta my way!* (note the ellipsis) will leave them with no idea that they should understand this as *(Get) out of my way!*

These aspects of speech are fairly mechanical, and still within the purview of "grammatical English", insofar that the meaning can usually be retrieved with a little work at expansion of the forms.

1.3) "A-grammaticality": Sometimes (though rarely in the corpus used) speakers do not follow English grammar as students have been taught. e.g. in sequence of tenses that students expect: *(if paper feathers are all it takes to fly, don't you think we'd have heard about it before?)*

2: "Vague superordinates"

Spoken language makes use of vocabulary which can only be interpreted through reference to the context:

2.1) generic verbs: verbs with a "basic" meaning that can be adapted by the listener to give a meaning which is **sufficient for the context**. A good example of this is the verb "GET". Where a typical dictionary would give "get" a great number of meanings, all of these meanings can be reduced to a simple, single basic meaning – **SOMEONE DID SOMETHING AND AS A RESULT SOMEONE**

[BE]/[HAVE]/[CAN DO] SOMETHING. So, for example, when a speaker says *Bill got John drunk*, what is important is that John is or was drunk as a result of something Bill did. If *Sarah got to see the Queen of England in London*, what is important is that someone did something, and as a result, Sarah was able to see the Queen. If I say *I got a dog*, what is important is that someone did something, and as a result, I now have a dog. (*Have*, here, is also a vague superordinate, containing as it does the basic meaning – POSSESSION AND POWER OVER; whether captured, killed, bought, stolen, taken or given to me, I now have power over the possessed and can do something with it, e.g. kill it, eat it, enjoy it, or work with it³).

2.2) prepositions with metaphoric (or literal) extension⁴. If a book is *out* of the library, it is not the same as it being *out* in the bookstores, though the bookstore manager could conceivably be *out* collecting copies of the book that he has run *out* of. Similarly, as a baseball player, I might be in the *outfield*, hoping the batter will fly *out*. The general meaning of *out* can only be determined from a knowledge of the context in which it is uttered. Context constrains meaning.

2.3) minimalist reference—words used when a speaker cannot find the exact word (or feels it is unnecessary to do so), compounded by the situation described by Lewis (1993):

"In connected, usually spoken discourse pro-forms constantly assume different values and allow the language user to achieve many pragmatic purposes with a comparatively restricted vocabulary". (p.84).

The common pro-forms of this type are *stuff*, or *thing(s)* used either a) to refer to a contextually recoverable object, material or argument (*Don't give me all that stuff, the/this/that adjective stuff/thing*) or b) as a qualifier to a noun which is close enough in meaning for the speaker's communicative purpose, e.g. *I've got my bucket and stuff*. Other qualifiers of this nature include *and all*, ("I love the South, genteel women and all"), or *something* ("You look like you're sick or

something), and *the (whole)(modifying phrase/NP) bit* ('I didn't really enjoy the "I'm-your-father-so-don't-argue with me" bit' or "the teacher-as-learner bit"). For more on this aspect of vague reference, see Channell (1994).

2.4) contextual anaphor – *that, it, then*. A speaker faced with the impossibility of seeing a project through to completion might say, *that's that, then.*, (prompting, in this listener's mind at least, *what's what, when?*) while another speaker, observing a second person doing something, might say *that's IT, THAT's it, or THAT'S IT!!* If the referents do not refer precisely as Halliday and Hasan (1976) suggest they should, this is because the speaker feels there is no need for them to do so. As the speaker's context is (for both the speaker and the interlocutor) a real place, in real time, a real here-and-now, the speaker can logically infer that when the interlocutor hears *that's that, then* he or she will be able to provide enough reference from the context to give the words enough meaning to make conversational sense—something along the lines of: *that* (the outcome I observe) is *that* (the end of my/your/our hopes)⁵ *then* (which I or you had already mentioned before in the context of the topic we are now discussing or had discussed previously). Similarly, the words *that's it* might be used to describe the observed action as a) suggesting an answer to a question in the speaker's mind (*that's IT!*), b) the way the speaker conceives of the action being done, e.g. by an actor playing an old man (*THAT's it*) or c) as the last straw, the final insult (*THAT'S IT!!!*). This is an obvious application of Grice's 1975 admonition to *be brief*, while adhering to another of his maxims: *be relevant* (just how relevance is typically inferred from such language is discussed at length in Sperber and Wilson, 1986. See also Geluykens, 1994).

3: Attitude marking

3.1) Suprasegmentals: Stress and intonation can be manipulated for pragmatic effect – for contrast (*this is MY room, not YOUR room*), for intensification (*Get down here NOW!!*), or for ironic or humorous effect (when words do not match the expected pitch contours). In a context where characters are clearly delineated (drawn or described in words), there will be considerable agreement among native speakers as to whether capitalized letters (the graphological representation of stress or pitch movement) are to be read "normally", as marking contrast or intensification or whether they should be read pragmatically, with a suprasegmental that does not "match" the way the words are normally said, implying a secondary (often opposite) meaning.

Two examples should serve to illustrate this. *Oh boy!*, in American English, is, usually, a reaction to a context which implies a happy outcome – either achieved or expected. If I say to my wife, "I'm taking you to an expensive restaurant", her immediate reaction is, "*Oh BOY!!!*" (with a high rise–fall on *BOY!* and a paralinguistic signal of her happiness – in this case a smile), letting me know that she is happy at the prospect. As she tastes the perfect steak she repeats "*Oh BOY!!!*" (with a different paralinguistic signal – eyes half–closed, no smile, and a different pitch contour – a fall on *BOY*, which she also lengthens and makes breathy), letting me know how much she is enjoying it. However, if the steak is not good, or, as she is chewing it, she feels a filling come loose, instead of saying *Oh BOY!!* as before, she is more likely to say, "*OH boy*," with a marked stress on *OH*, and a low fall–rise on *boy*). From this I imply that something is not right, and so my next question is, "What's wrong?". Students unfamiliar with the conventions of capitalization are often disconcerted to see a "happy" reaction in an "unhappy" context.

The same can be said of when *some* is used as a determiner with a singular count noun. In its unmarked meaning, *some* used this way means something along the line of "an example of the class NP, but nothing more." If I say, *Mark arrived in a car* (the unmarked form) I present Mark the person arriving in a real car (pictured in my mind's eye), and chances are that I will go on to tell my interlocutor something about the car that Mark arrived in. If, on the other hand, I say, *Mark arrived in some car*, (marked lexically but not suprasegmentally) then the vehicle itself is of no interest, other than the fact that it was not a bus or a bicycle. Chances are that, without further prompting from the interlocutor the car will not be mentioned again in the conversation. Suppose that I said, *Mark arrived in SOME CAR*, with a high rise-fall on *car*, then I am expressing an intensification—Mark arrived in *very much* an example of a car, be it good, bad or strange, which the context would help define. This intensification itself can be intensified, often to ironic effect, by changing the word order: *Some car THAT was, that Mark arrived in.*⁶ (See below for more on intensification).

3.2) Degrees of truth: When people speak, they rarely assert the truth or non-truth of a statement; rather they assert the **degree** of truth they ascribe to a statement. They do this in two ways: they **intensify** the statement, asserting to what degree **something is the case** (*very much, completely, exactly, or not at all the case that...*), and/or **mitigate** the statement, asserting to what **degree they believe** that something is the case (i.e. marking how strongly they are committed to the truth of the statement). Intensifiers and mitigators function (often in tandem) to mark precisely how far the listener should understand that the speaker is prepared to assert or commit to the veracity of the message he or she is delivering.

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Intensifiers

(a degree of certainty, affirmation of absolutes, "A is B")

GENERIC	<p>word stress (CAPS/Underline/!!!): <i><u>IF</u> I GET <u>A</u> PRESENT?!!</i></p> <p>lexis (what (a)...!/How..!): <i>How typically female; What a lucky kid Calvin is!</i></p> <p>S sure/really VO: <i>Go way back. I'm really gonna belt this; I'd sure like to borrow that section right this minute.</i></p> <p>S [Be] really/real/so Adj/Adv: <i>Slugs are so chewy; he's really upset.</i></p> <p>Boy,/Geez, SVO: <i>Boy, I hate fishing; Boy, I'm glad we did me first; Geez, how many bricks do you have in your pocket?</i></p>
Intensified lexis	<p>great: (<good<nice); dumb/lousy (rotten) (stinking) (<bad/stupid)</p>
Intensified generics	<p>some: <i>Some buddy YOU are, you Benedict Arnold.</i></p> <p>pretty [Adj./Adv]: <i>he's pretty busy; you looked pretty cold.</i></p>
Intensifying particles	<p>[Completion verb] + up: (e.g. <i>eat up/burn up/use up</i>); <i>Clean up this room.</i></p> <p>[Motion verb] + on (e.g. <i>walk on/go on out/talk on and on</i>); <i>You go on out, and I'll guard the cookies.</i></p>
"Completely"	<p>a/the whole [N]; every [N]; all [N/NP]: <i>a whole week without a single newspaper!; it took me all morning to invent it.</i></p> <p>not one/not a single [N]; not even [NP]: <i>We don't even have a car; I wasn't even consulted</i></p> <p>ever/never/always (in VP): <i>she'll never look here!;</i> <i>I never got to do this when I was a kid!</i></p> <p>You [epithet(+N)]!: <i>Ooh, you lousy rotten stinking...; you Quack!</i></p>
Focus particles	<p>just; <i>I just thought we'd leave it in the garage;</i> <i>you're just too short; There's a connection here, I just KNOW it.</i></p> <p>only; <i>The only reason Mom and Dad are my parents is because I was BORN to them!; We've only been walking 20 minutes; This program only lasts an hour.</i></p> <p>even: <i>When the leaves change color, it just reminds you even more that summer's over; She even put marshmallows in the chocolate!</i></p>

Figure 2

3.2.1) Intensification: Most intensification, it seems, is manifested in a general way through word stress (graphically realized through the use of capital letters—*you IDIOT*, through underlining—*you idiot*, through the use of exclamation points—*you idiot!!!* or through any combination of the three), through lexical phrases (*What a... , How...!, [be] such a...*) or intensifying lexis (*so, real, really, sure*) or through intensifying disjuncts (*boy, [+ stress] Geez, [+ stress]*). Examples of these will be found in Figure 2. There are, though, other ways that speakers add intensifying attitude to their speech: a) through the use of **intensifying particles**, and b) through **intensified lexis**. Intensifying particles, restricted to certain verbs, are related to the vague superordinates like *out* cited above, but seem to have acquired this intensifying quality through metaphoric extension. Examples of this are *up*, which can be found with consumption verbs (*eg eat/drink/burn/finish*), where it adds the idea of *completely* (*I ate my dinner* vs. *I ate my dinner up*), and *on* usually intensified itself through reduplication (*on and on (and on and on)*), which can be found with most verbs of motion (*run/walk/flow/ramble*) to mean *[verb] + at length* (*the river ran on; they walked on and on*). When attached to certain specific verbs it functions to make them into vague superordinates or auxiliaries: *go on: resume or continue doing* (*he went on talking*) and *keep on: continue to not stop doing*, (*he kept on talking*).

[Figure 2 about here]

Intensified lexis, on the other hand has to do with substitution of lexemes. As ESL teachers we are accustomed to teaching students, for example, the adjectives *good* and *bad* as ways of describing generically our opinion of someone or something. Yet this is often not the case in the corpus. Characters are often more likely to render the opinion [*good*] as *great!* or even *amazing!*, and [*bad*] as *dumb* or *lousy (rotten) (stinking)*.⁷

Mitigators

(a degree of uncertainty, denial of absolutes, "I could be wrong")

GENERIC	<i>sort of/ kind of (like) [verb] [adj/adv] [NP]:</i> <i>things he did only sort of on purpose; I kinda pictured more buildings;</i> <i>kind of frustrating, isn't it?</i>
Mitigated lexis	<i>I want</i> <i>I wish :I sure wish he'd come back</i> <i>I hope :</i> <i>I hope he's OK; I hope he's not too much trouble tonight</i> <i>I think</i> <i>I think: I think they're mostly water</i> <i>I guess: I guess he's pretty busy</i> <i>I suppose: I suppose we could catch some mice</i> <i>I take it: I take it the game's over</i> <i>it+epistemic modal:it must be a bedbug; it will be huge!</i>
Epistemic modals	will/must/should/may/might: <i>She [will/must/may] have a gun</i>
"Quasi modal" lexis (senses)	<i>seems [to be] [as if SVO] [like NP/SVO]</i> <i>it/he looks/smells/tastes/feels/sounds [like] [as if]</i> <i>would appear to be</i>
Intensifier Mitigator Overlap	intensifying lexis: certainly/probably/maybe/possibly [+epistemic] <i>[eg. He [may possibly]/[will probably] have a gun.]</i> mitigating lexis: certainly/probably/maybe/possibly [-epistemic] <i>[e.g. She probably ate dinner at 6 o'clock;</i> <i>He's certainly coming to school tomorrow.]</i>

Figure 3

A final group of intensifiers serves a slightly different purpose. These words isolate, and so throw into relief certain parts of utterances. They, too, seem to fall into two groups. First there are the "**completely**" intensifiers – *the whole, every, not even, not one, not a single*, which serve to express completeness (or total absence of completeness), and so are used to express the speaker's opinion that: *as far as I'm concerned (and I AM concerned because this context has a bearing on my life) this is very much or too much*. Consider the sentence, *I couldn't find a bagel in Chicago*. With "completely" intensifiers this would become: *I couldn't even find a single bagel in the whole of the city of Chicago*. Not a lot of bagels. The other group of isolating intensifiers, **focus particles** (after Koenig 1991, and Fraser 1990, 1995a, 1995b), can occur in most places in an utterance, and serve (in tandem with stress) to signal that the listener should focus attention on (and hence draw out an implicature from) the stress being laid on whatever it is they are modifying, be it a word, a phrase, or indeed the whole utterance. Two examples of these are *just* and *even*. In the case of *just*, what is to be implied is the **exact** nature of the element: *Just say what you want; say just what you want; say what just YOU want; say what you just wanted to*; while, in the case of *even* it is the **unexpected** nature of the element: *Even HE said what he wanted; he even said what he wanted; he said what even HE wanted*. (For more on these words, especially their limitations in scope and focus see Fraser (1995a), Koenig (1991), or, in a slightly different vein, Wierzbicka (1986)).

3.2.2) Mitigation: If intensifiers signal the degree to which the utterance is to be considered true by the listener, mitigators serve to signal, to a greater or lesser degree, how far the speaker is prepared to vouch for the truth of what he or she is saying. They are summarized in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 about here]

The generic mitigators *Kind of (kinda)* or *sort of (sorta)* mark an utterance with the message: *I'm NOT sure, I could be wrong, this is only MY opinion* (albeit to a greater or lesser degree). Like the focus particles, *kind of* and *sort of* can be used to modify whole utterances or specific parts of them: *I sort of ate the ice cream quickly; I ate the ice cream sort of quickly*. Interestingly, they do not modify nouns, usually, unless "quoted off" (*I ate the 'sort of' ice cream quickly*, but not **I ate the sort of ice cream quickly*) where *sort of* functions as a vague superordinate, referring to a substance that the speaker offers as a close approximation because he or she does not have the exact word for it⁸.

While *sort of* and *kind of* offer a generic way of mitigating, mitigation is also achieved lexically. Lexical options open to speakers include **overt marking** (**I* think* [strong opinion] through *I THINK* [but I could be wrong], *I guess* or *I GUESS* ['don't quote me on this'] to *I imagine* [though I'm probably wrong]), or **overtly mitigated lexis**. For example, while the base idea of [want] can be expressed in an unmarked form by using the verb form *want*, if speakers wish to mitigate the idea, there are other marked lexemes available to them: *wish* adds the feature [+ but I know I cannot], while *hope* adds the feature [+ I expect something will be able to be the case, but I recognize it may not be (for whatever reason), so I envisage the case not being as expected and offer the option of disappointment]⁹.

Speakers also mitigate utterances in a slightly less overt manner, especially when there is the possibility of face being threatened or lost in conversation by such overt marking. Mitigating a statement by affirming its greater or lesser degree of truth in terms of speaker's knowledge implies that the speaker's knowledge can always be contradicted by the interlocutor's greater knowledge. In other words, it is not the speaker himself or herself who is wrong, but rather the speaker's

knowledge which is defective (through no fault of the speaker). This kind of mitigation tends to be realized through the use of epistemic (after Coates 1983) modal auxiliaries (*she must/may/might have a gun; they will/might/may be there*), and quasi-modal vocabulary, rooted in observed phenomena. Into this latter group come the sensory verbs (*looks/ sounds/ smells/ tastes/ feels + adjective/like NP*) as well as *seem/appear* (*it appears/would appear to be..*), and the verb *tend* or its variant *have a tendency to*. This kind of mitigation lies at the borderline between mitigation and intensification, since it is of course quite possible to intensify a mitigated sentence through the use of intensifying lexis as to the relative certainty of the mitigated utterance. For example, it is perfectly possible to say *he certainly might come* at one end of the mitigation spectrum and *he will possibly come* at the other, to say *people always tend to smile in these circumstances* as well as *people sometimes tend to smile in these circumstances*. While this system, which allows for very precise degrees of intensification/mitigation, may seem complex, fortunately the same degree of precision has so far appeared to be available in the languages of students studying the corpus. In most cases, given a context and the language within it, students have been able to give spot translations on which they all agreed.

4: "Doing words"

A final aspect of spoken language which puzzles ESL students is a group of words that includes those termed *interjections* by Carlson (1984), *discourse markers* by Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987), *pragmatic devices* by Östman (1981), *discourse particles* by Schourup (1985), *expletives* by Stenström (1991), and "*conversational greasers*" by Wong-Fillmore (1976). These can all be subsumed under the term "doing words", since they are used by a speaker to "do

"DOING" WORDS

REACTIONS:	1: DETERMINATION	<i>by golly!</i>			
	2: SURPRISE/SHOCK(GOOD/BAD)	<i>Uh-Oh; Oh NO!; Wow!; Well (I'll be)!...; Why...</i>			
	3: DISBELIEF	<i>Can you believe it?; I don't BELIEVE this!; This isn't happening.</i>			
	4: FRUSTRATION/ANGER(NO SUCCESS)	<i>Man!; Phooey.; Rats!; Sheesh!; Geez..</i>			
	5: SATISFACTION/JOY/SUCCESS	<i>YES! (+paraling.) GREAT!; Oh BOY!</i>			
	6: DISGUST	<i>BLECCH!; YUK!; GROSS!</i>			
	7:				
SIGNALS:		OFFER - NEW:	OFFER-PARALLEL	TAKEOVER:	INVITATION:
	1: TOPIC MANAGEMENT	<i>SO; So Dad,</i>	<i>By the way,..</i>	<i>Well,...</i>	<i>What about...</i>
		CONTINUE:	RETURN:	DISCOUNT PRECEDING:	
		<i>And,...</i>	<i>..., then.</i>	<i>Anyway,...</i>	
	2: ACKNOWLEDGE NEW INFORMATION	<i>Oh.; Hey!;</i>		<i>(+reformulate) I mean..., like</i>	
	3: ALIGNMENT	<i>Yeah!; Right!; I'LL say!; I('ll) bet!; Yeah, right. (also ironic, when said with level intonation); You betcha!; Tell me about it!</i>			
	4: DO THIS	<i>Listen! Look! Quiet!, Say Dad, Say it was Sunday...</i>			
	5: LISTEN TO THIS	<i>You know,...? ; Hey, ; Hey Dad,;</i> <i>See,... (= explanation coming)</i>			
	6: COMMENTS	<i>Of course,; naturally,; as far as I'm concerned,; needless to say,</i>			
	7:				
CONFIRMATION CHECKS:		<i>Isn't she nice?; It's good, isn't it?;</i>			
	1: AGREE: (REQUIRES ALIGNMENT)	<i>AREN't YOU HAPPY! (= I think you are);</i> <i>Don't you think...?; ..., don't you think?; Pretty smart, huh?</i>			
	2: RIGHT?: (EXPECTS ALIGNMENT)	<i>It's good, is it?; You're Jane, right?;</i> <i>Aren't you HAPPY? (= I think you should be)</i> <i>Didn't YOU have friends like that? (= I know that I did)</i>			
	3: CLARIFY: (REQUESTS ALIGNMENT)	<i>A: Jane came. B: Jane. (= So?) or Jane? (= I didn't hear correctly);</i> <i>A: We're going to Tunisia B: Going where? (= I didn't hear);</i> <i>A: We're eating salad tonight. B: You mean, there's no meat?</i>			
	4:				

Figure 4

conversation", to signal how the listener should understand the utterance coming or just said, or what the speaker is feeling in or about the context¹⁰. These fall into three types: Reactions, Signals, and Confirmation checks. They are summarized in the table in Figure 4.

4.1) Reactions to context: a) **non-lexical sounds or sound clusters** e.g *Uh-Oh, blecch! mhm,* and *Augh!* (some of these were described in Wheeler, 1993), and b) **lexical expletives.**

Stenström (1991) describes expletives thus:

Expletives are realized by taboo words related to religion, sex and the human body, which are used figuratively and express the speaker's (genuine or pretended) emotions and attitudes. (p.240)

Examples would be words used to express surprise (*God! Fuck me!*), or frustration (*Shit! Jesus! Fuck! For Chrissake!*)¹¹.

4.1.2) Reactions in a comic book corpus — a pedagogic mother-ese.

If students are to function adequately in spoken English it is essential that they have access to language enabling them to react to contexts. However, whether teachers should explicitly teach the taboo language to be found in the streets, in movies or on television is an open question, especially since students seem to pick up such language informally only to use it in inappropriate contexts. Somehow, it would seem, students have to be made aware that taboo language is (normally) only appropriate in extreme or jocular contexts, and that not all terms can be used interchangeably. It is here that the use of comic books has proved very useful.

The comic book (in this case *Yukon Ho!*, a Calvin and Hobbes collection by Bill Watterson, 1989) illustrates a context. Characters interact in a real, visual, here-and-now (for them) and react to the context in non-linguistic ways. It is possible to see a character in a context and have a fairly good idea of what he or she is feeling/thinking, and then see what language he or she uses to

express that feeling (i.e. how does s/he react to the context?). In most cases, the character will use language that is mild in tone (newspapers will not publish characters using taboo language), but apposite. Hence characters' use of terms like *Phooey*, *Sheesh*, *Geez*, and *Heck* in the place of an obscene or blasphemous variant beginning (usually) with a similar phoneme which ARE in common usage in the mouths of many Americans. Students presented with these examples of extreme language gain in two significant ways:

a) They have access to reactions that they will be able to use anywhere (mild reactions are rarely understood as offensive – in fact, some of the reactions in *Calvin and Hobbes* are mildly humorous).

b) More importantly, they are looking at people in a context, and not just at words on a page. By observing characters reacting in a context they come to recognize that not all reactions and taboo words they hear around them in New York City can be used in all contexts indifferently. They begin to 'notice' (Kenny and Murphey, 1996), to look at as well as listen to real people in real contexts, to observe how the language people use fits the context it is used in, before making that language part of their own L2 (should they choose to make such language part of their linguistic repertoire).

But not all reactions in spoken language are expressed through taboo words, and many of the reactions used by characters in the cartoons are very much reactions students can and do hear around them. So, for example the reactions used by characters to express marked surprise – *Wow!* [+wonder], *Uh-oh* [+unfortunate outcome], *Oh NO!* [+ unhappy outcome], *Well I'll be...* [+totally unexpected/shocking], *Why...* [+that's not what the situation is supposed to be'] (R.Lakoff 1981, quoted in Östman 1981) are reactions students will often hear as are those used to express

satisfaction/success, (e.g. *YES!! +paralinguistics*), disbelief (all the various collocations with [believe]: *I don't believe this! Can you believe it?; this is unbelievable! this isn't happening..*), and disgust (See Figure 4). Once aware of reactions, students have been invariably surprised at how frequent they are in speech, and have started listening for them in earnest.

4.2) Signals: used by a speaker either to ask the listener to do something (*Listen,...; Hush!*) or, more importantly, to ask the listener to understand the following or previous utterance in a way that may not seem obvious from the words themselves.

4.2.1) Topic management signals: to introduce a new topic for consideration either "cold" (*So*), or because something in the previous discourse/present context has triggered it, (*By the way...*); to introduce an element of "other" into the discussion of the topic, either by mentioning an apposite but not yet considered piece of information, or by asking another speaker to offer his or her contribution to the topic (*What/How about...*); to assert face and consequently control over the topic (*Well*¹²); to assert that there has been a digression, and so what has just been said can be discounted (*Anyway...*).

4.2.2) Comment signals: used by a speaker to **evaluate** what has just been said, either by him/herself or by his/her interlocutor. They mark an opinion about the previous utterances. They can mark the words they refer to as counterfactual (*actually, though.*), an extension of the conclusions reached (*needless to say, not to mention.*), an opinion as to how far the conclusions reached are obvious or logical (*Of course!*¹³) or a plain marker that what follows is an opinion prompted by what has gone before (*as far as I'm concerned;* *If you want my opinion;* *In all fairness.*).

4.2.3) Other signals: used to mark the listener's **acknowledgment of new information** (*Oh.*), and **alignment** with what the interlocutor has said to a greater or lesser degree: *Yeah; Yeah,*

RIGHT!; Sure!; I'll say!; You betcha!; Tell me about it. (marked as [+ empathy = I know JUST what you're talking about]).

4.3) Confirmation Checks: used to request alignment. Students cope easily enough when speakers ask **questions for information** using "classic" WH- or polar questions with auxiliaries preceding subject. These are the question forms they have been taught, and are familiar with. However, when faced with "abnormal" question forms in speech, where word order does not match the intonation contour, they often fail to recognize that these function as a request by the speaker for the listener to confirm something speaker believes. They also fail to recognize the differences between those confirmation checks that **require** interlocutor agreement with an opinion expressed (falling tag questions – *It's hot today, isn't it.*; negative questions with falling intonation– *isn't it hot today!*), those that **expect** interlocutor alignment (rising tag questions,– *it IS hot today, isn't it?*; tags with *right?* or *OK?* – *It's hot in Texas, right?*; and *You can't go out in the heat, OK?*), and those that **request** a clarification, either of what was said, or of the reason for saying what was said, or of the context (typically expressed as phrases or sentences with rising intonation, sometimes preceded by *you mean,...*).

B: Raising awareness of language beyond syntax: A methodology.

Many teachers... try to hold a mirror up to (linguistic) nature – to let students see something of the organized chaos which is out there. This is as it should be. Trying to protect students from it, by pretending it isn't there, does no-one any service. We need to find ways of reflecting it, but at the same time filtering it, so that students are not dazzled by the spectrum of alternatives which are part of sociolinguistic reality." (Crystal, 1996, p.16)

[W]ell-chosen comprehensible language is of immense value to the learner. Such language should not, however, be predominantly reading, telling stories etc. The most important language of this type, is language produced with reference to the Here–

Raising awareness

Teaching pragmatic aspects of language involves: "reflecting ... but at the same time filtering ... so that students are not dazzled" (Crystal, 1996).

The linguistic model: re-viewable, "authentic", visual, spoken.

Filtering language: 1 at source level:

(-spontaneity) (TV sitcoms, movies)

(-sounds) TV [-sound]

(-visual) "sloppy dictations"

(-time) comic books.

Filtering Language: 2—linguistic sieves.

Worksheets I-IV;

Pragmatic mapping through teacher questions: (*why?*, not *what?* > *How in L1?*)

Figure 5

and-Now framework. Native speakers begin to acquire the complex system of inter-relationships which is English through extensive exposure to the spoken language. We have no reason to suppose that L2 learning is so different that this does not also play an important role in that process. (Lewis, 1993, pp.194-5)

1) The linguistic model.

Students need to be exposed to real, "authentic", spoken English, where the context is visible, and which is re-viewable, which can be experienced over and over. In other words, students need to work with video-taped programs from American television, not tapes made for ESL. This is not to say that students need to work with **all** aspects of a tape all of the time, but it is to say that the language students are exposed to should not be simplified out of deference to the learner¹⁴. As Grellet (1981) has shown, by limiting tasks to those which focus on only a few aspects of the target language text, by filtering out some of the variables it is possible to help students develop micro-skills to help in the analysis of the whole language. Nor is it necessary for any one aspect of the language to be "mastered" before students are asked to move on to another. Language acquisition is not linear (Lewis, 1993, defines it as *provisional and cyclical, based on endlessly repeating the cycle Observe-Hypothesise-Experiment* pp.55-6), so why should language teaching be so?

2. A methodology.

What then can be filtered out? Logically, elements which might distract students from concentration on a given aspect of the language.

2.1) Filtering out the "spontaneous" nature of the language. Spoken language production is no smooth affair of putting ideas into words (be they vague, context-dependent or attitude-laden). Doing conversation consists, often, of false starts, contradictions, "filling" language (um.. er..) and/or overlapping contributions. This can be controlled, at least in early stages of exposure, by using

native speaker language which has been scripted to a greater or lesser degree of "naturalness"¹⁵. This explains why "authentic" is in quote marks. American 'sitcoms' ranging from the tightly-scripted (*Home Improvement*) to the less so (*Roseanne*—where characters frequently *ad lib*) have been successful in this regard, as have recent movies, which seem to be scripted increasingly to sound unscripted¹⁶.

2.2) Filtering out the sounds of the spoken language. Watching tapes without sound, forces students to pay attention, to use their eyes to infer meaning from context and paralinguistic cues, to guess at relationships between characters and at what they are feeling ¹⁷.

2.3) Filtering out the visual aspect of the language. Removing the visual element from a tape frees students to concentrate on the sounds of spoken English: reduced forms, blends and ellipses. In early stages of class this has proved very difficult for most students, so it has been necessary to develop an "un-authentic stopgap" strategy to give students the confidence to feel able to attempt to tackle the cacophony (for them) of normal-speed native-speaker English. After initial presentation of common reduced forms, blends and ellipses, students are given practice in recognizing them in context in the form of 'sloppy dictations' – dictations of (for the student) the worst kind – conversations at high speed, with the maximum number of ellipses and blends¹⁸. Initially these are read by the teacher, thereby simplifying the deciphering process for students, as they are already familiar with their teacher's voice and so do not have to cope with unfamiliar timbre or dialectical pronunciations. The teacher, too, can use these dictations to help students appreciate the mechanical aspects of processing oral English. While not making words explicit by slowing down her delivery, a teacher can control how difficult it is for students to process the sounds through the use of segmentation, either by repeating segments many times or by increasing

"Sloppy" Dictation (extract)

Text:

A: So what do you think, then?

B: Well, I don't know. I have to admit it's a good price, though.

A: Yeah. And just think what we could do with it; think of the places we could go. It'll be great for our social life, not to mention a wonderful investment. What do you say?

B: Well, you don't (really) leave me a lot of choice. (I guess) I'm going to have to buy it for you. What color do you think I should get?

A: Well, I'M not YOU, but if I WERE, (I guess) I'd go for the red one.

FANCY

A: _____ think, _____?

B: _____, I don't _____
good price, _____.

A: Yeah. _____ think _____ do _____
_____;
_____ places _____ go. _____
_____ great _____ social life, _____
_____ wonderful investment. _____?

B: Well, _____ leave _____
_____ choice. _____
_____ think _____?

A: Well, I'M not YOU, _____,
_____ go _____.

Figure 6

the length of pauses between segments. While early sloppy dictations are scripted, (see Figure 6 for an example) they are very soon replaced by scripts from movies (initially read by the teacher, but later on audio tape) and then transcription of unscripted conversations on tape. At the same time that students are being given practice in deciphering aural signals they are also being exposed to other, verbal aspects of conversation. In the dictation in Figure 6, for example, any words in italics are "doing words", while anything underlined is a collocation – a group of words that often are often found together¹⁹. In the expression *So what do you think, then, What do you think* is a single lexeme, a lexical collocation, a kind of "doing word" that requires an opinion from the interlocutor. Students are led to see this as a chunk, a single stream of sounds, rather than a sentence of 4 words. In *Well, I don't know* (notice the face marker) *I don't know* is a hedge (after R.Lakoff 1981), a refusal to give what is being requested, be it an opinion or a clear signal of alignment or non-alignment to the proposition, which in this context stems from the fact that the speaker does not want to commit himself to buying a Porsche, just as he does not want to lose the affection of his favorite daughter, the person putting pressure on him to buy. As they listen to a high speed segment or phrase (eg /a gEsmnahAftabAIytfya then/) students are given as much time as they feel necessary to fit the sounds they hear as a single sound into the finite number of blanks they see on the page. They do this as a group process, since this sharing of frustrations and successes in hearing sounds has been found to create far more involvement in the deciphering process than individual work.

An alternate form of dictation centers on student narratives. A student records a narrative, or an episode from his or her life, which the teacher "tells back" on tape, keeping the information the same, but trying to recast it the way a native speaker might. Upon reception of the "native speaker" version of the narrative, a student has the option of either a) taking it as an extended

personal sloppy dictation or else, b) trying to re-record it, copying pauses and rhythm of the model. Interestingly, given the personal nature of these narratives, students have been found to invest a great deal of time and energy into practicing their "correction" of the original story until it sounds as close to the teacher's version as they can make it.

2.4) Filtering out the temporal nature of spoken language—linguistic sieves. The fourth and possibly most extensive way to help students analyze the spoken language is to neutralize the transient nature of speech by using worksheets to sift language fixed in a context, i.e. in comic books (Figures 7, 8, 9 & 10). The first of these, (Figure 7) abandoned as soon as practicable, serves to establish the idea of context as intrinsic to language. [Figure 7 about here] The reason for this lies in the nature of language which students expect to encounter in class. When they first arrive in class, students expect to be working with words, since all language (so they reason) is made up of words. This first worksheet helps disabuse them of this idea, by impressing on them the idea that spoken English is NOT only words, but rather **words in a context**²⁰. It requires them to look first, and decide such basics as *Where are these people and what are they doing?*, as well as *How do they look?* The answers to this last question are found through observation of facial expressions (eyes, nose, mouth) and/or posture and the graphic recreation of what has been observed. Drawing frees the student from the constraints of having to use words, and keeps the focus on the non verbal. Of course, there are also words in the strip, but often the sense of them can only be inferred from observing the character's mood. If students feel the need to label the results of the discussion, then, by all means, they are encouraged to do so, using the bilingual dictionary. The discussion has helped to fix the visual expression (the codified set of a face) as an expression of an emotion (codified in a word in L1 or L2). The words that accompany these visual expressions are, of course, reactions,

COMIC BOOK WORKSHEET I

CONTEXT (Where? Doing What?)	BODY EXPRESSIONS		REACTIONS		VAGUE WORDS + MEANING (it/that/so/up/get/do/stuff/thing)
	Drawing	Meaning	Word/Sound	Emotion	
CONFIRMATION CHECKS (SVO? or [REPETITION]?)	MITIGATORS & INTENSIFIERS		CAPS + PRONUNCIATION ff [loud]: # [stress]: ↑, ↓ [contrast]		SIGNALS (____, SVO, or SVO, ____.)

Figure 7

COMIC BOOK WORKSHEET - II

PAGE #
Meaning:

Quote: (Strip, Frame #)

MARKING LANGUAGE:

Doing Words: Requests: (R) Signals: Topic Managers(TM)/ Comment(C)/Other(O)			
Reactions: (Wow! Nuts. Boy!)			
Intensifiers/mitigators: (just/real/great/what a.../kind of/pretty)			
Vb/PP? (look up/look+up): Preposition means? (ONLY: UP / IN / ON / DOWN / THROUGH)			
Confirmation checks (SVO? or [REPETITION]?)			
It/this/that/them/th*se/[do]/some/so(+stuff/thing[s]) = Get (New state =)			
CAPS = ff, ↓, ↓, #			
Other vocab/qqs for teacher			

MARKING LANGUAGE:

Quote: (Strip, Frame #)

Meaning:

Doing Words-Requests: <i>Quick!, Look!, Shut up!, Listen!,</i>		
Doing words-Signals: Topic Managers: <i>so, well, then, I mean, you know, mind you, anyhow/anyway</i>		
Doing words-Signals: Comments: <i>actually, of course, to tell the truth, as far as I'm concerned,</i>		
Confirmation Checks: Require(R!)/Expect(E)/Request(R?)		
Intensifiers/Mitigators/Reactions		
Vague words: <i>up/in/on/down/through/get/it/do/some/stuff etc.</i>		
CAPS = ff, ↓, ↓, #		
Other vocab/qqs for teacher		

Figure 9

MARKING LANGUAGE:

Quote: (Strip, Frame #)

Meaning:

Signals (TM): <i>so, well, then, I mean, you know, sure, anyway,</i>		
Signals (C): <i>actually, of course, to tell the truth, as for me,</i>		
Confirmation Checks: <i>Require Isn't it warm! ↓</i>		
Confirmation Checks: <i>Expect Isn't it warm? ↑</i>		
Confirmation Checks: <i>Request-Clarify [REPETITION]?; you mean,?</i>		
Confirmation Checks: <i>Request-Clarify [+I DON'T BELIEVE YOU]. Yeah?!/↑ Really?!/↑ I am, ↓ am I?/↑</i>		
Confirmation Checks: <i>Request-Clarify: [+I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU SAID THAT]. [REPETITION] ↓ So?/↑ And?/↑</i>		
Intens/Mitigs/Reacts/Vague/Caps:		

Figure 10

and they can then be written right next to the facial expressions that have been drawn, further reinforcing the word/context relationship. At the same time, students are being asked to look for vague words, (introduced as "words that refer to something, rather than meaning themselves"), signals, ("words 'comma-ed off' from the sentence"), confirmation checks, ("normal sentences with a question mark") mitigators and intensifiers ("words to give an opinion") and capital letters ("words said differently"). In this first stage, students are being asked to **recognize** that aspects of the language they will be studying are often surplus to the syntactic requirements for a message to be imparted, and are looking to see how these additional elements are set in or set off from the sentences they know and love, the transactional language, the language giving the message. Once looking for the aspects has become second nature (this takes a couple of weeks, during which students are constantly grumbling about how difficult all of this is—and it is, since they are not being asked to accrete little bits of language as they have done previously, but to start analyzing a lot of it all at the same time), the other worksheets are introduced (Figures 8, 9 10) as a way of refining the analytic tools. [Figures 8,9,10 about here] Each worksheet covers the same ground, but in each, one or two of the aspects have been expanded to force students to actively consider the pragmatic usage of the words in the context that they are uttered. Classroom discussions now center around word choice, around the **why** of utterance, rather than the **what** of meaning. These discussions are often in mother tongue (if there is more than one representative of the same language in class). At the same time that discussions are going on, the teacher is stimulating this process by asking questions (based on those in Lewis, 1993), to help students actively search for coordinates for a **pragmatic mapping** of L2 on L1 and vice versa. First among these is not, "*What* is the character saying?", but rather, "*WHY* is the character saying what he or she says?" (i.e. "Search the

context to find the *reasons* for the words"). Once the words have been tied in to the context, the next logical step is to ask, "*How would this be said in YOUR language?*". Sometimes students shoot back, "*WE don't say that*", which may indeed be the case (though this may betray an unconscious refusal on students' behalf to admit to the 'sloppy' aspects of their own language stemming perhaps from the 'received truth' in their culture of 'good' language (careful, educated, and error-free) in contrast to 'bad' language (lazy, uneducated, and ungrammatical). Should it be the case that there is indeed no pragmatic equivalent for a lexeme, this still contributes to pragmatic mapping: at least the student has become aware that there are contexts where L1 functions differently from the L2 being learned²¹. By continuous comparison of L1 and L2 in given contexts students are exploring a kind of spoken contrastive rhetoric, and the discussions which invariably surround the answers to this question often force a reevaluation of how students perceive spoken language, be it L1 or L2.

Other questions address other aspects of language: "*What is the character thinking (look at the paralinguistics), and how will this affect the way s/he says the words?*" "*How would this be said?*" (Often students do not read capital letters as stressed, seeing the word as just another word on the page, written in big letters). "*How would you say this if you were to mitigate it, rather than intensify it?*" (i.e. "*What is a pragmatic opposite, an opposite of effect rather than a lexical opposite?*"); *How does this expression mean in this context? Is this vocabulary useful or not?*. In all cases the aim of these questions is to raise and to continue to keep raised questions in students minds.

Such questions and discussions allied to the use of filtering worksheets serve, in the long term, to **extend** the array of tools a student has to **continue her analysis** of the language, as she grapples with "the many still unaccounted for observations about the way language works". (Brazil,

1995, p.1). And over time, some of the language has stuck. At the end of the semester, two days after it had been recorded, students heard the conversation which opened this paper. They understood the context. They laughed.

NOTES

1. The description which follows has grown out of work with low intermediate students who have studied the formal grammar system of English and who can do sentence grammar exercises and drills well *ad infinitum*, but who find it difficult to speak. Why this should be can be attributed to two factors: 1) an overriding fear of making grammatical mistakes in what they want to say, which stems from 2) the mistaken belief that the precise, ordered grammatical collection of sentences that people write is indeed what people say. Nobody in their previous ESL classes has attempted to disabuse them of this idea, even though applied linguists such as Brazil (1995), Carter and McCarthy (1995), Coulthard (1985), McCarthy and Carter (1994, 1995) in their studies of naturally occurring speech have demonstrated the disparity between written discourse grammars and spoken discourse grammars. We use Watterson (1989) as a corpus.

2. John Fanselow (personal communication) tells the story of when he dropped a small article on the floor. From his standing position, he was unable to see it no matter how hard he tried. Then his father suggested that he lie down on the floor with his eye at floor level. Immediately, the object rose into prominence. Sometimes linguistic sense comes from looking at language from a different perspective.

3. Wierzbicka (1972), argues that **all** entries in any lexicon should be reducible to such simple meanings, which she terms *semantic primitives*. However, her interest in such definitions is much more theoretical than the scope of this paper:

Semantics is an activity which consists in the elucidation of the sense of human utterances. Its purpose is to reveal the structure of thought which the external form of language conceals. (p.1)

Contemporary semantics... is principally concerned with "semantic representation": instead of talking about meanings (and changes of meaning), it seeks to model them and present them in the form of explicit formulae. (p.1)

I am not sure that she would necessarily agree with her terminology being used in such a prosaic or pragmatic context; after all, ESL students are not semantic theorists.

4. For a presentation and discussion of how far metaphor underpins much of language use, see G. Lakoff & Johnson (1980)

5. Of course, other interpretations of *that* would be possible in other contexts. At a more generic level, *that* might be interpreted as *whatever was predicted then (whenever we last talked about it (the topic that is now under discussion, or the context unfolding (or that has just unfolded) before our eyes))*. It is a measure of how effective (and how necessary!) contextual anaphor is that so many qualifying words are needed to describe the message that is contained inside a single contextual referent, (in this case, *that*).

6. A similar argument can be made for the word *pretty*, which is devoid of any inherent meaning beyond 'to a degree' (its written equivalent is *somewhat*). In context it can mean a little, a lot or a great deal. Compare the meanings of the sentence: *That was pretty good*, when said a) to an athlete who ran 100 meters in 13 seconds; b) to an athlete who ran 100 meters in 9 seconds; and c) an unfit middle-aged man who ran 100 meters in 18 seconds.

7. It is no accident that "relative opposites" should be the lexis that is usually intensified. Since the meaning of what is to be understood can be inferred relative to the context, all that remains for the speaker is to assert a degree of certainty, of how far this is the case. Other examples of such opposites are: *big (huge, humongous, ginormous); small (teeny, tiny, itty-bitty/little [+unimportant/helpless]); hot (boiling); cold (freezing); raining (pouring)*.

8. This is also the case with verb forms in *-ing*, though slightly more complex: Consider the following replies to the question: *How are you enjoying the party?*

a) I'm sort of meeting a lot of boys.

b) Am I sort of meeting a lot of boys?

While a) is a clear mitigator (understand: *I'm meeting boys, but not all the boys I want to – sort of would carry stress*) b) is less so. Given that the utterance is a confirmation check, it could be interpreted as mitigating – the question equivalent of a), in which case *sort of* would be stressed– but is more likely to be interpreted as vague, with *sort of* reduced to /sata/: (*you mean, am I meeting a lot of boys or something like that?*). In other words, *I don't know exactly what's in your mind but is this a close enough description?*). The response of the listener (what aspect of the confirmation check she or he chooses to confirm) would constrain the direction of the conversation:

i) You'd better be meeting boys here. That's why we threw the party, remember?

ii) Well, I also wondered if the music was good.

Yes.

9. Either of speaker or of interlocutor. While *I hope* is often aimed at another (*I hope you'll be able to make it*), it is also often addressed to the speaker him/herself (*I hope John's mother isn't there tonight*). In the first case, *I offer you* the option of disappointing *me* graciously, while in the second I entertain the possibility of *me* being disappointed.

10. Why they are so puzzled by this aspect of language may stem from the fact that these words are function words, which carry little meaning beyond their interactional signalling function. Speakers don't often think about these words, because they are second nature to them. If speakers accord them so little status in L1, it is hardly surprising that speakers consider them unnecessary

to a knowledge of a foreign language. It is often a shock to realize that speakers in the L2 culture also do the same 'sloppy' things speakers do in their own language. Learners often accord the L2 the status of "great language", ignoring the fact that speakers of that language also need 'conversational greasers.' (Wong-Fillmore)

11. Interestingly, not all lexical reactions to context are variants on taboo words, for example: *Man! Oh boy! I don't beLIEVE this!*, though it must be admitted that such expletives are not carrying their primary meaning either; there is often no boy or man present to be addressed when the words are uttered.

12. *Well* has been variously described as, *I accept the situation* (Carlson, 1984), a marker of 'insufficiency' (R. Lakoff 1973), an assertion that what follows is not what you (the interlocutor) would reasonably expect as a reaction to what has been said (Schiffrin, 1987), a marker to show that the speaker is considering what to say (Schourup, 1985). That it seems to play a role in face relations as suggested in Brown and Levinson (1978) or in asserting a power relations while remaining within the topic is suggested by the data in the corpus. I assigned it the term topic takeover, to underline this idea that the speaker is not so much abandoning the topic as wanting to give the appearance of deferring to listener's face so as to assert control over the topic (To be understood as something like "I recognize the validity of your stance in terms of the topic but that is not exactly how I want to continue this conversation. Accordingly I am going to change the direction of the discussion around the topic"). Needless to say, it is therefore an optional signal.

13. There is, of course, an extension in meaning depending on the context and the way that the words are uttered. *Of COURSE!* uttered in a context where the interlocutor's utterance is obvious to the speaker, will be heard as a criticism. If, on the other hand, the speaker was ignorant of what the interlocutor was trying to say, then, the *Of COURSE!* would be a criticism of the speaker's ineptitude in understanding what is, now, only too obvious. (Maybe Eureka! was the Greek equivalent of *Of COURSE!*). Context decides.

14. This has always been an issue with simplifying language. Once a teacher decides to simplify language, such simplification will always be undertaken according to the teacher's criteria for so doing. This is to deny the student his or her own strategies for acquiring whatever he or she might be ready to acquire from a richer diet of whole language.

15. Obviously authentic 'dramatico-poetic' language, where the language itself is being manipulated for artistic effect (as, for example, in the plays of Pinter or Beckett), is of little use to students struggling to grasp how 'ordinary people' communicate.

16. Increasingly, actors seem to give approximative versions of the lines given them, or at least attempt to make them sound spontaneous. As an example, consider the following speech from Chris Columbus' 1988 movie *Heartbreak Hotel*:

John: *How many times have I got to tell you guys that I'm serious! Look, you guys know about my mom; man, she's, shit, she's in a lot of trouble, man. And she loves Elvis Presley, you*

know, more than anything, and I figure, you know, if I can make her happy, then maybe I can hold our family together.

Obviously, the basic information required for the plot to advance is there, but so, too, are many of the markers that characterize unrehearsed spontaneous speech.

17. "[I]n face-to face interaction there is a large number of non-verbal, extra-linguistic sources of information and meaning. And they are not to be despised; true, they lack the semantic or referential precision of the verbal component, but in pragmatic and relational terms they are generally far more important....[L]et us just emphasise the point that such factors as proxemics, kinesics and deictics are all part of the message. They are not just a sort of gloss on the verbal component." Riley (1985), p.334.

18. It might be argued that not all English speakers speak at such high speed in day-to-day conversation. This is undeniably true. However, if students can cope with extreme forms of spoken English, anything slower or more clearly articulated can only be easier for them to understand. It is also not at all certain that native speakers DO talk as slowly as they claim. In the process of preparing sloppy dictations, this native speaker has taken dictation from video and/or audio tapes only to find that some of the function words are not clear – indeed, on subsequent listenings to the tape, he has often "heard" alternates, none of which he can claim with certainty to be "correct".

19. For more on this, see Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992)

20. By asking questions such as 'Is A teasing B?' or 'Is A being sarcastic?', the teacher goes directly to the heart of the matter. ... [I]t may be objected that to do so is trivial and unnecessary, since the learners will understand naturally. Such an argument can be refuted on a number of points: firstly, it is based on an unacceptably naïve view of the nature of language and communicative behaviour; secondly, the balance needs to be redressed—conditioned by their previous experience, learners tend to concentrate on the verbal component at the expense of all other aspects of communication; and thirdly, experience shows that in fact learners do often make wrong judgements on the key of an act or interaction." (Riley (1985), p.341.

That the last two aspects of Riley's argument are indeed true is shown whenever students work with strips from Watterson (1989) In one strip (p.57) Calvin and Hobbes are running away to the Yukon. Calvin writes in his captain's log. "Morale is high as we push north." to which Hobbes replies, "MY morale would be a lot higher if YOU'd carry the toboggan". Invariably one student raises a hand to asks the meaning of *toboggan*. Hobbes is holding the toboggan and pointing at it, but somehow this fact escapes the student's notice. In another strip (p.73), Calvin is unhappy at the arrival of autumn ("You can never really enjoy Sundays because in the back of your mind you know you have to go to school the next day.") Hobbes, on the other hand, is in love with the season ("The trees are like nature's own fireworks display!"). As the tiger expresses his enjoyment, Calvin is picking up windfallen apples. "You didn't mention fresh applesauce, fuzzhead. Do you like applesauce?" Students fail to see that the applesauce is about to be made

on Hobbes head with the rotten apples being picked up, since they fail to ascribe the feelings to Calvin which he is indeed showing (eyes narrowed, eyebrows pointing down to the middle of his face.)

21. This is where language and culture overlap. Sometimes language learners cannot conceive that language and culture are inextricably bound up, and judge the L2 as somehow deficient for either not having the nuances they have in their own language, or for having nuances where they see no need for them. In Nida's words: "The form is felt to be instinctively strange, queer and wrong" (1957-8, p.13)

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