The Grammar and Lexis of Conversational Informal English in Advanced Textbooks

María Dolores Fernández Gavela

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To Marta, Sara and Roberto,
the best LIFE teachers any learner can have, ever.

There is only one happiness in life,to love and to be loved.
—GEORGE SAND

Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop.
—LEWIS CARROLL

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ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Audiolingual Method
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CA	Communicative Approach
CANCODE	The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
DA	Discourse Analysis
DM	Discourse Markers
DfE/WO	Department for Education/Welsh Office
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELL	English Language Learning
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EU	European Union
ICE	International Corpus of English
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LDC	Linguistic Data Consortium
LGSWE	Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English
LSWE	Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus
L2	Second Language
NNS	Non Native Speaker(s)
NP	Noun Phrase
NS	Native Speaker(s)
PPP Approach	Presentation, Practice and Production Approach
SE	Standard English
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TPR	Total Physical Response
VL	Vague Language

Speak properly, and in as few words as you can, but always plainly; for the end of speech is not ostentation, but to be understood.
—WILLIAM PENN

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The origin

If I were to say that this book is the result of a long-term investigation in the field of applied linguistics, I would not be telling the truth. In fact, it has been prompted by years of on-the-job teaching and by the questions that have arisen during this period. It aims to reflect on concerns about oral production in ESL: Why is informal interaction such a challenge for learners? How can learners become more efficient in the interpretation of pragmatic information in conversation? Are ESL textbooks adequate learning tools for this? If they are not, how can corpus-informed teaching materials bridge the gap between spontaneous English and the ESL classroom?

As an ESL teacher with over 20 years' experience, I have undergone many phases in my career. My first years focused on learning how to teach. I experimented with methodologies and techniques and slowly learnt about the type of exercises that were most *productive,* not necessarily most *efficient,* in the process of language acquisition. At the time, I attended teacher-training courses and then simply applied the techniques recommended in them. I readily accepted the ideas offered by my colleagues and happily cloned them. This period gave way to one in which I felt more at ease with my teaching and I started analysing the type of exercises that I would apply during my lessons. I no longer chose a task because I knew the learners would enjoy it; I selected it for a reason. An aural activity was no longer just a listening-speaking task; it became a way for learners to practise interaction in a supermarket or buying train tickets at a railway station. An email became a writing task learners needed before doing an interactive activity with other learners. In other words, I reflected on *why* I should take an activity to class.

In the following years I began to analyse the weak points in my students' learning[1] process and the most effective materials to improve

[1] In this book, no difference will be made between acquisition and learning.

their success. But while students tend to have fewer problems with written tasks, speaking the language remains a problem. In June 2011[2], the results of the final exams of the state-run Official School of Languages in Gijon (in the Principality of Asturias) showed that only 29% of the students taking the advanced level of the *Pruebas Terminales*[3] passed their oral test, while 45% obtained positive results in their written expression evaluation. Examinees were far more successful in the reading and listening comprehension tasks: 78% and 60% passed them respectively. Undoubtedly, learners find the productive skills the most challenging. Writing and speaking skills can be very trying and disheartening for many students. Of the two problematic areas, I gradually became more interested in the speaking skill[4], perhaps because, due to its interactive nature, most learners rely almost completely on the tasks carried out in the classroom, thus making effective teaching materials and techniques essential.

As an examiner, I have evaluated L2 speakers following the specific parameters provided by the Education Authorities, but, as a teacher, I have very often wondered how these L2 speakers will cope with real situations outside the textbook environmenIndexIt, as the rigid Spanish education system does not always focus on language acquisition but on language testing. This book aims to highlight the need for a more realistic learning/teaching process in which learners are exposed to real interaction and are made aware of the lexico-grammatical resources as well as the paralinguistic techniques used in informal interaction by native speakers.

The book was conceived after years of not understanding why the spoken mode of the language was so challenging. When in 2005, the Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deporte of the Principality of Asturias offered me the possibility of taking a year off my teaching, I was finally able to focus on my research and on trying to find answers to some of the abovementioned questions. Although the book had been planned before, that year marked the beginning of the written work. After 2005, I continued reading and my work on the topic did not cease, but personal and professional reasons slowed down my research. Fortunately, in 2011, I

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[2] Figures provided by the *Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Gijón,* based on the results registered in the SAUCE data base of the *Consejería de Educación y Universidades del Principado de Asturias* (the Education Department of the region).

[3] The schools offer instruction at three levels – basic, intermediate and advanced. The completion of the three levels, as part of a six-year formal learning programme, involves a final external exam - *Pruebas Terminales.*

[4] Speech in this book will be used as synonymous with conversation and spoken informal English.

could take another year off and finalise the project. This final period took me to Amherst, Massachusetts, where I had access to the resources of the University of Massachusetts library, which facilitated my research immeasurably as well as the completion of the book.

1.2. The corpus-informed approach to ESL

> … many corpus-based approaches to language teaching … are based on empirical evidence, thus leading to the elaboration of better quality learner input and providing teachers and researchers with a wider, finer perspective into language in use, that is, into the understanding of how language works in specific contexts (Campoy-Cubillo et al. 2010: 3)

This quote describes an approach to spoken language that corresponds to what, in my opinion, L2 speakers' actually need, i.e. a wider perspective of speech, one that does not provide a neat description of the language, but real contexts to use English as a real communicative tool. As I continued reading the results of recent research, I became convinced that ESL materials had to be corpus-informed, and that it was necessary to take these materials to the language classroom; however, I also anticipated the difficulties of making them learner- and teacher-friendly.

The need to include a corpus-based description of spoken language in ESL materials led me to explore to what extent this challenge has been undertaken by textbook designers. From the outset, I was convinced that, although corpus-informed textbooks and teaching materials had not been readily available in the final years of the twentieth century, this might have changed after the publication of corpus-based grammars and research from 1999 onwards.

In order to examine the influence of corpus-based data in ESL teaching materials, I assumed that language is context-dependent, which can have an effect on the choices speakers make in everyday use. Therefore, the input L2 learners receive should not only be contextualised, but also make learners aware of the different varieties of the language available to them and in what circumstances they are appropriate. The next stage involved reviewing how methodological approaches to second language acquisition had dealt with the spoken variety. The twentieth century gave way to many changes in ESL pedagogy in response to the many challenges of the century. These are associated with the social, political and economic transformations resulting from the two world wars, particularly WWII, and with the technical advances of the final part of the century. Of all those methodological approaches, the Communicative Approach (CA) has become the most popular in the past decades. It is an umbrella term that includes a variety of teaching techniques with communication as its main aim.

In order to ascertain the influence of corpus-informed data on the production of ESL materials, I selected specific features of informal speech from two corpus-based grammars, namely Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan's 1999 *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, and Carter and McCarthy's 2006 *Cambridge Grammar of English*. Once these specific features of speech were identified, my next step was to establish the influence this data has had on ESL textbooks in the two periods covered here, the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. Textbooks are a highly relevant element of the learning process, as learners often rely exclusively on their class books.

I anticipated a significant number of changes and considered that the presence of corpus-based data might have increased in recent books. Thus, ESL materials could be more successful in bringing everyday spoken English into the classroom environment.

1.3. General approach of the book

Although in the past decades the focus in ESL classrooms has been on the four skills, namely reading, writing, grammar, listening and speaking, there is a need to include the ability to understand the pragmatic value of language. Pragmatics, the "ability to use language appropriately according to the communicative situation" (Garcia 2004: 2), enables speakers to perceive the underlying meaning of spoken utterances, which convey essential cues for effective on-going communication and, thus, understand the speaker's intentions, feelings and attitudes. However, in order to interpret this information, L2 speakers need to have access to pragmatic signals and to integrate them in their contextualised linguistic *shared knowledge*. Consequently, a growing number of linguists (Timmis, 2002, 2005; Garcia 2004; Carter and McCarthy 2004, 2006; Cullen and Kuo 2007; Carter 2008; Rühlemann 2008) stress that this can only be achieved by using authentic language samples in order to provide learners with practice of how native English speakers express themselves pragmatically, not just linguistically.

This descriptive and practical approach to language will inform the present study. It is assumed that the teaching activity needs to be supported by suitable materials. ESL teachers, who may not be NS themselves, rely heavily on the resources available to them. In fact, a 2008 British Council survey revealed that 65% of the teachers polled always or frequently used a textbook while only 6% never did. These revealing percentages further highlight the need for these publications to adapt to the pragmatic needs of everyday spoken interaction. Textbooks should no longer aim exclusively at increasing a learner's vocabulary and grammatical knowledge of the language. L2 users need and want to communicate effectively and appropriately (Timmis 2005).

Although the role of the textbook in the language classroom is a difficult one to define, as every teacher and teaching reality is different, in my experience the use of textbooks without any supplementary material does not normally meet my students' needs. However, both teachers and students need a reference point and textbooks undoubtedly provide this. Regardless of the additional resources available online, other additional material such as CD-roms, DVDs and so on, the textbook continues to be the basic teaching and learning tool. For this reason, my aim is to assess the relationship between corpus-informed data and ESL textbooks. As mentioned, chapter 7 will offer an analysis of twenty mainstream British ESL textbooks with the objective of considering, from a diachronic perspective, to what extent L2 learners of B2 and C1 levels have access to real conversational data through the books published in the two decades covered here. I believe the knowledge of the features of spoken English is essential to achieve effective communicative skills, as this information can provide ESL learners with some of the tools necessary to reach proficient communicative competence.

The practical study carried out in chapter 7 will test three main hypotheses. The first one maintains that features of conversational discourse are not expected to have been included in the older textbooks. Materials are expected to rely on the writer's own intuition and to have a prescriptive view of language. The second hypothesis upholds that the features of conversational interaction will be more relevant in the newer textbooks as a consequence of the publication of corpus-based grammars and research articles and books (especially the reference grammars by Biber et al. 1999 and Carter and McCarthy 2006). Thus, the newer books will encourage learners to be more aware of the specific characteristics of conversational discourse and to reproduce them appropriately in natural speech. The third hypothesis is based on the understanding that twenty-first century textbooks might have reduced the influence of the lexico-grammatical features of written English upon the presentation of spoken discourse, i.e. it scrutinizes whether learners are exposed to everyday spontaneous conversation through them.

Based on the abovementioned corpus-informed grammars, the analysis will consider non-clausal, clausal and lexical features of spoken interaction. This final chapter will reflect on the evolution of textbooks and will determine to what degree the teaching of spoken language has managed to disentangle itself from the more prescriptive nature of written discourse. In other words, it aims to establish whether the spoken discourse offered in these textbooks has been brought closer to a more corpus-informed descriptive approach. It will also consider some of the reasons why the changes may be insufficient as well as future expectations concerning the production of ESL materials.

1.4. Outline of the book

The book is divided into 7 sections and progresses from a description of language as an instrument of communication to a more specific study of the features of informal spoken discourse, as presented by contemporary corpus-based grammars. The final section examines 20 ESL textbooks published between 1989 and 2010 in order to assess the extent to which the characteristics of spoken interaction have made their way into these materials.

In terms of individual chapters, after the general introduction and outline provided in the first chapter, chapter 2 considers the different varieties of English described by Quirk et al. (1985), focusing on those that are applicable to the present study. It presents spoken language as a compendium of lexico-grammatical features substantiated by a contextualized cultural framework.

Chapter 3 outlines how the most popular teaching methods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have approached the teaching of spoken English. The emphasis is placed on the Communicative Approach (CA), as it is the underlying method used in the textbooks studied in the final chapter.

Chapter 4 highlights two pioneering corpora: The Longman Spoken and Written British Corpus (LSWE) and the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse (CANCODE). It outlines how these data banks are an invaluable source of information that needs to be adequately transformed into motivating learner-friendly materials.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe the specific characteristics of conversational English and their importance in the language learning process. The first of these chapters is divided into two sections, clausal and non-clausal features of spoken discourse, while the latter describes lexical features frequent in conversation. In both, the fact that spoken discourse involves the use of paralinguistic elements as well as non-standard lexico-syntactic structures is emphasized, as is the importance that these specific features must be introduced in any materials aimed to facilitate fluency in the spoken variety of the language.

The final chapter consists of a study of twenty mainstream comprehensive textbooks published between 1989 and 2010 in order to ascertain the extent to which recent research has informed the design of the new materials. The study does not assess the quality of the materials, although it does assume that the older prescriptive grammars may have become obsolete as the base for teaching materials. Newer textbooks are expected to provide L2 speakers with more effective, practical conversational resources.

1.5. A small tentative step

Finally, I would like to stress that here I do not suggest that learners should express themselves like native speakers. However, I believe that they should be able to decipher the underlying information expressed in any informal interaction as well as be given the choice to use the same communication techniques. To do so, they must be exposed to them and be made aware of their existence and underlying meanings.

O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter (2007) summarise the spirit of the book when they state that L2 listeners and speakers do not use language in the same way as native speakers and it should not be our aspiration. However, on closer inspection of how interpersonal communication occurs and taking *tentative, sometimes faltering steps* in order to interconnect corpora and pedagogy, learners become "real people interacting with one another, working at full stretch with the language, adjusting millisecond by millisecond to the interactive context they are in, playing with the language, being creative, being affective, being interpersonal and, above all, expressing themselves as they engage with the processes of communication which are most central to our lives" (2007: 30). The present book hopes to be yet another of those tentative, faltering steps taken towards more effective and efficient communication in a foreign language as

> It is hard to imagine any learner of a second language not wanting to be a good, human communicator in that second language, whether they are going to use it with native speakers or with any other human beings (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 30).

Language is by its very nature a communal thing; that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a compromise - that which is common to you, me, and everybody.

—THOMAS EARNEST HULME

Chapter Two

Varieties of English

2.1. Introduction

> Language is a systematic resource for expressing meaning in context and linguistics, according to Halliday, it is the study of how people exchange meanings through the use of language (Chapelle 1998).

Giving meaning to utterances is the main objective of both written and spoken language, but the exchange of ideas and concepts does not take place within a vacuum: "The elements of structure of the text are more abstract; they are functional entities relating to the context of situation of the text, to its generic properties in terms of field, tenor and mode" (Halliday 2002: 221). In other words, linguists such as Halliday and Hasan (1976), Halliday (1985, 2002) and Eggins (1994) approach the study of language as a means of communication and not as a two-dimensional entity divided into syntax and morphology. According to Halliday, three components facilitate the analysis of the cultural and contextual environment where language occurs: field, mode and tenor. In his view, it is fundamental to relate linguistic elements to them, and, as a consequence, "we shall find a systematic relationship between these components of the situation and the functional components of the semantic system" (Halliday 2002: 201).

Although field, tenor and mode have become well-known not only in linguistics, but also in other disciplines such as translation studies, let us start by reviewing how Halliday and Hasan used them in their seminal work, first published in 1972. Each of these elements covers a specific part of the act of communication. *Field* refers to what happens in the text including the "purposive activity of the speaker or writer" (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 22), while *mode* refers to the function the discourse has in the situation, including both "the channel taken by the language" and "its genre or rhetorical mode" (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 22). The third element, *tenor*, "refers to the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved" (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 22). These variables bind the features of language function and language form: in a given exchange, the field determines the nature of the social activity, the mode is conditioned by the linguistic interaction and the tenor defines the social statuses and roles of the participants in the situation.

In Halliday's model, language affects and is affected by social and cultural factors, leading to grammatical variations in the way language is used. This becomes obvious even in short exchanges. Greetings, for instance, are conditioned by the social environment in which they take place as well as by the age, sex and even cultural background of the speakers. Thus, *hey*, *hi, hello, good morning* and so on would be adequate in different situational contexts. The cultural environment also conditions the semantic system. In Britain, for example, the normal farewell formula in a supermarket would be *Bye!* or *Goodbye!,* while in the United States these would be replaced by utterances such as *Have a good day!* or *Have a good one!*

The fact that language changes to suit the various social and cultural environments has been analysed by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (hence Quirk et al.) (1985). These authors provide a general classification of the social and contextual variations in the English language involving "region, social grouping, field of discourse, medium, and attitude" (1985: 4), which could be applied to other languages. Although Quirk et al. state that an exchange may involve the five types to some extent, for practical purposes I will maintain the distinction and will later select the two that will be discussed in this book.

2.2. Regional variation

According to Quirk et al., the term *dialect* is the well-established label to refer to regional variation, both popular and technical contexts. Dialects are associated to different regions or areas. For many speakers, it is not difficult to identify certain dialects such as Cockney. However, it is more complex to identify all the possible dialects of the English language, as it can have "indefinitely many, depending on how detailed we wish to be in our observations" (1985: 17). For example, British speakers will probably recognise an American as such, but they may differentiate a Scottish speaker, a Welsh person or a Londoner based on their dialects. They may even discriminate different Scottish accents. Americans, on the other hand, may view all of these as *British* variations or dialects.

It is interesting to point out that there are fewer dialects in the more recently settled areas, including New Zealand, Australia or even the

United States, than there are in Britain. The smaller number of variations found in younger English-speaking countries has led Quirk et al. to speculate that a deterministic factor in the historic development of dialects and languages is the geographical remoteness caused by the difficulties in both communication and transportation. This caused the isolation of communities which developed particular characteristics in their variety of the language. This isolating factor is also considered to have been the origin of some of the languages that we know today, as is the case of Dutch, English and German, all Germanic languages, or French, Spanish and Italian, as Romance languages. Bearing this in mind, modern means of communication have led Quirk et al. to assert that today's dialects are unlikely to develop into languages since

> this latter stage was long ago reached by the Germanic dialects that are now Dutch, English, German, Swedish, etc. but it has not been reached (and may not necessarily ever be reached, given the modern ease and range of communication) with the dialects of English that have resulted from the regional separation of communities within the British Isles and (since the voyages of exploration and settlement in Shakespeare's time) elsewhere in the world (1985: 16).

On the other hand, an analysis of the last fifty years of the language has led McArthur to consider the possibility of the fragmentation of English into what she calls a *family of languages* (1998). For his part, Crystal (2003) believes that a language is a living and changing entity and, for this reason, he argues that independently of the modern ease of communication, dialects have a tendency to adjust to social and cultural needs. Crystal refers to this as *New Englishes*, and he perceives linguistic globalisation as a deterministic factor that will influence English in unprecedented ways. Although Crystal accepts the idea that there are indications that some of these dialects may become an independent identity, he stresses that these are limited by the concept of *intelligibility*. In fact, according to this linguist,

> none of this disallows the possible emergence of a family of English languages in a sociolinguistic sense; but mutual unintelligibility will not be the basis of such a notion in the case of New Englishes, any more than it has been in relation to international accents and dialects (2003: 178).

Crystal believes that even certain *non-standard* forms may be difficult to understand, "there is no true intelligibility problem and no problem of identity status" (Crystal 2003: 180). He does not perceive *English* as a multiform entity with separate denominations within the European context, even though the fact that English is the most widely spoken of the co-official languages of the European Union has inevitably affected its character. Germans, Spaniards, Greeks and Romanians coming in close contact and speaking English are likely to cause sociolinguistic alterations, which have already received the name of *Euro-English.* Furthermore*,* the blending of cultures and linguistic backgrounds has blurred the line between the notions of *first*, *second* and *foreign languages*. However, for Crystal, these varieties of the language "make us reconsider the notion of *standardness*, especially when we find such hybrids being used confidently and fluently by groups of people who have education and influence in their own regional setting" (2003: 183).

Thus, regional variation is not a straightforward concept, especially in times when socio-political borders are becoming less defined. Globalisation has created a more universal world where nationalities are no longer clearly marked by cultural aspects. Language, especially English, is being influenced by the globalisation process, which has led to the search for other ways to express self-identity. How this will affect English is yet to be seen, changing English and transforming it into McArthur's *family of English* (1998), a family where the common denominator is intelligibility and where each member has a distinctive identity.

From a similar perspective, Bauer believes "there is just one level of language, both in Britain and in the colonies, a level which we can term a standard" (2002: 104). However, unlike McArthur, she does not discard the possibility that English, like Latin, can break up into completely different languages. She considers the possibility of Australian or American becoming languages derived from English, very much like French or Spanish derived from Latin. In any case, for Bauer, there are determining factors that make the complete break-up of English into Englishes an unlikely outcome. The role of the media and the fact that "in recent times some evidence of language convergence rather than divergence" (2002: 103) has been identified may indicate that the division of English is improbable after all. She also maintains that even though spoken English tends to undergo constant transformation, written language does not experience such dramatic changes. In fact, she highlights that "one of the many advantages claimed for English is that you can sit down and read a work written in Canada or Australia or Tyneside wherever in the English-speaking world you come from [since] the differences of grammar between varieties are very slight" (2002: 102). Bauer adds that everybody speaks with some accent and that "what you speak with your accent is your individual version of a dialect – a kind of language which identifies you as belonging to a particular group of people" (2002: 3).

Similarly, McArthur argues that "a monolithic view of English as 'a' language is no longer sufficient to cope with the reality we meet from people all round the world who say that they speak 'English'" (1998: 101). More recently, he has written on the concept of Euro-English, somehow related to "*Franglais* and *Deutschlish"* (2003: 57). Outside Europe, researchers have begun to consider the influence of other languages upon English. Eaves, for instance, wonders about the existence of "English, Chinglish or China English?" (2011: 64).

2.3. Social variation

2.3.1. Social classes

Quirk et al. affirm that linguistic variations can be affected by socio-economic factors in relation to the additional features of age and sex, thus, creating a parallelism between upper-class educated users of English and the uneducated users belonging to the lower-classes. These authors also point out that the higher levels of education are often linked to the so-called standard variety, which, in turn, "tends to be given the additional prestige of government agencies, the professions, the political parties, the press, the law court, and the pulpit" (1985: 18). Nonetheless, they insist that non-standard language should not be associated exclusively with uneducated speech, as regional varieties can often adopt non-standard forms, and, consequently, "there is no simple equation of regional and uneducated English" (1985: 18). An example of this is multiple negation, which Quirk et al. regard as linked to uneducated speakers, although the structure has cut across regional boundaries:

> Just as educated English, I saw, cuts across regional boundaries, so do many features of uneducated use: a prominent example is the double negative as in *I don't want no cake*, which has been outlawed from all educated English by the prescriptive grammar tradition for over two hundred years but which continued to thrive as an emphatic form in uneducated speech wherever English is spoken (1985: 18).

Although they do not establish an out-and-out link between the level of education and the use of standard English, Quirk et al. remind us that educated English "comes to be referred to as STANDARD ENGLISH" (1985: 18), whereas "forms that are especially associated with uneducated (rather than dialectal) use are generally called NONSTANDARD" (1985:

18). This definition is not accepted by other researchers. Not long after the publication of Quirk et al's grammar, Freeborn, French and Langford (1993) suggested that standard English should be regarded as a dialect *among many* and not as "'the English language' and the dialects as a number of substandard varieties" (1993: 39). This approach to *standardness* would imply that other dialects would no longer be considered *imperfect* versions of the language but "equally regular in their own forms and rules" (1993: 39).

In fact, Freeborn, French and Langford stress that the most significant differences in dialects are grammatical. Thus, if standard English is not considered a superior version of the language, perhaps grammatical variations in other dialects could be considered acceptable. To demonstrate this point, Freeborn, French and Langford provide two examples. On the one hand, they argue that "it is not true that negatives necessarily make a positive in language even if they do in mathematics" (1993: 41); on the other, they mention the case of double comparatives, where the "comparative is reinforced by being doubled" (1993: 44). In other words, they support a more tolerant view of appropriateness that would accept vocabulary and grammatical structures associated at present with non-standard English.

Similarly, Biber, Conrad and Leech (2003) consider non-standard structures such as dependent multiple negation to be a characteristic of spoken non-standard English, not necessarily indicative of social or economic class. In their approach to language it is not *who* uses the language but *how* and *why* the user makes specific choices.

2.3.2. Prestige and power

As Quirk et al. remind us, *educated* English is associated with prestige and power. It is the language used in the traditional grammars and dictionaries, "it is almost exclusively the language of printed matter" (1985: 18). It also remains the language used to speak in formal public settings. It is this social and political prestige that equates the so-called educated language with the *standard* label, rather than other more objective linguistic reasons. Trudgill and Hannah, who have studied the regional and social differences of English, endorse this point of view. For these linguists, standard English is associated with "the variety of the English language which is normally employed in writing and normally spoken by 'educated' speakers of the language" (1994: 1).

Carter also relates the concept of standardisation to written language and believes that "not to learn to write standard English is to be seriously disadvantaged and disempowered" (1999: 163). He supports the teaching of standard English in the written form, but, unlike other authors, he cautions that to teach a socially-associated dialect can also cause problems. He questions "the unthinking and determined use of the equation between speech and standard English" (1999: 153), which has led to similar descriptions of the spoken and written modes in England and Wales' curriculum, where we read: "In order to participate confidently in public, cultural and working life, pupils need to be able to speak (…) standard English fluently and accurately" (DfE/WO 1995: 2). Thus, Carter maintains, the objective of the curriculum is "for pupils to speak in the same way as they write" (1999: 154) or to speak in an unnatural manner.

Although the curriculum has undergone significant alterations over the last years, Carter's claims have yet to be paid full attention. In the 2011 version, pupils are still expected to "express themselves correctly and appropriately … Since standard English, spoken and written, is the predominant language in which knowledge and skills are taught and learned, pupils should be taught to recognise and use standard English" (DfE/WO 2011).

Cheshire (1999) takes the concept of standardness a step further. She believes that educated speech contains characteristics that are not mentioned in prescriptive grammars, reinforcing the view that standard language is based on written norms. Like Carter, she strongly defends the separation between written and spoken descriptions of the language:

> at the very least, it seems necessary to draw a clear distinction between spoken standard English and written standard English, and between formal and informal styles of both speaking and writing (1999: 146).

Furthermore, Cheshire challenges the association of certain forms such as the negative contraction *ain't* with the lower social classes. She states that this correlation is not based on linguistic grounds but on capricious sociolinguistic reasoning. Here she refers to Klein's historical perspective of linguistic divisions. This researcher affirms that, in the eighteenth century, the standard variety was an instrument used to express *politeness* or refinement. In an attempt to flee from barbarity and towards knowledge and culture, "writers began to use specific issues of linguistic usage" (Klein 1994: 43) for social and political purposes. This eventually meant that some features of the language, such as contracted forms, became "morally, socially or politically charged" (1994: 43).

The search for a regulated form of *politeness* during the years of Enlightenment had long-lasting linguistic consequences for the concept of standard or *correct* spoken discourse. Even in the early twenty-first century, Kubota found that “an inequality is also reflected in prejudices and discrimination against speakers of non-mainstream US English at work places and campuses” (2001: 47). On the other hand, Sutherland provides a modified view of the prestige and power allocated to standard users of the language. He believes that “the plethora of distinct varieties of Standard English across the globe also erodes the very notion of there being one Standard English” (2010: 99). She calls for teachers to inform learners of the different varieties “according to geography, culture, ethnicity, social background, age and gender” (2010: 99). In other words, she attempts to dissociate non-standardness from an uneducated use of the language.

2.4. Varieties according to field of discourse

Field of discourse refers to the type of activity speakers become engaged in and reflected in the language. Speakers are able to switch from one variety of discourse to another depending on the occasion and on the features the situation may require. The number of varieties a speaker can master depends on his or her profession, training and interests. The switch may consist of simply using more specific lexical items related to a field or, at times, using certain grammatical structures. For example, a cooking recipe may contain vocabulary such as flour, eggs, beat and blend, but it will also use imperative structures:

> **Example 1**
> Beat the eggs.
> Add the flour and blend for two minutes.

Finding atypical grammatical structures would be, to say the least, surprising:

> **Example 2**
> It would be a very good idea if after beating the eggs, the rest of the flour was added and blended together for approximately two minutes.

Thus, the field of discourse, or register, has been defined as “the set meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns that are typically drawn upon the specific conditions, along the words and structures that are used in the realization of these meanings” (Halliday 1978: 23). In Stubbs’ view, these semantic and syntactic choices become props for the roles that “have to be acted out in social interaction” (1983: 7). Along the same lines, Biber, Conrad and Leech claim that “registers can be described in terms of their style by comparing their use of the lexical classes" (2003: 23). Hence, a preacher giving a sermon will need a specific register, which will undoubtedly be very different from the one used by children in a primary school. Likewise, for these young pupils, it would be adequate to find a description of Italy such as *It is shaped like a boot*. However, such a description would be far from acceptable if used by a geographer at a professional conference. In other words, the real significance of an utterance cannot be valued on its own: a statement has to be considered within its social context. Eggins considers these features to be "the general framework that gives purpose to interactions of particular types, adaptable to the specific contexts of situation that they get used in" (1994: 32). Thus, the field of discourse determines what a person is *doing* with language, i.e. how speakers choose to present themselves to specific groups through the use of language.

Howard uses the term "jargon" in a similar manner. In his view, jargon refers to "the sectional vocabulary and register of a science, art, trade, class, sect, or profession, full of technical terms and codes, and consequently difficult, or often incomprehensible, for those who are not in the know" (1985: 43). He provides the example of a scientist who uses technical terms in sentences likes "Chlorophyll makes food by photo-synthesis" when addressing other scientists, while he might *translate* it as "green leaves build up food with the help of light" (1985: 45) when addressing a class. Jargon is necessary as part of the *membershipping* process of communication, because it makes the ongoing interaction more fluent and efficient due to the lexico-grammatical and even intonational similarities of the speakers participating in it.

For his part, Ferguson states that

> people participating in recurrent communication situations tend to develop similar vocabularies, similar features of intonation and characteristic bits of syntax and phonology that they use in these situations… special terms for recurrent objects and events, and formulaic sequences or "routines" seem to facilitate speedy communication … There is no mistaking the strong tendency for individuals and co-communicators to develop register variation along many dimensions (1994: 20).

From the definitions given in this section, it would be logical to assume that the varieties according to the field of discourse are a compendium of factors that contribute to the interpretation of the utterances. The field of discourse would, thus, involve the relevant features of formality, technicality and topic for a given communicative situation.

2.5. Varieties according to medium

According to Quirk et al. (1985), there are two mediums, the spoken and the written. Previously, Hymes had made use of the term "channel" to refer to the same feature, specifying that there could be a "choice of oral, written, telegraphic, semaphore, or other mediums of transmission of speech" (1974: 49). For our purposes, the obvious difference between these mediums is derived from the situation in which communication takes place and, therefore, the focus will be on the binomial spoken/written. In writing, the reader is absent, which might create a need to be more precise and explicit, while in speech sentences are often incomplete and tend to be supported by gestures, intonation, backchannelling as well as paralinguistic strategies (see section 5.1.). Oral communication is more immediate. This "ephemeral, dynamic, continuous, context-bound, less explicit, etc." character of spoken discourse has meant that "the persistent, static, discrete, decontextualized, more explicit, etc." (Linell 2005: 183) written language has been given prominence in prescriptive grammars and dictionaries. Linell believes that linguistics has shown an obvious bias that can be traced back to "Aristotle, Dionysius, Thrax, Donatus, Priscian and others and goes all the way to the twentieth century, with names like Saussure, Bloomfield and Chomsky" (2005: 2).

The preferential treatment writing has received is understandable from a historical perspective. Speech was temporary and changing, while writing was tangible and permanent. It could be studied and analysed much more easily. Nonetheless, much has changed since the prescriptive trend promoted by scholars in the eighteenth century; a descriptive grammatical framework no longer accepts writing as the only mode that should dictate the norms of correctness and appropriateness. Grammarians such as Quirk et al. (1985), Halliday (1994), Biber et al. (1999) and Carter and McCarthy (2006) defend the view that within the English language, a dichotomy between the spoken and written mediums should be acknowledged, but add that both should be studied in their own right.

> Since speech is the primary or natural medium for linguistic communication, it is reasonable to focus on the differences imposed on language when it has to be expressed in a graphic (and normally visual) medium instead (Quirk et al. 1985: 25).

Fortunately, over the last two decades, speech has become a focal point for many grammarians, who aim to describe the specific features of this dynamic medium. Spontaneous or conversational communication has also received much attention from a pedagogical perspective. Additionally, we need to consider other factors, such as the speed and diversity of communication as well as the technological advances of the twenty-first century. Writing is no longer limited to books, newspapers and letters, while speaking also has numerous forms. In fact, the merging of both types of communication (emails, advertising, etc.) has led McCarthy and Carter (1994) to talk about *modes* rather than *medium* of communication. While *medium* refers to the overall distinction between linguistic messages transmitted to their receivers via phonic or graphic means, that is, by sound or by writing, *mode* refers to choices that the sender makes as to whether some features normally associated with speech or writing are to be included in the message, regardless of the medium in which it is to be transmitted. For example, a university lecture may be transmitted through the medium of speech, but it may have characteristics of the written academic mode; an email uses a written medium but may share some of the characteristics of speech.

On the other hand, studies comparing oral cultures as opposed to those with a written tradition (Havelock 1982) have led researchers to conclude that "the idea that medium affects, and is affected by, what people do with discourse continues to be a powerful and a useful one" (Johnstone 2002: 173). Some linguists (Ochs 1979; Carter and McCarthy 1994 and 2006; Biber et al. 1999) have highlighted the fact that the *degree of planning* is the distinctive feature characterising discourse in a given medium. While, face-to-face interaction needs little planning, a lecture would need to be carefully planned; a book is drafted and edited and yet certain computer-mediated talk may involve almost immediate written interaction, thus, leaving little time for planning.

Undoubtedly, unplanned interaction has certain unique features linked to the characteristics of everyday conversation. According to Ochs, this type of discourse relies on the immediate context in which it takes place. The syntactic structures used in this case tend to be simple. Speakers are assumed to have learned them in the early stages of the language acquisition process (in L1 or even L2). In connection with these points, unplanned discourse contains frequent repetition, incomplete sentences or even actual misunderstandings.

The combination of the concepts of medium and mode make an impact upon the features of speech and, consequently, we need to consider them beyond the two dimensional approach presented by Quirk et al. (1985). For example, the line drawn between the spoken and written mediums has been blurred by contemporary electronic means of communication. In fact,

> computer networks are often considered a medium of communication distinct from writing and speaking. … CMD[1] exchanges are typically faster than written exchanges (e.g., of letters, or published essays which respond to one another), yet still significantly slower than spoken exchanges, since even in so-called "real-time" modes, typing is slower than speaking (Herring 2004: 2).

Text-messages, emails, on-line newspapers and information are examples of how features associated with speech have entered the "static" world of writing. And yet, regardless of the blurred nature of communication in the age of the Internet, the differences defined by Halliday remain valid in many contexts:

> Typically, written language becomes complex by being lexically dense: it packs a large number of lexical items into each clause; whereas spoken language becomes complex by being grammatically intricate: it builds up elaborate clause complexes out of parataxis and hypotaxis (1994: 350).

Most of the informal spoken discourse produced in everyday conversation is immediate and spontaneous, that is, it is necessarily vague, unplanned and context-dependent. A written text, on the other hand, e.g. a school essay or a newspaper article, tends to be more specific and information-centred and, thus, more elaborate.

2.6. Varieties according to attitude

Variations according to attitude refer to the choices made by speakers/writers in connection with their attitudes towards the listeners/readers as well as to the purpose of communication. In other words, it involves using the adequate *features* of speech that may facilitate communication depending on the relationship between the participants in a given exchange. This use-related framework, as opposed to dialects (which would be considered user-related), aim to "uncover the general principles which govern <the variation in situation types>, so that we begin to understand what situational factors determine what linguistic features" (Halliday 1978: 32). A speaker/listener or a writer/reader needs to adopt different roles, directly linked to the level of formality required. Quirk et al. had proposed a scale between formal ("relatively stiff, cold, polite, impersonal") and informal ("relatively relaxed, warm, rude, friendly") (1985: 26). The distinction involves both grammar and vocabulary: "For

[1] Computer Mediated Discourse

example, contractions such as *didn't* are appropriate in both informal and neutral English; they are excluded from formal English" (1985: 26).

However, this initial division is far too limited. The spoken and written modes can reflect concrete choices made by speakers in certain contexts, e.g. spoken/written academic language, spoken/written fictional language or spoken/written medical language. Each of these adaptations reveals the *attitude* of the speaker in a given context. They can vary in structure but "the one aspect in which they cannot vary with consequence to their genre-allocation is the obligatory elements and dispositions of the GSP[2]" (Hasan and Halliday 1985: 108). Following this line of thought, Finegan states that, from a very early age, language users are able to express themselves in several varieties. Young children, for example, can differentiate between the interactional level of appropriateness when addressing a teacher and when talking to a classmate in the playground. Additionally, changes take place continuously in spoken language, as "social rules govern non-linguistic behaviours such as physical proximity, face-to-face positioning, standing and sitting" (Finegan 2012: 341). These variations at a non-linguistic level make an impact upon the vocabulary, sentence structure, and phonology.

In adult users, the command of a wide range of attitudinal variations is often taken for granted. It is a feature associated to "maturity, tact, sensitivity, and adaptability – personality features which enable the individual to observe and intimate what others do, and to search the language's resources to find expressions to suit his attitude" (Quirk et al. 1985: 26). Although it is true that younger children do not possess the necessary resources to be tactful in certain circumstances, it would be too intransigent to state that only considerate, courteous and complacent users of the language can handle attitudinal variations competently. Milroy and Milroy go even further when they state that, for the most part, users have an innate sense of appropriateness: "There is no speaker who does not vary his or her usage according to situation: a native speaker who confined his usage to a single (formal) style would be unnatural and odd" (1985: 63).

2.7. Focusing on spoken language

As we have seen in the previous sections, the definition of the term *English* is not straightforward, and it becomes even more difficult when authors attempt to delimit the barriers between the spoken and written

[2] Genre Specific Potential

language. Descriptive linguistics has highlighted and systematically classified variations of speech and writing and, although there is still one common starting point, i.e., English grammar and vocabulary, the fact that each mode has its own characteristics can no longer be obviated in L2 teaching and learning.

In a society where bilingual education at both university and non-university levels is in growing demand, Spaniards are not alone when perceiving English "as both socially and professionally important" (Reichelt 2006: 3). What is more, nowadays, learners need to *use* language more than ever before as they have new, more specific needs. English learning can take various forms, as Hutchinson and Waters point out when stating: "tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need" (1987: 8). If we accept that "life is in many ways a series of conversations" (Cameron 2001: 7), it seems paradoxical that comprehensive ESL textbooks have focused primarily on giving a *tidy* view of language structures, while relegating real-life communication to a very secondary position, if any. This *tidiness* has gradually been challenged by authors like Mauranen, who states that "the traditional concept of clause may go far (even if not all the way) in describing written text, but as anyone working with speech notices, its usefulness as an analytical tool of speaking is limited" (2007: 43), and goes on to say that "the academic world, just as the worlds of business, entertainment, and tourism, is increasingly demanding good spoken skills in international encounters" (2007: 47).

Although, traditionally, the spoken skills have been influenced by a prescriptive approach to language, where "grammar reference books and English as a Foreign Language textbooks [put] little emphasis on this aspect of informal spoken language" (Cutting 2003: 159), the fact that much of the meaning expressed in informal conversation is not expressed with the so-called standard lexico-syntactic structures cannot be overlooked. This book will consider the use of frequent conversational features, including non-clausal elements (section 5.1.), clausal elements (section 5.2.) and lexical features (chapter 6), whereas others, such as suprasegmental elements, fall out of the scope of this work. I contend that these features must be accounted for in ESL/EFL materials if L2 speakers are to achieve effective, fluent communication. Low and Littlemore defend this view when they that what "international students find particularly difficult is the understanding of spoken discourse" (2009: 27) and, more specifically, the conversational style.

To sum up, the current study is based on the assumption that English is held together thanks to the concept of *intelligibility*, which results from the sociolinguistic background participants share. At the same time, it also accepts the dichotomy between the spoken and written mediums and/or modes. While the present section has focused on the various factors that can affect linguistic interaction, the next section provides a brief overview of how the various methodological approaches of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have approached the teaching of the spoken variety of a language. It will not provide general descriptions of the methods, but will consider the extent to which these methods deal with the spoken/informal language. Thus, the two most relevant varieties here are attitude (informal) and medium (spoken).

There is no such thing as a worthless conversation, provided you know what to listen for.

—JAMES NATHAN MILLER

CHAPTER THREE

THE TEACHING OF THE INFORMAL/SPOKEN VARIETY OF ENGLISH

3.1. Historical background

Traditional prescriptive approaches to language have not considered informal spoken language to be a priority in L2 acquisition. In the case of the English language, the absence of an institution such as the *Academie Française* in France or the *Real Academia de la Lengua* in Spain has made grammars and dictionaries the reference points of the notion of linguistic correctness. Conventionally, these publications have determined that the appropriate language to be taught is formal and static, i.e. based on the prescriptive norm of polite written English. From a historical perspective, this approach made sense, as the spoken variety was considered mutable, making it less tangible, and hence difficult to analyze, than written texts. It would, nonetheless, be an understatement to affirm that the importance of spoken communication has been overlooked.

Linguistic tendencies throughout much of the sixteenth century concentrated on good rhetoric and eloquence, while the following two centuries focused on orthography and pronunciation. Although the spoken genre was never totally neglected, it is true to say that the amount of work on the teaching of the spoken word had little methodological impact, as most publications focused on the written variety. One of the first attempts to incorporate the teaching of spoken English into a syllabus took place during the Tudor period, when school children were trained to speak Latin. The controversial textbook used, Robert Whittington's *Vulgaria*, included certain colloquial expressions such as *thou stynkest* (White 1932). Likewise, in *The English Grammar* (1640), Ben Johnson stated that his work was intended "for the benefit of all strangers out of his observation of the English language now spoken and in use", and added that "grammar is the art of true, and well speaking a language: the writing is but an accident" (1640: 2).

The need to *speak* a foreign language, although perhaps not as salient as it is today, has always existed. Vizetelly defended that grammar was not necessary “in order to acquire correctness of speech” as long as conversations were maintained with “persons who speak correctly” (1915: 262). He argued that grammarians were limited in their task simply because they *knew too much* and because the time-consuming task of describing language did not allow them to keep up with “the laws of permutations” (1915: 265). In the early twentieth century, this linguist wrote that “correct pronunciation is the evidence of education” (1915: 270). He also believed that “it is due to the care which we exercise in teaching the language that the level of English speech is higher in America than it is in England” (1915: 332).

The twentieth century was, indeed, a time of change. Many approaches defended contrasting points of view: even the mere definition of *linguistics* was questioned and revised. Generally speaking, three major levels were used to define human communication: the discourse level, the lexico-grammatical level and the phonological level. The importance of discourse, understood as the use of language, was defended in the early decades of the twentieth century by linguists such as Baker, who gave priority to speech in the language acquisition process. She believed that “the adjustment in the teaching involves a shifting of emphasis from written to spoken language, the acquisition of a social viewpoint, and the reorganization and renewal of subject-matter based upon social needs” (1924: 595). In other words, she regarded the spoken language as the primary means of social interaction.

She emphasized the fact that teaching based on “knowledge of the grammar and the theoretical principles of the language” (1924: 595) was destined to change. Based on the results of an amateur survey carried out by her students, which showed that up to 90% of the language used was spoken, she concluded her study thus:

> The teaching of spoken English is not a transient fad. It is a stable manifestation of a steady, growing, and irresistible tendency of our language-teaching to adjust to the rapid-communication methods of this day - the closer touch, the impatience of intermediaries, the imperative demand for speed and directness (1924: 597).

In the same year, Palmer and Blandford published *A Grammar of Spoken English,* with a clear lexico-grammatical approach. The title, although promising, was a basic first step towards the description of the spoken language. It was meant to be used by adult students of English, although the fact that it was written in English “shows that it is not intended to be put into the hands of beginners; it is designed to help (a) those who are already able to understand written English" (Palmer and Blandford 1969 [1924]: xiii). This would imply that, in the early decades of the twentieth century, spoken English was considered a secondary skill: it was to be acquired once writing had been mastered. For Palmer and Blandford, grammar was destined to become a tool used by "the English teachers who teach living English speech" (1969 [1924]: xii). They believed that it was impossible for a learner to memorize all the possible utterances as "a language is practically limitless" and, consequently, proposed a process they called *substitution*. This meant that original sentences were formed "from analogous sentences which have been memorized at some previous time" (1969 [1924]: xiii), which, in their view, would contribute to maximize students' time. According to these authors, this innovative approach to teaching spoken English had one drawback: students first had to become familiar with the different grammatical categories in order to avoid false analogies. Thus "the chief function of a grammar-book is to furnish the student with categories which will enable him to perform the greatest number of useful substitutions" (1969 [1924]: xiv).

3.1.1. The phonological approach. Spoken English as pronunciation

The phonological approach can be traced back to the eighteenth century when the need to establish a standard pronunciation began. Sheridan, for instance, believed that all English speakers needed to share the same pronunciation:

> it cannot be denied that an uniformity of pronunciation throughout Scotland, Wales and Ireland, as well as through the several counties of England, would be a point much to be wished (1762: 206).

Throughout the eighteenth century, phonological studies came out with a clear aim: to establish *standardness*. For Knowles, authors such as Buchanan illustrated this movement when, in 1764, he considered "establishing an uniform pronunciation" as "doing an honour to our country" (Knowles 1979: 135). These early studies focused on the diction of specific words and tried to establish a standard pronunciation. Knowles believed that this search for uniformity has had long-lasting effects upon English pronunciation:

> Should Rome sound like roam or room, and should gold rhyme with cold or cooled? Should the first vowel of quality be as in wax or was! Some

> disputed words had popular pronunciations based on fanciful etymologies, for example cucumber was pronounced 'cowcumber', and asparagus 'sparrow-grass'. People still argue today whether controversy should be stressed on the first syllable or the second, and whether vase should rhyme with face, shahs or cause (1979: 136).

By the nineteenth century, speech had been described "in such a way that the masses cannot possibly attain it" (Knowles 1979: 148). Ellis contributed to this thorough description of pronunciation by depicting the "varieties in which no speaker can indulge without being condemned as ignorant" (1878: 149). The inserted [h], and intrusive [r] in phrases like *law and order* were examples of proscribed pronunciation while the r-less forms were perceived as standard (Ellis 1878: 149). Studies continued in the following decades. By 1910, Sweet was able to define his *class dialect* not by the distribution of sounds but by minute details in pronunciation. For example, the pronunciation of the vowel in *bad* or in *house,* the [l] in *bell* or the [k] in *baker* conveyed significant social implications depending on how they were pronounced. Sweet's views were strengthened by publications such as Jones' 1917 *English Pronouncing Dictionary.* For Jones, standard English was equated with the "everyday speech in the families of Southern English persons whose men-folk have been educated at the great public boarding-schools" (1917: preface).

At this time, the study of the pronunciation of language was approached *scientifically*; equipment like the oscilloscope and the spectrograph were used to study speech in a way as it could never had been imagined, which contributed to the ultimate establishment of the so-called Received Pronunciation (R.P.) variety as the only prestigious or educated phonological choice. In 1921, Sampson wrote in *English for the English* that

> a teacher of speech untrained in phonetics is as useless as a doctor untrained in anatomy […] the untrained ear cannot isolate the real cause of the trouble — often, in London speech, for instance, a defect of one element in an unrecognized diphthong (1921: 49).

In literature and popular culture, the fictional character of Professor Higgins reflected this scientific approach to language with immense social implications. Higgins used his phonetic knowledge to pass Eliza Doolittle, a "squashed cabbage leaf" and "an incarnate insult to the English language" (Lerner 1958: 23) as a duchess at an Embassy Ball after teaching her the *genteel* way to pronounce. At the same time, Eliza illustrates how pronunciation could condition a speaker's social status and claims:

> I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel (Shaw 1915: 27).

When in 1922 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was launched, the so-called standard accent received new impetus and BBC presenters became a contributing factor to the standardisation process. Received Pronunciation (R.P.) was implemented as the *typical British accent*. Lloyd James, advisor to the BBC, wrote:

> We also know that for serious purposes, solemn occasions, or indeed for such ordinary occasions as reading the news bulletin, all purely local standards i.e. "dialects," are considered unsuitable by the vast majority of listeners (1938: 170).

Soon BBC English "acquired a reputation for both a clear, measured style and dispassionate, authoritative broadcasting" (McArthur 2006: 361) at an international and national level. It remained so until the 1960s when, according to McArthur, "language attitudes tended to become more 'democratic' and less judgemental" (2006: 365).

However, not everyone agreed with the trend towards phonological correctness alone because it seemed to entail the teaching of informal formulas. Paget, for instance, displayed an openly critical viewpoint towards contemporary phonetics, as he accused "the academic phonetician of being of little use" due to "the slovenliness" with which they taught foreign students the "most up-to-date expressions of colloquial speech" (1930: 193). Like Jones (1917), he was in favour of a rigid standardisation of English pronunciation, but also of teaching standard grammar and vocabulary.

The end of World War II brought about further social changes to the UK. The British Nationality Act of 1948 allowed citizens of the Commonwealth to enter the United Kingdom without a visa. British social groups, which until then had remained practically unaltered, were exposed to a significant number of immigrants from those nations. These speakers introduced new dialects and accents, which, at times, varied distinctly from those of the mother country. Many came from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan and spoke one of the Englishes of the world. They helped to reconstruct the country and also had a predictable influence on the language as well as on the gradual acceptance, however slow, of other varieties of the language.

Some remained averse to changes, though. Compton, for instance, did not try to bridge the problems in communication through inclusion but through exclusion. He stressed the importance of "training young people to speak in an 'easy, clear, reasonably exact, and friendly' way, without the influences of the "dead hand of the elocutionary tradition" (1941: vi-vii). Thus, while towards the end of the twentieth century spoken English would gradually move away from the rigid positions of the past, in the first half it continued to be associated with "that variety of English which is generally used by educated people (more especially in the South of England) in the course of ordinary conversation or when writing letters to intimate friends" (Palmer and Blandford 1969 [1924]: xv). In other words, conversational English was still being compared to written English, which did not involve a spontaneous, informal variety of the language. The latter was often linked with a specific regional or social variety, and, more precisely, with the pronunciation used by a specific sector of the population with a certain educational level. For a long time, this would remain the most persistent trend in academia.

3.1.2. An introduction to corpus research. Some setbacks

The invention of the tape recorder in the 1930s, "perhaps the greatest single event in the history of linguistics" (Halliday 1994: xxiii), became a major breakthrough in the description of spoken language when referring to both its phonological features as well as to its lexico-grammatical characteristics. It contributed to the collection of natural speech samples and slowly began to counteract the existing bias in favour of the written form. Eventually, the recorder together with other technological advances would give way to corpus linguistics and the publication of the influential grammars that will be the base of the present study (see chapter 4).

In the post-war years, Firth urged linguists to study conversation for there "we shall find the key to a better understanding of what language is and how it works" (1957: 32). In his last work, he wrote that language was a way of "behaving and making others behave" (1957: 35) and, therefore, a linguist should concern himself with "verbal process in the context of situation" (1957: 192). Thus, he believed that language was only meaningful when contextualized. This fell in line with Vallins's approach, who a few years earlier, had stressed that "letters are merely symbols suitably arranged to represent any given sound" (1949: 2). The author of *The Making and Meaning of Words* believed that this changing property of “the tongue that Shakespeare spake” meant that “words can have the most extraordinary adventures … even grammar has to bow before customary usage” (1949: 7). It was an extraordinary move, as he associated language with the cultural heritage of freedom: “The liberty of language which we enjoy is, in a very real sense, part of our democratic heritage” (1949: 4).

Nonetheless, not all the contributions of the period moved in this direction. A contemporary of Firth, Chomsky proposed a model that not only questioned some of the previous tenets but also regarded the spoken variety as secondary. His theories, readily accepted by a significant number of linguists, did not help to bring a greater balance between speech and writing. In fact, Chomsky has recently argued that a corpus of speech and written examples is both unnecessary and counterproductive, as it is impractical to keep a record of all the possible structures of the language. In 2004, Andor interviewed the master, who stated that corpus-motivated linguistics could be compared to the hypothetical case in which disciplines such as physics or chemistry no longer relied on experiments to obtain results but determined to “take videotapes of things happening in the world and they’ll collect huge videotapes of everything that’s happening”. He continued that those doing corpus-based research may “come up with some generalizations or insights” (2004: 97), so he considered the corpus approach to be useless to the extent that “I don’t pay much attention to it” (2004: 97).

Chomsky asserted that such data could also contain misleading information, *performance* errors such as memory limitations, shifts of attention and so on. For this reason, in his view, linguists should concentrate on the *competence* of the ideal speaker-hearer as this underlying competence is supposed to be the same for all individuals. In other words, he sustained that all speakers are born with the same communicative competence and, therefore, there was no need to collect *real* data from *real* speakers as the linguist himself/herself could provide the material necessary to carry out linguistic analysis. He/she could do so by using the methods of *modern sciences*, i.e. through the construction of “refined experiments which ask, which try to answer specific questions that arise within a theoretical context as an approach to understanding the world” (2004: 97). Although some authors have argued that Chomsky’s strong criticisms have been extremely harmful to corpus linguistics, Edo Marza believes that, in spite of Chomskyan’s detrimental influence, corpus-based research is becoming increasingly more influential in “the gathering and observation of naturally occurring evidence” (2009: 66).

3.2. The teaching of informal spoken English in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

A globalized society has given rise to the need to communicate at a very quick and immediate pace with people around the world. In the twenty-first century, English has, in fact, become the language for international communication; it is undoubtedly the world's lingua franca, the official language in air and sea communications, the language spoken in the United Nations, and the unofficial language of other economic activities of vital importance for the world's economy, such as tourism. It is spoken by over 340[1] million people in over 100 countries, making it the third most spoken language in the world after Mandarin Chinese (874 million) and Hindi (366 million). In McArthur's words:

> We're all 'global' now, and need to use the first truly universal language, whether we are business people, politicians, teachers, tourists, or terrorists (2003: 54).

Indeed, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has radically changed the way in which human interaction takes place. ICT has influenced not only the means through which a new language can be acquired (e.g. e-books, websites, podcasts), it has also determined the type of language that is taught. Learners are demanding ESP courses that better suit the needs of an ever-growing global market, while professionals need to learn concrete registers in order to communicate efficiently with their peers. But, regardless of this specificity, social interaction is, undoubtedly, a fundamental skill that also needs to be mastered in the L2. *Chatting* is an essential part of both formal and informal interaction. In 1992, Knight wrote that "speaking skills are often considered the most important part of an EFL course" (1992: 294). Bearing this in mind, it is imperative to provide ESL learners with the skills needed to interact with other speakers in spontaneous everyday conversation. Therefore, spoken language needs to be an essential part of any syllabus.

The lack of appropriate tasks, including speaking exercises, can also affect learners' motivation, which has been defined as "an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action" (Brown

[1] Figures provided by O'Neil in "Language and Culture: An Introduction to Human Communication" at http://anthro.palomar.edu/language/Default.htm (consulted 12th May, 2012). Please also notice that in this book no distiction will be made between ESL and EFL.

1997: 114). Thus, motivation is closely associated with the aspirations and objectives of our students and, why not, with an official recognition of their success via formal exams. In 1991, the Council of Europe began an ambitious project aiming to achieve "the mutual recognition and communication concerning objectives and achievement standards" (Trim 2001: 5) throughout the EU. The result was the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR), a document that does not aim to specify "the route that you should take, but it gives you details of the topography so you can plan your own" (Morrow 2004: 8). It puts forward the view that learners can acquire different levels of proficiency in each of the four skills of a target language. In Spain, the CEFR brought about significant changes in the examination system of the state-run Official Schools of Languages. These institutions, whose origins can be traced back to the early 20th century, were created to teach languages to adults throughout the country. While obtaining the final certificate for each of the three levels (basic, intermediate and advanced) implies reaching the minimum level required in the four skills, learners now receive a document that specifies the grade they have obtained in each of these skills. This confirms that learners can *draw their own plan* and, consequently, focus on specific skills.

Considering the role of ICT in ESL, learners' freedom to choose their path in L2, their need to interact in a globalized society and the cultural fusion that "illustrates what it means to 'make strange' together" (Rowsell, Sztainbok and Blaney 2007: 141), the approach to second language teaching and learning has undergone drastic changes in the last two decades, changes that have been accompanied by new materials in ESL. In the past decades, these materials have been based on the Communicative Approach (CA) to learning and teaching languages, which also is the departing point of the textbooks analysed in the final chapter. However, in order to assess its importance in present-day language learning, it is worth reviewing the way in which the most important methods of the 20th century included the teaching and learning of the spoken informal variety of English and other languages.

3.2.1. The Grammar-translation Method

The Classical Method, also called the Grammar-translation method from the mid-1800s, was the main method for the study of foreign languages until the early 20th century. It was originally used to teach the classical languages, both Latin and Greek, as it was believed that learning the grammar of a second language would help to achieve a higher proficiency in one's native language, both in the writing and the speaking skills. The aim of the method was not the teaching of a second language, as "it was recognised that students would probably never use the target language" (Larsen-Freeman 1986: 4), but to be an intellectual stimulus for the learner.

The Classical Method focuses on translation from one language into another. In other words, the written word is prioritized over the spoken discourse, and the ability to communicate orally in the target language is not a goal. Unlike other approaches, it did not require students to become aware of their personal language needs. Learners were considered *successful* when they were able to translate after being supplied with "the lexical and grammatical bricks and mortar which were then built into a text" (Griffiths 2011: 301). However, the learners' needs changed and, as a result of the lack of interest in oral communication, in the mid-1900s the Grammar-translation method lost popularity. Although correct grammar continued to be a priority, reciting rules was no longer enough. Indeed, Savignon argues: "Grammar is important; and learners seem to focus best on grammar when it relates to their communicative needs and experiences (1991: 269).

Although the method enabled students to acquire high proficiency levels in the reading and writing skills, "the tendency for Grammar-translation to produce communicatively incompetent graduates led to the enthusiastic adoption of Audiolingualism in the late 1950s and 1960s" (Griffiths 2011: 302).

3.2.2. Functional-notional Methodology

The preference for the written language remained the landmark of the Functional-notional approaches. Although Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) supported "language *use*, not language knowledge" (1983: 90), the distinction between spoken or written contexts was not clearly defined. Learners were placed in specific situations and given specific linguistic formulae. These formulae were produced by textbook writers themselves, who based their materials on their own intuition of the language, not on real data. As a result, learners were taught that, in order to disagree, native speakers say "I disagree" or even "I disagree with you" (McCarthy 1998: 19), while corpus-based studies have pointed out that NS tend to be more subtle and less direct.

Notional-functional approaches were simplistic views of dealing with, at times, quite complex situations. Learners were exposed to artificial contexts in which the formulae given *fitted* to perfection. However, some essential aspects of communication were not taken into consideration. For example, if we return to the forms in which NS express disagreement, this method did not consider the fact that the speech-act of disagreeing is a socially contextualised "face-threatening act that jeopardizes the solidarity between speaker and addressee" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 66), and that "for the act of disagreement to occur in a way that preserves social harmony, the speaker may use partial agreement, colloquial language, and first person plural to redress the threat to the addressee's positive face" (Rees-Miller 2000: 1089). Thus, performative verbs like *disagree,* and others like *complain* or *invite,* are rarely used when enacting those actions. They are more adequate for reporting, predicting or talking about speech acts rather than performing them.

Function, interpreted as either the use of utterances with a particular grammatical structure or the communicative purpose of a specific structure, does not cover the gap between linguistics and real communication. Thus, learners are likely to encounter difficulties when using language outside the classroom context. Possibly, one of the most important deficiencies of the Function-notional approach is the lack of a cultural or sociolinguistic framework, as it is based on controlled spoken exchanges in made-to-measure situations.

Taking a closer look at the function of disagreeing, once again, a learner should be given the ability to choose between different options depending on the sociolinguistic environment in which the act of disagreeing is taking place: at home, in a shop, at work, whether the interlocutors are friends, family members, strangers or employer-employee and so on.

3.2.3. The Audiolingual Method (AL)

The Audio-lingual (AL) Method was designed to enable post-WWII soldiers to learn to speak languages in a relatively short period of time. The reconstruction of Europe brought about a distinct need to communicate with people of other nationalities. Therefore, the AL method is based not on a lexico-grammatical approach, but on the belief that if learners are provided with the correct structures, which should be drilled and learnt, they will be able replace individual words by others provided by the teacher. This method, similar to the one proposed by Palmer and Blandford (1969 [1924]) (section 3.1.), is a step-by-step procedure in which learners use the same *structure* but encounter different interactional situations. For example, the sentence *I am going to the park* can be altered to *she is going to the park* or *they are going to the bank.* L2 speakers are expected to learn pronunciation and syntax in a process of immersion while in the classroom.

This method, although still in use nowadays, has come across much criticism. Smith's study (1965-1969), termed the *Pennsylvania Project*, provided significant proof that AL methods were less effective than a more traditional cognitive approach involving the learner's first language. For his part, Valette stated that "it remains evident that better techniques must be found to bring students to the mastery of second language objectives" (1969: 403). AL also received strong criticism from Brown and Yule, who believed that, although the drilling practice of short correct and yet artificial-sounding dialogues can help students to acquire better pronunciation, it does not enable them to acquire effective conversational skills. For these linguists, coursebooks within the AL approach tend to focus on the pronunciation and the transactional function of spoken English, while the interactional function is overlooked. They point out that the evaluating process in AL textbooks seems to be somewhat paradoxical as "curiously, the assessment which follows a course composed of short, structured 'correct' responses often demands that the student should produce an extended stretch of speech in a 'prepared talk' on some topic" (1983: 27).

Brown and Yule proposed a syllabus in which the *needs* of learners are met. These needs should be based on the transactional and interactional situations learners may encounter. They suggested a series of *sentence types* that learners can use in order to take part in speech acts: "[these] are performed by uttering a short sentence, taking a short turn" (1983: 27). More recently, Griffiths has underlined that after the "urgent motivation of wartime survival was no longer there" (2011: 302), the AL approach became *boring* and in the early 1970s "the stage was set for the new 'miracle method': CLT[2]" (2011: 302).

3.2.4. The Total Physical Response Method (TPR)

The Total Physical Response (TPR) approach focuses on the listening comprehension skill rather than on the immediate reproduction of spoken language. Asher believed that "there is evidence that the skill of listening comprehension has high positive transfer especially to speaking a foreign language" (1969: 4). He relied on the evidence provided by the way children learn to obey or follow orders before they actually learn how to speak. He defends the view that learners encounter difficulties when faced

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with listening and speaking skills simultaneously. For Asher, the process of acquiring a second language would be *more effective* if there were only one skill to concentrate on. In other words, if learners achieve good listening comprehension "then the transition to speaking may be graceful and non-stressful" (Asher 1969: 17).

All in all, the TPR, as well as the approaches mentioned so far, show significant drawbacks in the acquisition of conversational skills, as neither sociolinguistic nor paralinguistic elements of the spoken variety are considered: communication is limited to the use or formation of utterances within a completely artificial framework. Additionally, these methods are based on drill-like exercises that expect the learner to repeat utterances or to react to instructions or imperative orders. For advanced students, these methods are especially restrictive because spontaneous speech is never encouraged. Thus, while the AL approach encourages learners to repeat sentences from the early stages of the learning process, the TPR method focuses on the comprehension of oral texts, i.e. both approaches lack full interactivity: students act as semi-active agents, while input is drilled either through speaking or listening exercises.

In clear contrast to the principles of the CEFR (2001), learners' needs are not taken into consideration and, as a result, the learning process can become less motivating, less effective. In fact, when referring to the TPR approach, Frost maintains that "you can't teach everything with it and if used a lot it would become repetitive" (Frost 2007).

3.2.5. The Communicative Approach (CA)

During the 1970s, oral communication became essential in an increasingly globalised economy and English conversation classes were by then widespread. Students were expected not only to be able to reproduce sounds but also to "discriminate between sounds or words" (Brown and Yule 1983: 2). For these linguists, the CA encouraged learners to reproduce "spoken-language forms spontaneously, not simply to utter 'written-language sentences'" (1983: 2), to be creative and choose the adequate language expressions for the situation they were involved in. This innovative approach was a turning point in ESL teaching but its newness also led to many uncertainties. As if they were in front of an empty canvass, Brown and Yule sketched a challenging outline for most materials designers and ESL teachers:

> What is the appropriate form of spoken language to teach? From the point of view of pronunciation what is a reasonable model? How important is pronunciation? …is it all right to teach the spoken language as if it were

> exactly like the written language, but with a few "spoken expressions" thrown in?... what is the teacher to do about the incompleteness and frequent ungrammaticality of spontaneous native speech? Pretend it doesn't exist? (1983: 3).

Studies carried out by these linguists using recordings of authentic conversations became a challenging task due to the variability of spoken English and to the important differences not only between existing dialects but also between the so-called *standard* versions of spoken English. Their research, nonetheless, led them to the conclusion that even *educated* and *highly intelligent* speakers tended to use *much less specific* vocabulary (see section 6.1.) and construct syntactically simpler structures when compared to their written production. Brown and Yule concluded that speakers tended to use less elaborate lexico-syntactic structures (see section 5.2.).

Their work aimed to solve some of the paradigms regarding ESL teaching. It was based on recordings of *authentic material* that consisted mainly of incomplete utterances. They stressed that, although incompleteness and *dysfluency and error* were intimately associated with informal speech, these features were not suitable as teaching material. However, a contradiction followed as they questioned the fact that many speakers of English as a second language "speak language which is 'more perfect' than that spoken by native English speakers, because they produce complete sentences and articulate clearly" (1983: 11). They argued that although this language is precise, it may be *inappropriate*, which could lead to difficulties in certain contexts. Brown and Yule believed that, unlike the written language, speech does not focus exclusively on information-transferring or, as they call it, on its *transactional* function. They claimed that a conversation may include a transactional content but, they added, it almost inevitably contains an *interactional* function. When talking, speakers need to be able to navigate through a number of topics in a very rapid manner, i.e. "such primarily interactional chats are frequently characterised by constantly shifting topics and a great deal of agreement on them" (1983: 11). The attempt to achieve a high level of *correctness* by using complete sentences at all times, they maintained, does not enable an L2 speaker to hold a spontaneous informal conversation. Consequently, learners' needs should be re-assessed. For instance, students should be made aware of the fact that using only complete utterances during an informal conversation will, inevitably, make them sound foreign and perhaps impede fluent communication.

Similarly, Savignon has compared spoken communication to the strategies used by players in a football game, where they "fake, pass, and punt their way along the field" (1991: 262). She claims that speakers are much like the players, as their strategies represent the collaborative nature of conversation, as interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning constantly takes place. She insists on the fact that *communicative competence* does not rely on knowing grammatical rules, but rather on the pragmatic conventions of the language. Although grammar is not unimportant, "the replacement of language laboratory structure drills with meaning-focused self-expression was found to be a more effective way to develop communicative ability *with no loss of morphosyntactic accuracy"* (Savignon 1991: 268). The CA approaches language acquisition from a multidisciplinary viewpoint. In Savignon's view, it derives from linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research. It is the fusion of these disciplines, i.e. "when language use is viewed as social behavior, learner identity and motivation are seen to interact with language status, use, and contexts of learning to influence the development of competence" (1991: 273).

While for Savignon the CA was the result of interdisciplinary research, for Galloway it was the logical result of the dissatisfaction that the AL and the TPR methodologies caused among applied linguists. The existing methods concentrated on specific elements of language, such as grammar or pronunciation, but applied linguists "felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not know how to communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions; in brief, they were at a loss to communicate in the culture of the language studied" (Savignon 1993). Authors such as Halliday (1978), Galloway (1993), Sinclair (1997) and Savignon (1991, 2007) have regarded language acquisition as a compendium of different factors in which communication can only be efficient if syntax, vocabulary, paralinguistic and sociolinguistic features are part of the process:

> In interacting with one another, we enter into a range of interpersonal relationships, choosing among semantic strategies such as cajoling, persuading, enticing, requesting, ordering, suggesting, asserting, insisting, doubting, and so on. The grammar provides us with the basic resource for expressing these speech functions… (Sinclair 1997: 3).

In order to achieve *appropriateness* in L2 communication, the CA also relies on cooperative, student-centred teaching. Allwright has pointed out that the curriculum for student-centred learning tends to be determined by teachers, who are often reluctant to compromise their own teaching agendas. He is also critical of textbooks exhibiting a CA as "however imaginatively mainstream textbooks are designed, they still revolve around the basic idea that units should consist of particular things, quite narrowly conceived, to be taught in a particular order, in particular lessons" (2005: 11). Allwright offers a radical alternative which implies reducing *teaching* as a focal strategy and providing *learning opportunities* by "planning for richness of experiences, and planning by teachers and learners, for teachers and learners, to deepen their understandings of language learning and of life in the language classroom" (2005: 28).

Speaking Allwright's alternative, Canagarajah acknowledged that changes in language pedagogy are continuous, but also sees the "temptation to give yet another label to this approach and market it throughout the world as the most effective method" (2006: 20). For this reason, he introduces the concept of the *Postmethod condition*, which implies "the formulation of conditions that will guarantee maximum learning opportunities in classrooms" (2006: 20), while freeing teaching from the limitations of approaches and techniques. The Postmethod model varies from CA in that there are no prescriptive learning strategies. It is a heuristic approach to learning defined in terms of what Kumaravadive calls macrostrategies: "to facilitate negotiated interaction, minimize perceptual mismatches, activate intuitive heuristics, foster language awareness, contextualize linguistic input, integrate language skills, promote learner autonomy, raise cultural consciousness, and ensure social relevance (2006: 69).

Additionally, the Postmethod model is brought about by "the combined forces of technology, globalization, and World Englishes" (Canagarajah 2006: 26) and has consequently raised uncertainties in language teaching:

> What does it mean to be competent in the English language? What do we mean by correctness? What is the best corpus of English or communicative genres for teaching purposes? What do we mean by language identity and speech community? (2006: 29).

Thus, it seems that Brown and Yule's search for answers and solutions has not reached a conclusion yet. In fact, Bell believes that the Postmethod model is yet another *method* which attempts "to unify these disparate elements into a more holistic, redefined communicative language teaching (CLT) through a dialectical process of building and deconstructing forces" (2003: 325). The controversy has been served and the debate continues. However, in order to avoid controversial terminological agendas, CA will continue to be the umbrella term for the methodological approach used in the coursebooks analyzed in the final chapters of this book. In the next chapter, I aim to discuss one of the questions mentioned by Canagarajah (2006): the potential uses of corpora in ESL teaching.

When I read some of the rules for speaking and writing the English language correctly, I think any fool can make a rule, and every fool will mind it.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AND CORPUS-BASED STUDIES

4.1. Introduction

The Communicative Approach, as its name implies, adopts communication as its foremost objective, i.e. it aims to give learners the necessary tools to be able to cope with different interactional and transactional situations in everyday settings. Mishan stresses that learning to communicate in the real world naturally implies the use of *real* material so that "the *ideal*, effective autonomous learner will utilise a wide variety of authentic sources in his/her learning" (2005: 9). If using authentic materials is paramount to the view that "their use enhances language acquisition" (Mishan 2005: 21), an almost inevitable consequence follows: we need to use corpus-informed materials in ESL teaching, "particularly those of the spoken language [that] are an incomparable source" (2005: 260). Indeed, the usefulness of corpora in teaching and learning has received growing attention and recognition (Sinclair 2004; Conrad 2005; O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007; Bennett 2010; Reppen 2010). However, its implementation in the classroom is not simple. McCarthy and Carter (2001) defend the distinctiveness of speech and the necessary differentiation between the written word and the spoken language. Speech has its own rules and learners can no longer be expected to learn the written norm as a first step towards spoken communicative competence:

> Language pedagogy that claims to support the teaching and learning of speaking skills does itself a disservice if it ignores what we know about the spoken language. Whatever else may be the result of imaginative methodologies for eliciting spoken language in the second language classroom, there can be little hope for a natural spoken output on the part of language learners if the input is stubbornly rooted in models that owe their origin and shape to the written language (2001: 57).

Researchers have found that analysing recorded data can give learners an insight into how language is used in specific situations. Some linguists argue that a corpus should be used to provide *real examples* of spoken language (Sinclair 1997). This approach might equip learners with the necessary tools to achieve fluent communication rather than present them with static, constant structures based on written discourse. In fact, some twenty years ago, Crystal found that analysing real conversations he had recorded from friends and acquaintances "brought to light fascinating aspects of English language usage about whose existence I had previously been quite unaware" (1995: 114). In other words, the analysis of conversational input can lead to understand how English in everyday informal encounters functions. For his part, Widdowson added that the use of corpus-informed materials implies that learners can analyse how language is used, although, he was not quite convinced as to the effectiveness of corpora in the classroom environment. He claimed that the use of authentic material is impossible as "the classroom cannot provide the contextual conditions for it to be authenticated by the learners" (1998: 711), and argued that *authenticity* only exists when taking part in the conversation with an *insider*, "but learners are outsiders, by definition, not members of user communities" (1998: 711). In his view, in order to achieve real communication, the CA has "to come to terms with the learners' reality and somehow create contextual conditions that are appropriate to them and that will enable them to authenticate it as discourse on their terms" (1998: 712).

On the other hand, Prodromou has maintained that the communicative purpose of spoken language should not be based exclusively on a descriptive approach of native-oriented corpora, i.e. on "imposing a homogeneous native-speaker model" (2003: 47), and has added that learners should be exposed to a syllabus that covers their needs from a linguistic and intercultural perspective. Corpus-motivated materials provide enriching contextualised data that may enable learners to analyse and perhaps incorporate them in their speech acts. However, learners are not expected to imitate this language, but rather be able to understand it and use it creatively in their own *reality*.

Focusing on EFL materials, Carter compared the *ready-made* conversations that appeared in a series of textbooks to corpus-based data. He found that many essential aspects of natural everyday English were missing, features such as ellipsis, discourse markers and hedges. He also found that most dialogues consisted of an artificial two-part question-answer dialogue with a possible fixed reply, such as *really, I thought so.* In a more recent study, Carter concluded that the specific characteristics of spoken language should not be obviated from the learning process and advocated "for the importance of greater knowledge about grammar and that such knowledge should go beyond single written sentences" (2003: 13).

As we have seen, the systematic study of spontaneously produced spoken language is relatively new: while descriptions of the written language have been numerous, studies of the spoken word remain elusive and, to some extent, controversial. An on-going debate involves the specific objectives that such studies should cover in second language acquisition. Coffin believes that grammatical descriptions should be systematic and cover a wide range of "recurring types of text or genres", while she also acknowledges "the functional nature and educational purposes of spoken text" (2003: 14). Coffin stresses that spoken grammar should be accessible, as it is aimed to have educational rather than just research purposes.

Thus, a logical question may come up: is a corpus-informed approach useful for students? According to a study carried out by Goh, teachers believe that "It reveals an authentic picture of language use to students, a world full of incomplete sentences, phrases, vague language, discourse markers, etc." (2009: 305) and, what is more, "L2 learners are bound to sound bookish without using these features of spoken grammar. This is one reason why many of us were shocked and disappointed when we used English for the first time in real interaction" (2009: 308). Consequently, a corpus-oriented approach within the communicative methodology can lead to a more effective learning process of the spoken variety of the language.

4.2. Corpus-based approach to language teaching and learning

It is at this stage that Coffin, referring to the corpus-based analysis of language, points out that if such "'extravagant' grammar with a very full and detailed theoretical framework and metalanguage" (2003: 15) is to be applied to teaching L2, certain adjustments concerning the needs of the teachers and pupils are required. As speech is gradually becoming an object of study in itself, a description of spoken grammar using a corpus-based approach can provide *real* materials to be analysed by the learners and, indeed, to be incorporated into the syllabus.

Arguments in favour of implementing corpus-informed materials in ESL teaching and learning are becoming stronger. Timmis points out "there is a consensus among teachers, that learners should at least be exposed to spoken grammar" (2002: 248) and, what is more, "a significant number of teachers and learners, in various teaching and learning contexts, express a desire to conform to native-speaker grammar norms, including norms of informal grammar" (2002: 249). He also believes that learners need to experience and listen to spoken discourse, as "global listening is one way in which we can ensure that texts are processed for meaning before they are analysed for language" (2005: 119). However, he complains that in the past decade there seems "to have been little progress on the question of how we should teach spoken grammar" (2005: 117).

In connection with Savignon's (1991) *complexity and interrelatedness of skills*, Timmis argues that segregating skills, that is to say, teaching only the spoken language is not entirely beneficial. For instance, listening to the text will also enable L2 learners to contextualise the situation as well as become aware of aspects such as intonation, pronunciation and other paralinguistic aspects that can give "clues as to the nature of the interaction, the relationship between the participants, etc." (2005: 119). Another element that Timmis (2002, 2005) considers is the concept of *discussion*. Learners are expected to reflect on their "sociolinguistic concerns" and "adopt a critical, analytic perspective to the language features they have 'noticed" (2005: 121).

In this sense, Bolitho et al. argue that language awareness not only motivates students but also helps "learners to notice the gap between their own performance in the target language, and the performance of proficient users of the language" (2003: 252). For his part, Carter defends the view that "pedagogically, language awareness is seen as inseparable from text awareness and the emphasis of language in use and in context entails a view of language as a social and cultural medium" (2003: 242). Hughes supports this line of thought because language awareness can provide a "tangible, more holistic and teacher-friendly framework for aspects of the Communicative Approach" (2003: 256). She believes that such analysis can provide insights into *why* some utterances are possible and some are not: it can give way to a broader "'language awareness' discussion which may bring to light contextual, socio-political, and attitudinal factors as well as semantic and syntactic ones" (2003: 256).

4.3. The corpora

The origins of the concept of corpus linguistics can be traced as far back as the late nineteenth century. For Halliday, corpus-based linguistics owes its existence to the tape-recorder, which enabled speech to be documented, and also to the development of computers, which have enabled linguists to study the spoken medium:

> For linguistics, the two most important advances in the latter half of the century were technological ones: the invention of the tape recorder and the evolution of the computer. The tape recorder made it possible to record natural speech. The computer made it possible to process large quantities of data. The two together have given us the modern computerized corpus, with natural speech as a significant component, on which we can undertake quantitative analyses on a statistically significant scale (Halliday 1994: 8).

Corpora have come a long way since then and tape recorders are no longer used, but the concept is still very much the same. Kennedy defines a corpus thus: "in the language sciences a corpus is a body of written text or transcribed speech which can serve as basis for linguistic analysis and description" (1998: 1). Similarly, for Williams "it is the scientific approach to language whereby the analysis of language is based on data that has been obtained from computerised texts" (2001: 289).

The data obtained from corpora is now wide-ranging and has informed contemporary descriptions of lexis and grammar (Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006), discourse particles (Aijmer 2002), courtroom talk (Cotterill 2004), media discourse (O'Keeffe 2006) and health care communication (Adolphs et al. 2004), amongst many other disciplines and areas of study. Although different in scope and interest, all these descriptions, however, have a connecting thread: in spoken discourse attention "is given to the language that surrounds a particular word or sequence of words" (Adolphs 2008: 6). That is to say, language does not take place in isolation and, consequently, the relation between the lexical-grammatical structures and their function is essential.

This groundbreaking approach to language laid its foundations in the early 1960s, when "work began on both sides of the Atlantic on corpora to be held in electronic form and to be processed by computer" (Sinclair 2001: preface). The Brown University in Rhode Island, US, and the University of Edinburgh, in the UK, began an uncertain path along a corpus-based analysis of language: "since the Edinburgh University did not possess a computer at the time, arrangements were made with Manchester University to carry out preliminary processing; the project moved to Birmingham in 1965" (Sinclair 2001: preface). Remarkably, fifty years later, The Cobuild Corpus "is a 2.5-billion word analytical database of English" (myCobuild.com).

The American Brown and the Cobuild Corpora were the forefathers of others, such as The British/Irish CANCODE spoken corpus (Carter 1998;

McCarthy 1998), The Longman Spoken American Corpus (Stern 1997) and the spoken sub-section of The American National Corpus. Additionally, they have undoubtedly contributed to the pedagogical approaches adopted in the teaching of spoken discourse. In fact, over the past two decades, the corpus-based approach has spread to such an extent that studies also cover other varieties of English, such as Hong Kong English (Bolton, Gisborne, Hung and Nelson 2003), New Zealand English (Holmes 1996) and Singapore English (Ooi 1997). All of these have promoted new strategies in the teaching of English as an L2. The following sections focus on two specific corpora, The Longman Spoken British Corpus and The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE). They are at the base of the grammars which have, in turn, set the path for the present study.

4.3.1. The Longman Corpus Network

The Longman Corpus Network is the generic name given to a series of corpora oriented towards the study of both British and American spoken and written language. The Longman Learners' Corpus was the first one to record and monitor the written output of students of English, making it possible to pinpoint their specific needs. The network does not limit its research to British discourse, as it includes the Longman Written American Corpus, comprised of 100 million words of American newspaper and book texts, as well as the Longman Spoken American Corpus, a source of 5 million words of everyday American speech. Its British counterpart is The Spoken British Corpus, which is part of the British National Corpus and the Longman/Lancaster Corpus. It has over 30 million words covering an extensive range of written texts, from literature to bus timetables. The data provided in this network has been an invaluable source of information for grammars, dictionaries and textbooks, offering a contextualised approach to language and language teaching.

This book focuses on spontaneous spoken discourse and, consequently, its main focus within the Longman network is the information from the Spoken Corpus. It consists of a 10 million-word record of natural, spontaneous conversations divided into two equal-sized parts: a demographic section containing transcriptions of spontaneous natural conversations by members of the public, and a context-governed part consisting of transcriptions of recordings collected in various social contexts. These range from lectures, business meetings, after dinner speeches to chat shows.

For the demographic part of the corpus, the British Market Research Bureau recruited approximately 2,000 volunteers. The recruits were chosen to ensure equal numbers of men and women, approximately equal numbers from each age group, and equal numbers from each social grouping. They were then classified according to age, gender, social group and religion. Linguists did not participate in the data collection process, as in the case of the CANCODE (see section 4.3.2.). In this case, each person was given a microphone and a Walkman and was asked to record his/her conversations over a week. Anonymity was guaranteed so that speakers did not feel inhibited. The data was then transcribed and entered onto a computer.

With regards to contexts, the intention was to collect roughly equal quantities of speech recorded in each of the following four broad categories of social situations: (1) educational and informative events, such as lectures, news broadcasts, classroom discussion, tutorials; (2) business events such as sales demonstrations, trades union meetings, consultations, interviews; (3) institutional and public events, such as sermons, political speeches, council meetings, parliamentary proceedings and (4) leisure events, such as sports commentaries, after-dinner speeches, club meetings, radio phone-ins.

4.3.2. The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE)

In 1996, the CANCODE project, based at the University of Nottingham's Department of English Studies, started with a total of 1,061,274 words of informal spoken English. Although the size of the corpus could be considered secondary to its quality (see McCarthy 1998), at the time a corpus containing fewer than one million words was considered small. Following the *no data like more data* slogan of the Linguistic Data Consortium (LDC), established in the USA in 1993, the Longman Corpus Network was to reach a total of 30 million words, of which 10 million were spontaneous speech. The CANCODE followed suit and, between 1995 and 2000, it collected 5 million words from locations across the British Isles.

The structure of the CANCODE is based on the *genre approach*, that is, according to the wide variety of situations in which conversations take place. The data collected has been sub-classified into five cells: *transactional, professional, pedagogical, socialising* and *intimate.* These cells indicate the kind of relationship among the speakers. A transactional category would denote that the speakers have had no previous relationship. It is considered the most public. The professional category would indicate that speakers share a workplace or meet regularly for professional reasons. The pedagogical category includes encounters among teachers and students as well as student-student conversations. The socialising type incorporates social and cultural talk, while the last category includes conversations among family members and close friends.

The abovementioned categories are, in turn, divided into activities with three goal-types: *provision of information, collaborative tasks* and *collaborative ideas*. *Provision of information* refers to activities in which one of the speakers has the predominant role of providing information; the second type refers to tasks in which speakers are integrated in their own environment, while the last type of activities records situations in which speakers share thoughts, judgements or opinions. Adolphs and Carter (2003) provide a table illustrating the different CANCODE cells as well as some relevant examples:

Table 1: CANCODE text-types and typical situations in which they might be found.

	CONTEXT-TYPE	INTERACTION-TYPE	
	Information-provision	**Collaborative idea**	**Collaborative task**
Transactional	Commentary by museum guide	Chatting with local shopkeeper	Choosing and buying a CD
Professional	Oral report at group meeting	Planning meeting at place of work	Colleagues window-dressing
Socialising	Telling friends about a recent holiday	Reminiscing with friends	Flatmates cooking together
Intimate	Partner relating the plot of a novel	Siblings discussing their childhood	Couple planting a small tree in the garden

(Adolphs and Carter 2003: 49)

It is worth highlighting that the table does not include a cell for pedagogical activities. McCarthy (1998) explains that this is part of the process involving the different steps during the elaboration of the corpus and the use of a trial-and-error approach. These helped the compilers to spot problems and modify their initial objectives. The omission of pedagogical encounters is one of these adjustments.

The corpus aimed to fill each of the cells with 65,000 words. Linguists gradually realised that this was not feasible, as, in certain circumstances, speakers were reluctant to have their conversations recorded and analysed. Intimate encounters and business meetings, for example, were not very accessible as social encounters among friends. Additionally, McCarthy questioned the original objective of obtaining an equal amount of data for each cell. He was critical of the project as a *finished object*, and supported a new approach: a corpus needs to change in size and form "in relation to the recoverability of information with sufficient power of generality" (1998: 11).

The *recoverability* that characterizes the CANCODE offers advantages for the analysis of the data, but the clear-cut cell division also presents some challenges. Real life conversations do not always fit tidily into one of the cells. Human interaction can have an almost unlimited number of variables. For instance, a conversation among work colleagues taking place in a coffee shop after a long day at work will most probably deviate from professional topics into more *intimate* or at least *socialising collaborative activities.* Thus, a corpus with a static structure will, to say the least, distort the data obtained.

Another aspect that has caused some controversy is related to the size of the corpus itself. The initial targeted 5 million words posed a primary problem, as such a large corpus could provide overwhelming information on high-frequency grammatical structures or lexical items. However, less frequent lexico-grammatical items required a larger database in order to have reliable results. This controversy has brought about a change in the perception of the corpus itself and, in a significant number of articles based on the CANCODE (McCarthy 2001a; Adolphs and Carter 2003; Carter and McCarthy 2004), the corpus is no longer conceptualized as a whole. Small sections are analysed for specific and specialised data, thus, avoiding the vast amount of information that the computerised data is able to provide. In other words, analysts draw on the information according to their aims, underlining the importance of what McCarthy had called *recoverability of information* (1998).

4.3.3. Corpora types and uses

In the previous section, we have seen an overview of the structure of the corpora that set the foundations for the grammars (Biber et al. 1999 and Carter and McCarthy 2006) upon which this study has based its findings. In this section, I consider the most common approaches when compiling a corpus and their implications for L2 pedagogical purposes.

McCarthy (1998) describes most corpora as *opportunistic* in that they gather as much data as is available with no classification in mind. He believes that a corpus must have a carefully planned structure so that the data gathered is classified according to the context, the type of speakers and the type of discourse. In other words, a corpus needs an internal structure so that the information obtained can in turn be classified and analysed according to some initial criteria. In the compilation of a corpus, two main approaches are possible: the demographic one and the genre one.

The *demographic* approach aims at a particular population of speakers. According to Biber, "demographic samples are representative to the extent that they reflect the relative proportions of strata in a population" (1993: 247). He highlights the importance of conversational discourse, which, in his view, could represent 90% of the total corpus. This percentage reinforces the need to make ESL speakers aware of the specific features of conversation that cannot be replaced by the *prêt-à-porter* dialogues present in most textbooks.

> A corpus with this design might contain roughly 90% conversation and 3% letters and notes, with the remaining 7% divided among registers such as press reportage, popular magazines, academic prose, fiction, lectures, news broadcasts, and unpublished writing. (Very few people *ever* produce published written texts, or unpublished written and spoken texts for a large audience.) Such a corpus would permit summary descriptive statistics for the entire language represented by the corpus (1993: 247).

The *genre* approach takes into consideration not only the population of speakers, but also the environments and the contexts in which the data collected takes place: "The genre approach tries to seek a balance between speaker, environment, context and recurrent features" (McCarthy 1998: 8). This classification enables linguists to analyse data from different perspectives, i.e. the type of language used in different age groups, in different situations and so on. Thornbury and Slade show how the genre approach can be a useful tool in the attempt to focus on language use rather than on its form, as contextualising language can enable learners to become aware of how language can be and should be adapted to its social context. In fact, for these authors, "the influence of both sociolinguistics and pragmatics on the pedagogical treatment of *appropriacy*, including sensitizing learners to register factors" (2006: 262) can make L2 speakers more proficient users of the language.

Both the demographical and the genre approach enable linguists to observe the characteristics of the spoken language and, more concretely, of conversational discourse. Crystal envisaged a corpus as a means "to verify a hypothesis about language - for example, to determine how the usage of a particular sound, word, or syntactic construction varies" (1992: 74). Subsequently, technological advances in data processing have enabled linguists such as McCarthy to take Crystal's objectives a step further. McCarthy links corpora to the field of ESL teaching when he claims that by using computerised data "we no longer have to rely heavily on intuition to know what we say or what we write; instead we can see what hundreds of different speakers and writers have actually said or written, all at the click of a mouse" (2004: 2). He stresses that although a corpus is not a theory of language acquisition or a methodological approach, "it does influence our way of thinking about language and the kinds of texts and examples we use in language teaching" (2004: 2).

The shift from intuition to corpus-based material as a methodological approach to the analysis of spontaneous verbal interaction has challenged the views of those linguists who, by implementing a prescriptive view, had tried to establish a fixed set of rules for the spoken language as well. However, in corpus-based linguistics a clear-cut definition is no longer the objective because, as McCarthy states, "the particular strength of computerised corpora is that they offer the researcher the potential to check whether something in everyday language is a one-off occurrence or a feature that is widespread across a broad sample of speakers" (1998: 151). Consequently, speech is no longer the dysfunctional variant of writing. It is contextualised and its distinctive features are studied in order to establish their frequency and significance in spoken discourse.

From a similar perspective, Biber and Conrad believe that the frequency or quantitative analysis of data is *much more than bean counting,* as it enables researchers to depict the most frequent speech patterns present in various settings. These recurrent patterns can, in turn, become part of the language L2 speakers actually acquire: textbooks no longer have to be based on the writer's intuition but on actual language use. These grammarians provide a clear example of the usefulness of quantitative corpus analysis by pointing out that "there are literally dozens of common lexical verbs in English. For example, nearly 400 different verbs occur over 20 times per million words" (2001: 332). Thus, it would be impossible to determine if any of these stand out in conversation by relying on the writer's intuition alone. However, corpus-based studies have revealed that, in spoken language, 12[1] verbs account for almost 45% of the occurrences. Undoubtedly, it would make sense for these frequent lexical items to become part of the core content of the curricula, in particular in the presentation of spoken language.

From a qualitative perspective, Biber and Conrad underline that verbs such as *get* have diverse functions, while others such as *say* have a primary function that relates to one main activity. In both cases, they believe that learners, even at an elementary level, will benefit from the use of this knowledge "as these are the ones students will most often hear in their day-to-day interactions with native speakers" (2001: 333). However, they claim that "low-level ESL grammar books tend not to cover these verbs, instead introducing activity verbs like eat, play, work, run, travel, and study" (2001: 333).

Biber and Conrad mention another interesting example: while in L2 teaching the progressive aspect tends to be taught at an early stage because it is taken to be *the unmarked* choice in conversation, corpus-informed studies have shown that this is not necessarily so. Although the progressive aspect is more common in conversational language than in other registers, these studies point to the fact that the "simple aspect is clearly the unmarked choice. In fact, in conversation simple-aspect verb phrases are more than 20 times as common as progressives are" (Biber and Conrad, 2001: 333).

McCarthy and Carter highlight the need to complement statistical data with a qualitative analysis whereby aspects such as the richness and the ambiguity of spoken communication are considered, allowing more balanced conclusions to be reached: "We also believe that qualitative as well as quantitative criteria are highly significant, particularly where applications of corpus insights to the language classroom are concerned" (2001: 337). In any case, these linguists argue against ignoring what is already known about the spoken variety:

> Whatever else may be the result of imaginative methodologies for eliciting spoken language in the L2 classroom, there can be little hope for natural spoken output on the part of language learners if the input is stubbornly rooted in models that owe their origin and shape to the written language (2001: 338).

[1] These 12 most common verbs are say, get, go, know, think, see, make, come, take, want, give, and mean.

Thus, it might seem that corpus-based language analysis is shaping the way material for L2 learners is designed. This revolution, or perhaps evolution, can be expected to affect the presentation of many other features of the language. An example of the importance of a grammar of spoken English may be found in the use of *this/that*. While most traditional grammars describe *this* as referring to people and things, situations and experiences that are close to the speaker or very close in time and *that* refers to people and things, situations and experiences that are more distant, either in time or physically, corpus-based grammar goes beyond such limited descriptions. The data obtained from the CANCODE (see section 4.3.2.) shows how *this* and *that* can have a parallel use. In the example provided by Hughes and McCarthy, speakers choose *that* to distance themselves from the *problem*. Once a solution is found, the problem becomes less threatening and speakers may use *this*: "Contextual awareness assists in the understanding of choice, and grammar becomes a question of discourse" (2001: 267). In this sense, discourse grammar is the interpretation of grammatical choices within a context.

Leech provides us with one the most visual descriptions of discourse grammar: he sees grammar as made up of a "rubbery substance" which can be "squashed or inflated in one part or another according to circumstances" (1999: 9). He adds that both written and spoken language share obvious common aspects, but admits that spoken utterances can seem chaotic and dysfunctional when compared to writing. As a result of this new approach, i.e. when spoken discourse is identified as an entity with specific features, utterances like the one below start making sense.

Example 3

No. Do you know erm you know where the erm go over to er go over erm where the fire station is not the one that white white.

(Biber et al. 1999: 1052)

4.3.4. Concordancing, word frequency counts and wordlists, and cluster analysis

Corpus-based grammar has given naturally occurring speech a specific status within language which, one might expect, is slowly filtering through to the elaboration of ELT materials. Corpus-based materials are processed using a number of techniques such as *concordancing*, *word frequency counts and wordlists*, and *cluster analysis*, each having a specific linguistic objective.

According to O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy, "concordancing is a core tool in corpus linguistics and it simply means using corpus software to find every occurrence of a particular word or phrase" (2007: 8). It can provide examples of patterns of use obtained from everyday discourse that are very useful when determining the contents of ESL materials. In fact, they point out that concordacing data has already been adapted to ELT material in textbooks such as *Natural English* (see example below).

Figure 1: Extract from *Natural English*

Exercises

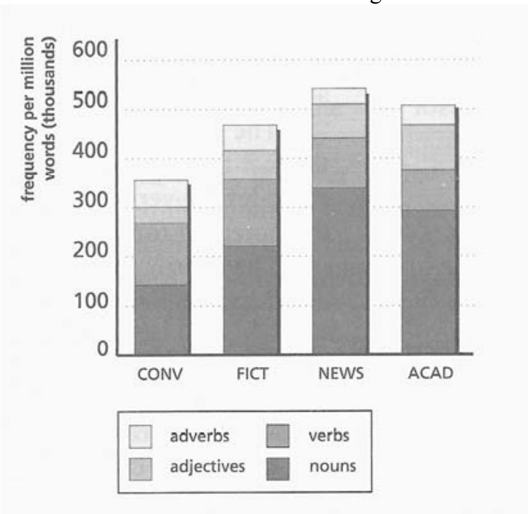
1 Look at these concordance lines, and identify the meaning of *there* in each case. Is it a pronoun (something that something exists) or is it an adverb (saying where something is)?

a. There's a bar and a lecture room for guests' use.
b. There'd been another quake at 4am, a 6.5 shock.
c. It was only in my third year that I really felt happy there.
d. You say there's a certain amount of risk. How much?
e. I was there for her birth and it was the most exciting thing.
f. But there'll be no alcohol on sale.
g. He was standing there with Mrs Kasmin and she tried to give him tea.
h. He had been there since he left the Pit a year earlier.
i. He was confident there's been no problem. So was I.

(O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy 2007: 10)

The second technique, *word frequency counts and wordlists*, can provide information regarding the frequency with which lexical items are used in different contexts or even different language varieties. In other words, "by running a word frequency list on your corpus, you can get a rank ordering of all the words in it in order of frequency" (O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy 2007: 11). For instance, Biber et al. use figure 2 below to indicate that nouns are the most frequent lexical word class while verbs are more common in conversation. It also shows that adjectives and adverbs are infrequent. The high frequency of nouns in conversation, but considerably lower than in other contexts, can lead to the conclusion that conversational discourse has a lower density of information and, therefore, does not need to be as concrete as the written form (see section 6.1). If this data is related to ESL, then surprising conclusions may be drawn with regards to the long lists of vocabulary that tend to be seen as necessary tools to enable L2 speakers to express themselves clearly and precisely "giving full answers and avoiding unnecessary hesitation" (Gude and Duckworth 2002: 175).

Figure 2: Distribution of lexical word classes across registers



(Biber et al. 1999: 65)

Word frequency can also identify the most commonly used lexical terms in different genres. Table 3 distinctly exemplifies that, depending on the context or the language genre, the lexical items used vary significantly. Conversational exchanges, for instance, tend to consist of interactional language such as *thanks, please, yeah* and *like,* while academic spoken language and the written genres use fewer pronouns (such as *I* and *you*) and inserts.

Figure 3: Comparison of word frequencies for the ten most frequent words across five different datasets

	1	2	3	4	5
Rank order	Shop (LCIE)	Friends (LCIE)	Academic LIBEL	Australian Corpus English	CIC newspaper magazine sub-corpus
	spoken	spoken	spoken	written	written
1	you	I	the	the	the
2	of	and	and	of	to
3	is	the	of	and	of
4	thanks	to	you	to	a
5	it	was	to	a	and
6	I	you	a	in	in
7	please	it	that	is	is
8	the	like	in	for	for
9	yeah	that	it	that	it
10	now	he	is	was	that

(O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy 2007: 11)

Figure 4: Top 20 Three-words chunks – spoken and written

Spoken

	Item	Frequency
1	I don't know	5,308
2	a lot of	2,872
3	I mean I	2,186
4	I don't think	2,174
5	do you think	1,511
6	do you want	1,426
7	one of the	1,332
8	you have to	1,300
9	it was a	1,273
10	you know	1,231
11	you want to	1,230
12	you know what	1,212
13	do you know	1,203
14	a bit of	1,201
15	I think it's	1,189
16	but i mean	1,163
17	and it was	1,148
18	a couple of	1,136
19	you know the	1,079
20	what do you	1,065

Written

	Item	Frequency
1	one of the	1,886
2	out of the	1,345
3	it was a	1,126
4	there was a	1,083
5	the end of	1,045
6	a lot of	785
7	there was no	753
8	as well as	737
9	end of the	691
10	to be a	672
11	it would be	671
12	in front of	655
13	it was the	643
14	some of the	621
15	I don't know	604
16	on to the	602
17	part of the	600
18	be able to	596
19	the rest of	577
20	the first time	567

(O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy 2007: 66, 68)

The last of the techniques, *cluster analysis*, is based on the concept that "language systematically clusters into combinations of words or "chunks" (e.g. *I mean, this that and the other*, etc.) can give insights into how we describe the vocabulary of a language" (O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy, 2007: 13). This affects the functional language that is presented in textbooks and, consequently, the way learners approach the task of acquiring vocabulary. The comparison between the spoken and written chunks in figure 4 is telling of the significant differences between the two genres. In our view, this revealing data should condition the materials designed for L2 acquisition, and the spoken/written dichotomy of language should be reflected in such a way that learners become familiar with the aspects shared by both as well as with the uniqueness of spontaneous spoken discourse.

4.4. Corpus-based grammars

Corpus-based data has set the foundations for a considerable number of articles, reference books and grammars. This study has mentioned a number of these publications, but will now focus on the major corpus-informed grammars to this date: the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999) and the *Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide: Spoken and Written Grammar in Usage* (2006). In previous sections, I have outlined the data found in the two corpora, but the most important publications based on them call for a closer look.

The *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (LGSWE)* is a ground-breaking publication based on over 40 million words of American and British English texts (gathered from conversations, fiction, newspapers, academic prose, non-conversational speech and general prose). It is linked to The Longman Corpus Network (see section 4.3.1.), and provides a detailed description of the characteristics of spoken language taken from "performance of naturally occurring language rather than on the linguistic competence illustrated by invented examples" (Broussard 2000: 788).

The grammar was born with a scientific objective in mind. Biber, Conrad and Reppen maintain that, until a systematic corpus-based language analysis began, most assessments of the language had either been based on the linguist's intuition or on small samples taken from one or two individuals, thus "studying individualistic linguistic features" (1998: 173). Conversely, corpus-based analysis contributes to decipher patterns in speech at a more universal level. Barlow considers that the results from the exploration of the data may have irrevocable consequences for the teaching of the spoken variety of English as an L2. He argues that information regarding frequency and utterance function determines what language items may be required in a specific interactional or transactional situation. According to Barlow, knowing *what* needs to be taught will, in turn, affect the *how* should be taught. Thus, the use of corpora implies that "students are exposed to actual usage and hence encounter expressions such as genuine article, express scepticism, detailed study, and so on" (Barlow 2002: 5). He goes on to add that "instances of real English are rarely found in sentences created by teachers and materials developers" (2002: 6). In other words, the use of corpus-based information enables L2 speakers to understand *how* language is used in everyday communication, outside the corseted environment of most ESL materials. The LGSWE provides an answer to all these issues.

The second innovative publication in the field is *The Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide: Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage* (2006), which is intimately associated with The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE), "a unique collection of spoken English recorded at hundreds of locations across the British Isles in a wide variety of situations" (ESL and Applied Linguistics online) (see section 4.3.2.). This reference book provides explanations as to the use of spoken and written language and it aims to benefit the pedagogic process of L2 learning and teaching.

Unlike the LGSWE, this grammar focuses on standard British English, considered "a variety of English" (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 4). The *Cambridge Grammar of English* does not adopt a prescriptive approach to language and, although it accepts the rules that *always apply* in language production, it also highlights the probabilistic ones that "state what is most likely or least likely to apply in particular circumstances" (2006: 5). In other words, the grammar describes how language is used and not how social rules determine it should be used, as they supposedly "mark out a speaker or a writer as educated or as belonging to a social group" (2006: 6).

This comprehensive grammar illustrates how grammatical choices are determined within the social context in which language is used. As a *grammar as choice*, it regards spoken language as inevitably linked to social contextualisation. The authors state that grammars have traditionally shown a bias towards the written language, which has led to the downgrading of the spoken variety, considering it "as relatively inferior to written manifestations" (2006: 9). This has meant that "both in the teaching and learning of first, second and foreign languages, and in educational institutions and society in general, oral skills are normally less highly valued, with linguistic expertise being equated almost exclusively with a capacity to read and write" (2006: 9).

Both of the abovementioned corpus-based grammars have similar goals but, possibly, the main aim is to bring to an end the prescriptive view of traditional grammars towards spoken language, while offering a clear, realistic contextualised perspective of English, spoken and written, by incorporating statistical evidence from many millions of words and broad contexts, "allowing speakers considerable choice in the expression of interpersonal meaning (that is, meanings realised in relation to who one is speaking to rather than just what one is saying)" (2006: 11). That is, these corpus-informed grammars facilitate access to the systematic patterns of English use that are no longer based on intuition, but on the actual use of lexico-syntactic features.

> Every time we write or speak, we are faced with a myriad of choices: not only choices in what we say but in how we say it. The vocabulary and grammar that we use to communicate are influenced by a number of factors, such as the reason for the communication, the context, the people

> with whom we are communicating, and whether we are speaking or writing. Taken together, these choices give rise to systematic patterns of use of English (Biber et al. 1999: 4).

4.5. Some conflicting views

The corpus approach to language has placed speech at a new level. Speech is no longer the rebellious version of writing; it has distinct features within a contextualised environment. This approach to conversational language has set the stepping-stones towards a much-needed identification of the uniqueness of the spoken genre. In corpus-based publications, the frequency of certain lexico-grammatical structures point to the fact that speakers use certain types of speech for various functions: to hold the floor in conversations (discourse markers), to gain time in order to sort out what their message will look like (lexical bundles), to make the message clear (repetition) and so on. In other words, spoken data reveals how very different the spoken word is from the written word. The uniqueness of the spoken language is what this study aims to highlight, as an essential component in any L2 learning process in general, and in English L2 learning in particular. However, at this point we need to consider certain controversies related to the use of corpus-informed materials in language learning.

Some linguistic theories criticise the fact that corpora have focused exclusively on the data obtained from native speakers of English (NS), regardless of the variety being studied. One of the most recent debates challenges the idea that the language produced by NS is the only valid pattern. Consequently, some newer corpora use both NS and Non-Native speakers (NNS) sources (Prodromou 2003), where cultural as well as structural aspects are considered. Steidlhofer (2001) has proposed the elaboration of a corpus of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) that would provide an independent profile of English from that used by NS. Thus, ELF would provide material that would supposedly drift away from the objectives which, according to Prodromou (2003), NNS "never master, never own" (2003: 5). An unequivocal sign of this is reflected in the terminology adopted by linguists such as McCarthy, who speaks of "expert users" (2001b), and Prodromou, who uses the expression "successful users of English" (2003). These terms remind us of the fact that both NS and NNS can be regarded as possible models in successful language use. Although this question will surely give rise to further debate, in this study I will not take on the controversy and consider the term *native speaker* as synonymous with *expert or successful user*.

Another controversial area results from the difficulties of adapting corpus-based analytical data to ESL materials (Cook, 1998; Gavioli and Aston, 2001). In 1998 Carter believed that the results of the corpus-driven analysis needed to go into an evolutionary process: "I certainly do reject extreme forms of corpus-driven language teaching, but I do believe that we need to encourage more not less corpus-based language description, particularly of Englishes in international contexts of use" (Carter 1998: 64), and added that "the best corpus-based language teaching represents an evolution which, I predict, will be seen to be radical only after several years have passed" (1998: 64). Therefore, the difficulty textbook designers encounter is how to design such material. If spoken grammar is sensitive to context, then it seems logical that "the target spoken language features should be embedded in a text" (Timmis 2002: 118). The text, however, should be interesting enough for the target learner. This might not always be possible in spoken discourse as, according to Cook, "a good deal of actual language use is inarticulate, impoverished, and inexpressive" (1998: 61).

O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy state that "in terms of what we actually teach, numerous studies have shown that the language presented in textbooks is frequently still based on intuitions about how we use language, rather than actual evidence of use" (2007: 21). This opens the door to the final part of the study, as chapter 7 analyses textbooks in order to ascertain the influence of corpus-based studies over the last two decades and determine whether L2 speakers are exposed to *real* language use and whether has been any evolution in the way teaching material are designed.

4.6. Teaching material – steps in the right direction

Leaving aside these controversies, I contend that corpus-based data can help language learners acquire efficient and natural conversation competence "by encouraging noticing and consciousness-raising, leading to greater autonomy and better language learning skills in the long term" (Bolton 2010: 535). In fact, Aski points to the fact that "recent research in second language acquisition found that learners reached higher levels of achievement when grammar practice included the processing and negotiation of meaning" (2003: 57). Learners, thus, should be able to negotiate meaning during language practice and observe real corpus data. Undoubtedly, this implies adjustments in the *typology of activities* learners are faced with.

The flexibility of the communicative approach to teaching allows teachers and coursebook designers to go beyond the repetition of formulaic structures. Instead, it pays attention to meaning in order to generate form: "The goal is to immerse the learner in a meaningful context in which he or she is motivated to interact" (Aski 2003: 61). Research carried out by Timmis (2002) confirms that L2 learners are strongly motivated when using native speaker norms of English and that this motivation "is not necessarily restricted to those students who use, or anticipate using English primarily with native speakers" (2002: 248).

However, if L2 speakers need to cope with a wide range of real-life meaningful contexts, it is surprising to find that "one can open just about any textbook at the secondary or college-level and turn to a section that introduces a grammar point. What one finds is explanation, followed immediately by pattern practice, however brief or long this phase may be. Workbook and lab manuals contain similar activities" (Wong and Van Patten 2003: 407). Similarly, Cullen and Kuo have found that corpus-based data is neglected in the materials offered to students. They have concluded that there is a mismatch between corpus-based information and the material found in British mainstream textbooks. These authors strongly recommend further studies and urge writers to use both quantitative and qualitative analysis to elaborate effective EFL material:

> clearly, further studies of this kind are needed to ensure that the learners' voice is not disregarded in decisions about whether to devote more attention in ELT textbooks to spoken grammar than presently exists (2007: 383).

Consequently, if the learner's need to acquire natural sounding conversational skills is taken into account (Timmis 2002; CEFR 2001; McCarthy 2001b), a corpus-based approach puts students in a context where language is "used in everyday situations, targeted to situations they are likely to find themselves in, and corresponds to what they will hear and see in real conversations, movies, radio and TV shows, newspapers, books, Internet texts, and magazines. It is not artificial or invented language" (McCarthy 2004: 15).

4.7. Conclusion

Corpus-based linguistics cannot be ignored any longer in the elaboration of materials aiming to allow both learners and teachers to become familiar with the interactive nature of everyday conversations. Some authors (Conrad 1999; Carter 1995 and 2000; McCarthy 1998 and 2004; Cullen and Kuo 2007; Richards 2008) have argued in favour of the role of corpora in the assessment of current pedagogical materials. This has been supported by the publication of corpus-informed grammars that provide a new perspective of the spoken variety of English. As we have seen, this innovative approach is based on frequency of use and contextual appropriateness rather than on prescriptive rules and notions of standard *correctness* (Hughes and McCarthy 1998; McCarthy 1998; Biber and Conrad 2001).

As Tsui claims, “a number of studies have observed discrepancies between corpus findings and the selection of and emphasis given to linguistic content in ESL and EFL textbooks and curriculum” (2004: 40). The incorporation of the findings of corpus-based research will inevitably lead to more realistic descriptions of authentic English and will promote a more proficient and true-to-life acquisition of the L2. The integration of this material should be based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the language rather than on the linguist’s individual intuition. McEnery and Xiao also support this view, but they mention the main barrier that needs to be crossed to get from the theoretical field of linguistics to the practical world of teaching. They argue that most studies have been developed as “research tools and not with pedagogical goals in mind” (2011: 374). This mismatch between research and practical teaching has been an issue for years. In 1998, Cook had already indicated that “the leap from linguistics to pedagogy is […] far from straightforward” (1998: 57).

The adaptation process might be slow, but surely the corpus-based approach will “impinge upon our long-held notions of education, roles of teachers, the cultural context of the delivery of educational services and the mediation of theory and technique” (McCarthy 2001b: 125). It will revolutionise “the way we approach language education, including both what is taught how it is taught” (McEnery and Xiao 2011: 375).

The application of corpus-based linguistics to the teaching of spoken discourse is a recent approach, but the more it develops, the more sense it makes to study and analyse naturally-occurring speech rather than to write prescriptive rules dictating how speakers *should* communicate. Logically, the adaptation process will encounter difficulties and there is still uncertainty about how ESL material will integrate all this new information. There is, nonetheless, a clear view among most recent researchers: the data obtained can improve the efficiency of the language learning process, as “the contribution of corpus linguistics […] to the description of the language we teach is difficult to dispute” (O’Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 21).

My God! The English language is a form of communication! Conversation isn't just crossfire where you shoot and get shot at! Where you've got to duck for your life and aim to kill! Words aren't only bombs and bullets. No, they're little gifts, containing meanings!

—PHILIP ROTH

CHAPTER FIVE

CONVERSATIONAL FEATURES OF ENGLISH

5.1. Non-clausal features: Introduction

> Casual conversation is a fundamental human activity, and one in which most of us engage many times a day. It may take the form of small talk about the weather at the supermarket check-out, or gossip about colleagues around the office coffee machine, or an extended phone conversation with a close friend about the meaning of life (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 1).

Since casual conversation is far more common than writing, it is almost an enigma that spoken discourse has not been a priority in the area of linguistics until recently. Although different features of informal English have been analysed in recent decades (Quirk et a. 1985; Quirk and Stein 1990; Langford 1993; Quirk 1995), it is corpus linguistics that has allowed us to become familiar with authentic informal and/or colloquial discourse (McCarthy and Carter 1994; McCarthy 1998; Biber et al. 1999; Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2000). The corpus-based approach to language description has placed lexico-semantic and grammatical features within a context that, in turn, determines their function and, therefore, their meaning. The social context, the relationship between and the attitude of language users, and other varying factors determine the type of utterances produced. Present-day corpus-based studies have also pointed to the fact that speech is not so chaotic as first thought. Thus, from the moment speech began to be analysed, and once the prescriptive rules of written English were no longer applied to the analysis of speech, ordinary conversational English acquired its own entity.

On the other hand, corpus linguistics has yet to find a standardized terminology. This difficulty is increased when it comes to defining the features of spoken discourse. To begin with, McEnery and Hardie question the uniformity of the concept of corpus linguistics itself. They argue that "looking at a series of defining features" of spoken language reflects "the differences that exist in linguists in their use – and basic conception – of corpus linguistics" (2012: 21). This variability reinforces the need to avoid confusing or contradictory terms. Thus, although this study will draw on the taxonomy proposed by (1999: 1082-1099), it must be underlined that the classification of certain elements is not always clear or definite: "it is probably correct to say that there are degrees of integration" (Biber et al. 1999: 140). This instability leads to the possibility of considering certain elements as multifunctional. For example, "*well, now, I mean* and *you know* often appear to be on the borderline between inserts and adverbials" (Biber, Conrad and Leech 2003: 449).

In any case, although terminological standardization would certainly be beneficial for the aims of this study, its main objective is to describe language and its *degrees of integration*, even though the description of spoken interaction is still an ongoing process that needs to be carried out

> … as perceptively and rigorously as possible, with maximal accountability to naturalistic corpus of data ideally collected within a broad program of language documentation … to ensure that the full spectrum of language structures are represented (Evans and Dench 2006: 3).

And, subsequently, to assess the extent to which these features have been incorporated into ESL materials.

5.1.1. The C-Unit – The syntactic clausal unit

For Halliday speech "is not static or dense but mobile and intricate" (1985: XXIV). However, this does not imply that it is less complex than written language. While writing may be lexically and grammatically more complete, Biber et al. have concluded that real-time production of conversation leads speakers to prefer shorter, simpler less varied structures as well as ready-made sentence frames. However, Biber et al. add that the spoken language derives its complexity from the fact that "speakers in conversation use a number of relatively complex and sophisticated grammatical constructions," which contradicts "the widely held belief that conversation is grammatically simple" (1999: 7). McCarthy makes a similar observation:

> Anyone who looks at large amounts of informal spoken data . . . cannot fail to be struck by the absence of well-formed "sentences" with main and subordinate clauses. Instead, we often find turns that are just phrases, incomplete clauses, clauses that look like subordinate clauses but which seem not to be attached to any main clause, etc. (1998: 79–80).

Thornbury and Slade believe that the *incompleteness* of conversational discourse is due to the fact that, unlike written language, spoken English does not consist of one-dimensional structures, but of interactional layers that are interposed in turn-taking. Consequently, the embedding nature of discourse leads to the "accumulation of individual clause-like units", which can be prolonged "and potentially limitless" (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 77). The adding-on of *simple segments* can thus become quite complex. What is more, conversational segments do not always coincide with the clausal structures *subject* + *verb* or *subject* + *verb* + *object,* as they often consist of non-clausal structures. These non-clausal units, which are "loosely connected with the clause and outside the predicate" (Biber et al. 1999: 136), are divided into two classes: *syntactic clausal units* and *non-clausal units*. Biber et al. refer to both classes of non-clausal structures, i.e. the "syntactically independent pieces of speech" (1999: 1070) as C-units.

The characteristics of C-units are highlighted in example 4 below. The syntactic clausal units (in italics), i.e. phrases or clausal fragments that are capable of forming clauses or sentence structures, include elliptical constructions (*a pen*, *good*) as well as vocatives (*Jessie*). According to Thornbury and Slade, vocatives "are considered to be syntactic clausal units, in that they can be incorporated into sentence structure (*My dad is a sweetie)"* (2006: 78). On the other hand, non-clausal units (underlined) are formed mainly by inserts, i.e. stand-alone items which "do not change the propositional content of the request head act but rather serve to either mitigate or aggravate its force" (Guzmán Pitarch and Alcón Soler 2010: 253). In the dialogue below, non-clausal units (<u>please</u>, <u>pardon</u> and <u>yeah</u>*)* are *inserted* elements that are syntactically outside the clause.

Example 4
Jessie: Can I borrow a biro <u>please</u>?
Di: <u>Pardon</u>?
Jessie: *A pen*.

Di: <u>Yeah</u>
Judy: How are you *Jessie*?
Jessie: *Good*. How are you?
Judy: *Fine, not bad*.
(Thornbury and Slade 2006: 78)

Although inserts cannot modify *propositional content* and "a speaker knowing only such words would be severely constrained in terms of the topics at his or her command" (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 46), these elements are crucial in spoken discourse: "just as sentences in written text are sequenced and organized into larger thematic units such as paragraphs, talk, too, is segmented into loose topically coherent macrostructures", which are achieved by inserting "*interactional signals* into the stream of talk" (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 57).

Interactional signals are constantly present in conversation. In fact, Biber et al. note that the interjection *oh* appears 8,000 times per million words in both British and American English, while the discourse marker *well* is present 4,500 times in British English and 5,000 in American English (1999: 1096). For McCarthy (1999), these frequently occurring *heavy-duty words* should be part of the learners' core lexicon. Similarly, Thornbury and Slade believe that "a common core of frequently occurring words might provide learners with a critical mass on which they can then build for their own particular purposes" (2006: 48).

Frequency alone does not justify the important role of inserts in spoken interaction. Norrick has highlighted the lubricating effect of these elements by stating that they underline the role of the listener. He sustains that the choices made by the interlocutor can elicit different responses, while encouraging the speaker to continue with a multi-unit turn. For example, "responses like *uh-huh* and *mhm* attract little or no attention to themselves [the listeners]" (2012: 575), while assessments like *wow*, *no way*, *oh* and *really* or "challenges like *well* and *so* increasingly attract the attention of the primary speaker and elicit a response in their own right" (2012: 575).

5.1.2. Non-clausal units: Inserts

We cannot communicate exclusively using non-clausal units but, certainly, they are a necessary part of conversation. Despite the fact that they are independent of the main clause and that they tend to be short one- or two-word units, they have important functions in conversation: commenting, extending, replacing, retrieving or developing topics. Biber et al. have defined these non-clausal elements by means of six main features:

1. They appear on their own, i. e. not as part of a larger grammatical structure.
2. On the other hand, they may appear attached (prosodically, or, in the transcription, by absence of punctuation) to a larger structure, which may be a clausal unit or a non-clausal unit.
3. They rarely occur medially in a syntactic structure.
4. They are morphologically simple.

5. They are not homonyms of words in other word classes.
6. Semantically, they have no denotative meaning: their use is defined rather by their pragmatic function.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1082)

Inserts do not correspond to specific meanings and, consequently, they cannot convey information without a context to refer to. However, they do facilitate the transmission of the message so that spoken communication is effective. These elements may have *no denotative meaning*, but they carry essential meaning for the understanding of an exchange, and, in some cases, they are used to transmit all the meaning (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2000; Leech and Svartvik 2002; Norrick 2012; Valdeón 2008: 118).

Example 5
Carol: So, anyway.
Frances: Well, you know.
Carol: Right.
Frances: Okay, then.
Carol: Okay.
Frances: Good.
(Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2000: 180)

In this short conversational exchange, most of the information conveyed by the speakers is done by means of peripheral elements of some type: responses, discourse markers and other formulae. The dialogue illustrates the essential character of these linguistic elements, regarded as marginal until recently. In fact, based on the data obtained for their research, Fox and Schrock point out that inserts may not be part of the semantic load, but they are neither *detrimental nor irrelevant to comprehension.* Fox and Schrock stress the fact that such elements help the listener to "create coherency out of linearly presented complex ideas or even incoherently presented ideas" (1999: 293). Analogies have also been made with other elements in written language such as *but*, *and*, *then, so* and *because* which, for readers, are "indicators of either continuity or discontinuity" (1999: 294).

For this reason, the grammar of spoken English has been depicted as *dynamic* since "[speech] is constructed and interpreted under real-time pressure, and correction and reformulation is possible only through hesitations, false starts, and other dysfluencies" (Biber et al. 1999: 1066). From a functional point of view, Fuller (2003) stresses that inserts "may be part of the marking and negotiation of speaker role" (2003: 44), while Fung and Carter state that such ephemeral elements of conversational speech can only be categorised by their heterogeneity: "they do not constitute a single, well-defined grammatical class but are drawn from different grammatical and lexical inventories" (2007: 413). Regardless of the standpoint taken with regards to inserts, Becker considers that "it is not important how one groups, labels, and describes these different sources of meaning" (1985: 2).

Inserts are relevant features of speech that are intimately related to a wide range of social situations. Thus, even if they have been viewed as marginal to grammar, they "encode speaker's intentions and interpersonal meanings" (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 208). For this reason, this study endorses Muller's position when he claims that "if we take it for granted that discourse markers[1] have such a decisive role to play in native speaker communication" then it would make sense to include them as "important elements to be learned by non-native speakers" (Muller 2005:14).

Inserts commonly mark the beginning of an utterance; they orient the listener towards the incoming message and can make reference to what has already been said: they "signal interactively how the speaker plans to steer the dialogue: *Now, here's some…"* (Biber et al. 1999: 456). That is, their *interactivity* is essential. In conversation, there are at least two interlocutors and, consequently, there is a constant exchange of information closely linked to the interlocutors' stance vis-à-vis the subject and the relationship between the participants, i.e. these elements contribute to convey feelings, attitudes, evaluations and assessments. In traditional grammars and EFL coursebooks, such aspects of speech have traditionally been linked to lexico-grammatical structures. Speakers are expected to express *certainty, doubt, commitment, detachment, necessity, obligatoriness, etc.* by means of "two common devices [:] adverbials and complement clauses with verbs and adjectives" (Biber et al. 1999: 966).

Example 6
Unfortunately, it's true.
"Do you?" Helen spoke **angrily**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 966)

Biber et al. consider that "speakers in conversation express a kind of linguistically covert stance with every utterance, even when the speaker does not directly articulate a stance" (1999: 967). Inserts allow the speaker/listener to convey such a stance without having to resort to

[1] Muller (2005) considers discourse markers "in the widest sense of the term" (2005: 1157). In this sense, Muller uses *discourse markers* in a very similar way to *inserts*.

lexico-grammatical structures. In other words, these interactive indicators "signal uptake, understanding, agreement or disagreement, emotional involvement and so on" (Norrick 2012: 566). McCarthy's (1999) 'top 40' includes elements such as *mm, yeah, er, well, right* and *oh*. Their high frequency alone indicates that speakers choose inserts to express stance.

Example 7
A: And then we stopped in Arizona to see Aunt Marie, [see], on the way…
B: **Mmm**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1064)

Example 8
A: Nicky got that for him.
B: **Oh**, did she?
A: **Yeah**. I think so.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1066)

In example 7, speaker B shows interest at the same as he/she acknowledges that the message is being understood. In example 8, speaker B shows surprise while speaker A signals a relaxed, informal relationship between the participants through the choice of *yeah* as a response form. McCarthy stresses that these elements exist in other languages, but "may be realised quite differently in different languages/cultures and it may indeed be a useful vocalisation to learn, even if we deny it full status as an item of vocabulary" (1999: 5).

It is true that inserts function differently when compared with other *words* because, as Fung and Carter state, they "are semantically and grammatically optional so that their existence does not affect the truth condition of the propositions. This means they can be omitted from a discourse without syntactic and semantic consequences" (2007: 414). However, if this happened the "stance and attitude of the speaker would not be properly signalled" (Fung and Carter 2007: 414), causing communication breakdowns. In conversation utterances cannot be detached from these interactive forms, which, in turn, are linked to stance. Through them, speakers express feelings and attitudes, they make evaluations and assessments. In other words, "topics are broached, commented on, developed, extended, replaced, retrieved ... and all this conversational flux is continuously shaped and negotiated by the interactants" (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 57). Writing about discourse markers, one of the types identified as inserts by Biber et al., Carter, Hughes and McCarthy assign them[2] the role of *negotiators* in conversation.

> Discourse markers are words or phrases which are normally used to mark boundaries in conversation between one topic or bit of business and the next. For example, words or phrases such as *right*, *okay*, *I mean*, help speakers to negotiate their way through talk indicating whether they want to open or close a topic or to continue it, whether they share a common view of the state of affairs, what their reaction is to something, etc. For example, people speaking face to face or on the phone often use *anyway* to show the wish to finish that particular topic, finish the whole conversation or perhaps return to a previous topic. Similarly, *right* often serves to indicate that participants are ready to move on to the next phase of business (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2000: 182).

In other words, discourse markers, which in Biber et al.'s terminology are comparable to inserts[3], are used by speakers as tools to maintain, change or give opinions; they also give language users time to interpret what is being said and *soften* how a personal stance is expressed. Biber et al. (1999) believe that speakers in conversation reveal a *linguistically covert stance*. This is often softened or modified by inserts. According to Fung and Carter (2007), corpora analysis of spoken interaction shows that inserts are among the 'top 10' most frequently used words and are found in continuous talk every 1.5 seconds on average. The following examples give a glimpse of the communicative function of inserts in everyday conversation:

Example 9

A: How are the team playing at the moment?
B: They're playing well but the tactics are poor.

---

[2] For Carter and McCarthy (2006) discourse markers "are words and phrases which function to link segments of the discourse to one another in ways which reflect choices of monitoring, organization and management exercised by the speaker" (2006: 208). This definition is taken as tantamount to that of inserts given in Biber et al. (1999). As we have mentioned, the terminology used by the various authors varies. Although in this book we have tried to link those terms and somehow remain coherent, we cannot avoid using the specific terminology used by these authors in quotations or references to their work.

[3] The term *insert* will be used when it refers to what Biber et al. (1999) consider elements that "signal interactively how the speaker plans to steer the dialogue" (1999: 456) in order to avoid confusion and contradictions with discourse markers, which Biber et al. (1999) consider a type of insert.

A: How are the team playing at the moment?
B: **Well**, they're playing well but the tactics are poor.
(Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2000: 179)

Example 10
A: What is your view of the risks of cigarette smoking?
B: It depends on your age and on other aspects of your life style.

A: What is your view of the risks of cigarette smoking?
B: **Well I mean** it depends on your age and on other aspects of your life style.
(Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2000: 179)

In both dialogues, inserts soften the tone of the utterances, which are transformed into opinions rather than precepts. The sequence *I mean* clearly reflects the speaker's stance, while *well* is also giving speakers time to think and formulate their answers. A lack of inserts, on the other hand, would make a speaker sound cold and distant. In spite of this, textbooks tend to neglect this feature of speech in most of the ready-made conversations designed for language practice.

In traditional grammars, some inserts were included as *function words*. They were assigned meanings like any word category. Quirk et al. provide us with a rather wide and unclear definition of what they refer to when used as *reaction signal and initiators:*

> Apart from conjunctions and some conjunct adverbs, certain other items must be positioned initially. They are important because of their high frequency in spoken English. Some are restricted to the spoken language (Quirk et al. 1985: 444).

Inserts, however, do not necessarily have a referential meaning, as can be observed in the examples mentioned above. In these cases, *well*, for instance, does not have the specific meaning of "in a good way, to a high or satisfactory standard", but it is rather used to introduce something you are going to say, often to show surprise, doubt, slight disagreement and so on. Thus, it makes more sense to speak of the function rather than the meanings of inserts.

As for a classification of these elements, Stenström admits that it is difficult to classify them into clear-cut categories. He proposes the following table:

Table 2: Inserts

Function	Lexical Item
appealer	you know, right, OK
acknowledge	mhm, right, really, oh, I see, yes
evaluate	gosh
uptake	yes, well
answer	yes, no, sure, OK
frame	right, now, OK
staller	really, well

(Adapted from Stenström 1994: 67)

This taxonomy, like so many others in linguistics, is far from definitive. Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen stress that these *small words* "can have an almost infinite number of functions depending on the context", raising the question of whether these units have "one meaning or many meanings" (2011: 228).

McCarthy and Carter (2006) believe that pragmatic markers[4], or inserts as defined by Biber et al. (1999), are intimately associated with speech and context. They claim that while writers target "an ideal reader for their purpose" (2006: 207), a speaker has to deal with very specific situations in face-to-face interactions. In their opinion, aspects such as the level of formality or familiarity are expressed by the use and the choice of these elements. They maintain that when a speaker opts to use a formulaic greeting, e.g. *Good morning* instead of *hi,* they are reflecting a degree of familiarity that will mark the rest of the conversation. They also highlight the fact that in the immediacy of face-to-face communication these elements help to organise and sequence messages "for the benefit of the listeners and in collaboration with them" (2006: 207). This context-bound approach would partly account for the overlap in meaning of these units.

For their part, Biber et al. acknowledge that the items they include as inserts in their own classification "are open to debate" (1999: 1086). Examples of specific functions are provided, but the door remains open to alternative interpretations as "inserts can be grouped into several major functional types. However, it should be noted that different functions

[4] Although the correspondence between inserts and pragmatic markers is not exact, their main characteristics are similar. They are "a class of items which operate outside the structural limits of the clause and which encode speaker's intentions and interpersonal meanings" (McCarthy and Carter 2006: 208).

overlap one another and that individual inserts can be versatile in taking on different conversational roles" (1999: 1083).

As stated, this study relies on the data and classification provided by Biber et al. (1999), who divide inserts into nine functional types: Interjections, greetings and farewells, discourse markers, attention signals, response elicitors, response forms, hesitators, polite formulae and expletives.

5.1.2.1. Interjections

Biber *et al.* define interjections as a type of inserts with an "exclamatory function, expressive of the speaker's emotion" (1999: 1083). Interjections tend to express a reaction about something that has been said or has happened. This functional approach originates in Quirk et al., who also provide a classification of interjections according to the emotion they convey:

> Ah (satisfaction, recognition, etc.); Aha (jubilant satisfaction, recognition); … Boo (disapproval, usually for a speaker at gathering; also surprise noise); … Oops (mild apology, shock or dismay); Ouch, Ow (pain)… Wow (great surprise) (1985: 853).

As with other inserts, interjections do not have a syntactic relation with other structures. Their characteristics have made linguists express doubts about their lexical classification, "in fact, it may be questioned whether some inserts are words or not. This applies to interjections (such as *ugh*, *ooh*), response forms (such as *uh, huh, mhm*) and hesitators (such as *mm, uh*)" (Biber et al. 1999: 1082). The phonological characteristics of interjections are certainly one of their most striking features: *tt* or *tut-tut,* for example, "consist of series of alveolar clicks" (Quirk et al. 1985: 853), whereas others may have extra lengthening of sounds. For Quirk et al. interjections belong to "lesser categories" of "marginal and anomalous" (1985: 67) words, while for Carter and McCarthy, interjections are *exclamative utterances* made up of one word. They express positive or negative emotional reactions to what has just been said in the conversation. They are "especially common in spoken language and rare in writing" (2006: 224).

Another uncertainty concerning interjections is whether they belong to a close group of items or whether speakers can produce them freely, as they are not always within the English phonological system. For Quirk et al., these items *could* be considered a close group "on the grounds that those that are fully institutionalized are few in number" (1985: 75), although they are grammatically peripheral and "frequently involve the use of sounds which do not otherwise occur in English words" (1985: 75). However, the fact that they may contain phonemes outside the standard English phonemic system can also lead to the conclusion that they are "a relatively open class because they can be rather freely created by onomatopoeia" (1985: 75). Quirk et al. contend that interjections such as *ugh*, *yucck, gr-r-r-r,* and *blaat* reflect an *unstructured freedom* of expressive vocalizing often used in ordinary conversation.

In any case, although the lexical or even phonological categories of interjections may not be clear-cut, something that is unquestionable is that they are common elements of speech. According to the data analysed by Biber et al., the most frequent interjections are *oh, ah, ooh, ha, wow, aargh, aha, tt, cor, oops* and *whoops*. Table 3 summarizes their most usual functions:

Table 3: Interjections

Lexical item	**Frequency**[5]	**Functions**
Oh	8000	• **introduces or responds to utterances** A: I think it is a mosaic. B: Oh, it is a mosaic. • **often combines with other inserts** oh yeah, oh no, oh well, oh God. • **Introduces some degree of surprise, unexpectedness** **or emotive arousal** A: Nicky got that for him. B: Oh, did she?
Ah	1100	• **conveys greater emotional involvement than oh** A: They're chocolates. B: Ah isn't that nice.
Ooh	700	• **can convey both pleasant and unpleasant feelings** A: How big was it? (referring to a new born) B: four pounds. A: Ooh, that's little. B: It's tiny.

[5] per million words

Ha	400	• **Expresses mirthless laughter and usually occurs in a series** I find that so funny, oh ha ha ha ha.
wow	50	• **Indicates the speaker is surprised and impressed** A: In Hudson bay, they have a whole floor, huge floor, the size of a big city block, on men's clothing. B: Wow. A: It's just incredible.
aargh	50	• **Expresses pain and displeasure** I don't like that, diet food, aargh!
Aha	200	• **Expresses sudden recognition** Let's see, aha, this one is yours.
Tt	50	• **Expresses regret or disapproval** Tt-tt That's the second time this week you've forgotten my coffee.
Cor	50	• **Expresses some degree of amazement** Cor he had a lovely physique, cor.
Oops	25	• **Can be used as variants of the same interjection** • **Used at the moment of a minor mishap** Whoops, easy Chester. Chester down. Thank you. (talking to a dog)
whoops	25	

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1097)

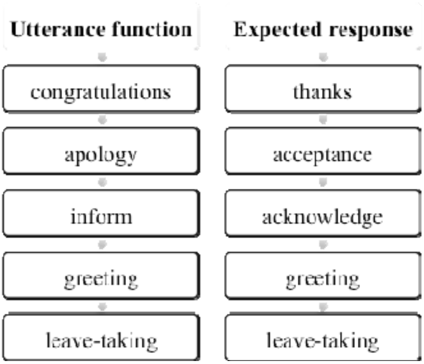
5.1.2.2. Greetings and farewells

Sacks's (1972) analysis of conversation points to the existence of certain universal fixed or quasi-fixed structures which speakers use routinely, greetings and farewells being amongst the most obvious. Conversations have a logical beginning and end, so the absence of these items would be unusual and noticeable. According to this linguist, the main characteristic of greetings is that they open the conversation giving the participants a turn to speak right from the beginning, while farewells or conversation-closing items are necessary if a conversation is to end adequately.

Greetings and farewells can, therefore, be said to be a part of a larger structure, a conversation. For Sacks, a conversation is a string of at least two turns, which he calls *adjacency pairs*. Each adjacency pair has a first pair part and a corresponding second pair part. The first pair parts include questions, greetings, challenges, invitations and announcements. The second pair parts can have a reciprocal structure, such as *greeting-greeting*, and admit only one appropriate answer, such as *question-answer.* In other cases, there may be more than one possibility, for example *complaint-apology/justification*. According to Sacks, these adjacency pairs are the basic structural units of conversation.

McCarthy shares a very similar view and claims that many utterances are mutually dependent and, consequently, in everyday speech the adjacency pairs in figure 5 are not infrequent:

Figure 5: Adjacency pairs



(Adapted from McCarthy 1998: 121)

McCarthy believes that NS have a "vastly greater range of formulae to call upon for use in wider range of strategic domains, along with a flexible and adaptable lexicon of non-formula based items" (1998: 122). These structures are, therefore, important not only due to their frequency and function, but also because they provide L1 and L2 speakers with the necessary resources to facilitate fluent and effective communication by means of their shared sociolinguistic knowledge.

A factor linked to adjacency pairs and, therefore, to greetings and farewells, is that of shared knowledge, which gives way to the existence of the so-called *dispreferred* pairs. That is, in NS conversations, the second part of the pair is determined by the first part and any variation can cause communication problems.

Example 11
A: **Good bye**, Robert. Till tomorrow.
B: **Good night**.

Example 12
A: **Hi**
B: **Good evening**.

These common errors amongst Spanish learners are examples of dispreferred second pair parts. In example 11, the answer would be inadequate as "*Good night* is limited to leave-taking at night-time, especially before going to bed" (Biber et al. 1999: 1086). In example 12, *hi* is an informal greeting which does not correspond to the formality of the second pair part. This communication fissure does not take place amongst NS due to the shared linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Thus, greetings usually receive *symmetrical* responses, because conversational language "has a restricted and repetitive repertoire" (Biber et al.1999: 1049) that leads speakers to repeat partially or exactly what is said in order to relieve "online planning pressure" (1999: 1049).

Example 13
A: Hi, Tom. How are you?
B: **Good, how are you**?
A: **Good, how are you**?

Example 13, a conversation held by two NS in a relaxed environment, illustrates how speakers take advantage of formulaic responses. In this case, speaker A repeats speaker B's utterance. This enables him to give a prompt answer, even if it is not the most adequate one. Instead of answering what would have been expected, i.e. *good, thanks/thank you*, he repeats the previous utterance almost mechanically. The interaction ended and no correction or remark was made on the *slip-up*. In any case, the example shows to what extent NS rely on repetition in ongoing interactional exchanges.

Farewells follow the same principles as greetings. They are usually found in reciprocal structures as in:

Example 14
A: **See you.**
B: **Bye Bye.**
C. **Bye bye.**

5.1.2.3. Discourse Markers (DM)

For Biber et al. (1999: 1086) these inserts have two distinct roles. First, they indicate a change of direction in the conversation, and second, they are part of the interactive nature of speech. They signal the interactive relationship between the listener and the speaker. Carter and McCarthy (2006) associate discourse markers[6] with power. In certain circumstances, DMs are necessary to maintain one's turn in a conversation and to exercise control over it.

The number of items considered DMs is "open to debate" (Biber et al. 1999: 1086), though their frequency in speech can justify their study in EFL materials regardless of the tag they are given. Table 4 below illustrates the frequency and the functions of the most frequent DMs. It follows Biber et al.'s proposal:

Table 4: Discourse markers

Lexical item	Frequency[7]	Functions
well	5000	• **Indicates speaker's need to give thought or consideration to the point at issue** He said, well, I'd like to read a little bit about it first – I said, well, can you read my first volume… but he said, well, what about this, well, you know, well, you know, and he hems and haws …. • **Common turn initiator** A: How much rice are you supposed to have for one person? B: Well, I don't know. • **Tends to mark some degree of contrast** A: You are always hungry? B: Well, I'm not now.

[6] Although the terminology and the categorisation do not coincide, there is an overlap of some of the elements considered discourse markers: *right, you know, I mean, you see, fine, good, okay, well, great, like.*

[7] per million words

right	NP[8]	• **Indicates a new phase of the conversation is being opened** A: No but it all adds up – I was sitting there the other day adding up your things. B: Right, now you can discuss with Wayne about the sheds. • **Indicates understanding and compliance** A: It's just an excuse, get on the phone and phone them up! B: Right Claire, I will.
now	550	• **Seeks background information while continuing the topic of conversation** A: Alan doesn't want anybody doing a sort of flaky job you know they haven't gotten the students who would do it. B: Now who is he, I don't know.

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1088 and 1097)

5.1.2.4. Attention signals

As their name implies, attention signals have the function of attracting the attention of the addressee. They "establish or maintain a social relationship between the speaker and the addressee(s)" (Leech 1999: 108). Quaglio and Biber provide a similar analysis and consider attention signals to be a necessary feature of conversational speech. They argue that because communication takes place in real time, speakers often need to take advantage of these "'utterance launchers' as attention getters, providing a frame for the listener to interpret the following information" (2006: 701). Carter and McCarthy label these elements discourse markers, but the function is the same as in Biber et al., that is, to attract the listener's attention: "Attention and focus can be directed to a topic or to a phase of the talk by a number of discourse markers" (2006: 218). L2 learners need to realize that the use of the most informal attention signals (such as *hey, oi, yo*) cannot be generalised, as they can be on the borderline between the familiar and the impolite.

Apart from the elements in Biber et al.'s taxonomy, Carter and McCarthy also include imperatives such as *look, listen, just think* and *remember*. They note, however, one important difference with respect to the previous ones. The key purpose of these imperatives (used as attention

[8] This information is not provided in Biber et al. (1999).

signals) is not to call the listener's attention to the conversation, but to call his/her attention to a specific focal point within the discourse.

Example 15
A: No, I don't like them.
B: You're going to wear them.
A: No I'm not.
B: Yes you are.
A: Sam please.
B: **Look** it's our wedding.
A: **Look**. Please will you just humour me? I've had a terrible day.
A: Oh. And I haven't?
B: Do you know what time I had to get up this morning? Six o'clock.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 219)

In example 15, the speakers are struggling to maintain the central point of the conversation. While for speaker A *our wedding* is at the centre, speaker B introduces her *terrible day* as the core issue. The attention signal is used not to let the listener know that the message is directed at him, but to tell the listener what the speaker's main message is.

Table 5 identifies the most frequent attention signals used in conversation:

Table 5: Attention signals

Lexical item	**Frequency** [9]	**Functions**
Hey	100	• **Attracts the listener's attention** Hey Rob do you want to lend me fifty p? Hey you, I buttered that bread for you and you didn't eat it.
Oi	50	

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1097)

5.1.2.5. Response elicitors

Response elicitors are akin to questions tags. However, unlike clausal question tags, whose main function is to confirm the listener's agreement, response elicitors are more speaker-centred. When these appear in conversation, the speaker wants to ascertain that the message is being understood and followed. Povolná believes that response elicitors

[9] per million words

"prompt some reaction from the current hearer" (2005: 128), while they "enhance the smooth flow of spoken interaction" and create "some space for the exchange of ideas, attitudes, opinions, etc." (2005: 135). She concludes that in face-to-face conversation, body gestures such as nods or facial gestures may have the same communicative effect, i.e. they show that the message is received and being understood. However, in other contexts, such as informal phone conversations, response elicitors are an essential part of effective communication: "when such face-to-face contact is not available, as for example in telephone conversation, the current hearer tends to produce much more frequently some kind of feedback in the form of a verbal response rather than a backchannel signal" (2005: 135).

Example 16
A: You know who Stan is, **right**?
B: I've heard his name.
(Biber et a. 1999: 1089)

Example 17
A: I think I'll leave her the message, **okay**?
B: Sure.
(Biber et a. 1999: 1089)

In example 16, speaker A is looking for a confirmation of the fact that the person mentioned knows who Stan is. In example 17, the response elicitor is a mechanism used to make sure that what has just been said has been heard and understood. The response form (see section 5.1.2.6.) used is not saying *Yes, you can leave her the message*, but *I have understood you and I have no objections.*

As for tag questions, Carter and McCarthy argue that they are likely to occur in informal speech as they "engage the listener and invite convergence with the speaker" (2006: 197). What is more, in their classification of response elicitors, Carter and McCarthy include syntactic structures formed by auxiliary, modal verb or verb *to be* + subject pronoun, as well as echo questions. Thus, their taxonomy does not fully agree with Biber et al.'s. It varies as other elements such as *right, okay* and *yeah* are added to the list, while in Biber et al. these appear under separate labels. Both taxonomies, however, concur that these frequent elements of informal speech "check that something has been understood or [to] confirm that an action is agreed" (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 198).

Table 6: Response elicitors

Lexical item	Frequency[10]	Functions
Eh	300	• **Used only in familiar and casual contexts as they tend to sound peremptory** Might as well get rid of it, eh?

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1097)

5.1.2.6. Response forms

Response forms consist of short messages received from the listener as a sign of agreement or recognition. Schegloff (1981) suggested that these backchannelling elements function as continuers: the listener gives the speaker the right to continue holding the floor. Fellegy (1995) believed that response forms are both grammatical and social. For their part, Quaglio and Biber (2006) associate these minimal response forms with situational ellipsis, where content words are omitted, as they are retrievable from the context. Thus, they contribute to relieve the pressure of real-time communication. These authors sustain that "these forms reflect the real-time production pressures of conversation" (Quaglio and Biber 2006: 704), and add that, in a conversation, the shared context makes it unnecessary to make all of the information explicit and, consequently, the answers can be shorter and more immediate.

Example 18
A: ↔ you gonna come, Bry?
B: **yeah**.
(Quaglio and Biber 2006: 706)

In example 18, speaker B does not need to use the complete sentence *I am going to come with you* as the context has already been given in the first utterance. Quaglio and Biber view response forms as an inevitable part of situational ellipsis because they tend to take place in the second turn of the interaction. Thus, the first turn sets the context and basis for comprehension, while the response form would be "a reaction or response to a previous utterance" (2006: 706).

From a functional approach, response forms have been identified as helping conversation to continue, i.e., they maintain the *flow of talk*.

[10] per million words

Gardner (1997) and O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter (2007) stress that these responses are perceived as floor-yielding, indicating that the listener wants the speaker to continue. In the example below, S2 is acknowledging the message conveyed by S1 without claiming the turn in the conversation.

Example 19

S1: … you know when you think of something you want to have.
S2: **Mm**.
S1: And you haven't seen them in the shops.
S2: **Mm**.
S1: … I sort of visualised what I wanted and then erm I went down Superdrug with Rebecca and we popped in and thought Ooh. They're the ones I want.

(O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 150)

For O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter, *convergence* response forms of this type include both Biber et al.'s minimal response forms (1999: 1099) as well as non-minimal response tokens (e.g. you never know, exactly, God help us). Both have more than a turn-yielding function, as they indicate that the participants agree. Adding to this convergence function, McCarthy (2003) has also pointed out that response forms can, at times, cluster in consecutive turns taken by different speakers to indicate that the conversation is coming to an end. Example 20a illustrates how response forms can gradually give the interactants the possibility of closing the conversation without coming to an abrupt end. Logically, this paralinguistic signalling can be linked to the speaker/listener's shared context.

Example 20a
S1: Do you think it needs editing?
S2: Erm I shouldn't think so.
S1: **Good. Brilliant. Okay**, **well** I'll be round to pop it up.
S2: **Okay**.
S1: Pick it up today.
S2: **Okay** Jack.
S1: Have you got the compliment slips?
S2: Yes.
S1: On all er..
S2: They they look very good.
S1: **Great**.
S2: **Yes**.
S1: **Fabulous**.
S2: **All right**.
S1: Okay. Thanks for that.
S2: **Okay** Len.

Example 20b
S1: Do you think it needs editing?
S2: Erm I shouldn't think so.
S1: I'll be round to pop it up. Pick it up today. Have you got the compliment slips?
S2: Yes.
S1: On all er
S2: They they look very good.
S1: Thanks for that.

(O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 151)

Response forms functioning as engagement tokens can be linked to the listener/speaker's stance, as they signal enthusiasm, surprise, shock, disgust, etc. towards what is being said without taking over the turn of the conversation. They indicate that the listener/speaker is emotionally involved in what is being said, as shown in the following example:

Example 21
S1: What are you going to do about the job?
S2: I don't know. He says that it's going to be like Killarney and that I should get one easily and I've been in contact with Debenhams and they told me to send over my CV.
S1: **Brilliant** Mary **Brilliant**.
(O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 152)

On the whole, Gardner (1997, 2002) and O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter (2007) assign response forms three main functions: continuer response forms, convergence response forms and engagement tokens.

From a pedagogical perspective, response forms are part of the intricate web of conversation whereby all the elements contribute to the success of the communication. Thus, example 20 draws a comparison between what the conversation would sound like with and without response forms. Although communication is achieved, it lacks the "terms of the social relationship between the speakers" and, therefore, "it may not achieve any level of relational bonding between interactants" (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 157). For L2 speakers, this may have significant consequences when trying to gradually membership, but it can have more serious implications as interactions lacking response forms are likely to fail: the speaker does not perceive that the message is being received or understood and may decide to abandon the interaction altogether. In other words, L2 speakers need to realize that response forms are more than answers to questions, they need to acknowledge that response forms are interactional signals that contribute to effective communication.

O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter include both minimal as well as non-minimal response forms giving way to yet another lack of concurrence with Biber et al.'s classification. Regardless of the total number of elements included in this subgroup of inserts, the common corpus-informed finding indicates that the most frequent response form is *yeah*. Biber et al. mention that it appears 10,500 times per million words (see table 7), while McCarthy (2003) increases it to almost 20,000 times per million words. Although frequency alone does not justify the importance of these elements, it does, nonetheless, indicate that speakers need them and repeatedly use them as *lubricant* in conversation.

Example 22

S1: You know, our Gregory he's only fifteen but he wants to be a pilot.
S2: Does he?
S1: Now he couldn't get in this year to go to Manchester, you know, on that erm course that they do, experience course thing.
S2: Work experience.
S1: But he's going for next we_ next year.
S2: Oh **yeah**.
S1: Work_
S3: Oh **yeah**.
S1: _experience yeah. And this time he's been to erm Headingley, coaching, doing a bit of coaching with the young kids you know.

(O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007: 72)

In order to avoid terminological confusion in the last part of the study, I will stick to Biber et al.'s classification, although the variation in this category is minimal.

Table 7: Response forms

Lexical item	Frequency[11]	Functions
Yeah	10500	• **Answer questions** A: Does anybody have a pencil? B: Yeah, here. A Want a sip of this, Cooper? B: Nope, I got tea. • **When answering directives a stronger positive response is needed to assure politeness such as sure or certainly. A direct negative answer is also avoided** A: Why don't we sign them now? B: Yeah, sure. A: Can I put the water on? B: You don't need it on! • **Confirm that the message is understood (BC)** A: and their lawn is high up, up the road, … B: Mm C: Yeah A: So he dug up the lawn and put a little garage in.
Yes	3000	
No	7000	
Mm	4000	
Uh huh	250	
Okay	500	

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1099)

To conclude, response forms allow the speaker and the listener to indicate that they "are keeping in touch with one another, and the communication is still in progress" (Biber et al. 1999: 1091).

5.1.2.7. Hesitators

We may not notice, but speech is often dysfluent, that is, it is interrupted by pauses, hesitations and repetitions. These features highlight the fact that a speaker needs time to plan ahead:

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[11] per million words

Example 23

A: My wife's not been feeling too well. She's seen the doctor, though and he's told her it's nothing serious. But, er, …

B: I'm sorry to hear about this.

(Quirk et al. 1985: 1474)

Example 24

A: How am I gonna get it back to you?

B: **Um**, I'll come over to your house.

(Biber et al. 1999: 1091)

Dysfluency is a natural feature of conversational language given its interactive character. Conversation is immediate and leaves speakers little time to elaborate opinions, give answers or make suggestions. Thus, it tends to be vague (see section 6.1.), but it must also observe certain rules so as to achieve coherent and successful communication. Based on the interactive nature and real-time production characteristics of speech, Biber et al. consider three principles:

i. **Keep talking:** The conversation must keep moving forward, otherwise is a communication breakdown might occur. When one of the sides stops, there are three repair strategies:
   a) Hesitate, which gives the speaker time to think.
   b) Backtrack and restart, which leaves an utterance unfinished.
   c) Yield the floor, which leaves the utterance unfinished and allows the interlocutor to speak.

ii. **Limited planning ahead:** This principle means that speakers and listeners have a limited planning time. This is connected to the working memory with which we operate in speech. As it has been estimated to have a span of seven words, there is a strict limit to the number of unfinished utterances we can hold for later completion. Consequently, speech does not favour structures whose meaning is at the beginning or in the middle of a clause.

iii. **Qualifications of what has been said:** This follows from the two previous principles. As there is little time to plan or elaborate structures, it may be necessary to modify the message retrospectively, as an afterthought.

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1067)

Hesitators are, therefore, an essential part of the conversational process. Biber et al. highlight two types of hesitations: silent and filled pauses. The former is a silent space that the speaker uses to think of an appropriate answer. In initial position, these silent pauses (marked – in example 25) are less noticeable than when they appear in medial position (marked in bold). Example 25, illustrates both types of pauses.

Example 25

a. So, - boy they've got a nice system over there hooked up.
b. That's probably what I'll do. – That's, that's a good idea.
c. My **erm** hairdresser brought, you know those **erm**, kiddies' chairs we were selling.
d. That's a very good – **er**[12] very good precaution to take, yes.

(From Biber et al. 1999: 1053)

It has been established that hesitators are an essential feature of everyday speech and a necessary strategy for speakers. According to Biber *et al.*, unfilled pauses are found over 19,000 times in corpus samples of one million words, while filled pauses have a frequency of 13,000 appearances in the same sample. These two types of hesitators have different roles. Filled pauses indicate that speakers need time to think and that their turn has not finished. They seem to be most useful in an incomplete grammatical structure, such as the beginning of a dependent or coordinate clause. Unfilled pauses, on the other hand, appear in the transition between one major grammatical point and the next, as indicated by the fact that they tend to precede utterance launchers which, in turn, tend to come at the beginning or the end of grammatical units.

A study carried out by Brennan and Schober led to revealing conclusions: listeners responded faster "after hearing mid-word interruptions with fillers than after hearing comparable fluent utterances" (2001: 274). In other words, a lack of distracting information allowed the listener to have a quicker response, while, at the same time, "fillers allowed for more time after the interruption for listeners to cancel misleading information" (2001: 274). Hesitators not only give speakers time to plan what and how the message is to be expressed, or even to rephrase what has already been said, they also grant listeners time to eliminate any unnecessary information.

Undoubtedly, hesitation is frequent and necessary, "as speakers attempt to keep the floor while formulating their next utterance; a pause

[12] In example *d* both a silent pause and a filled pause are used. These filled pauses are occupied not by silence but by a vowel sound which is transcribed as *er, erm* or *uh, um* although there is no significant difference in the pronunciation.

by itself may give another interlocutor the chance to take over, but by saying ‘erm’ the speaker indicates that he or she is not yet ready to relinquish the floor” (Gilmore 2004: 369). And yet, in a comparative study of seven dialogues from coursebooks published between 1981 and 1987 on the one hand and corpus dialogues on the other, Gilmore concluded that there were significant differences. While in textbook dialogues the frequency of these items was 8%, in authentic data it was 54.3%.

The absence of these elements is puzzling, since they can help “learners hold the floor while they struggle with what to say next” and “they add little to the cognitive load of the learners, and may actually aid the task of comprehension by breaking up utterances into smaller ‘meaning chunks’” (Gilmore 2004: 369). In his analysis, Gilmore concludes that slight improvements have been made and believes that “materials writers have deliberately chosen not to make their dialogues authentic-like”. Finally, he wonders “to what extent should we deprive students of exposure to natural language?” (2004: 371), because a learner’s goal is to become competent in the L2 outside the classroom environment.

5.1.2.8. Polite formulas

In 1976, Ferguson stressed the great importance polite formulas have in spoken discourse. From a cognitive point of view, these structures are acquired as chunks (see section 4.3.4.) and have a primary role in the process of language acquisition. Ferguson believed that they are an essential part of communication and that closely related to “the history of the particular society or groups” (1976: 143) and should, therefore, be acquired by all speakers. From an interactional view, when a speaker chooses a formulaic sequence, his/her paramount objective to achieve communication efficiently and effectively. In such situations, as is the case of greetings and farewells, the speaker anticipates the hearer’s knowledge of formulaic expressions. If the same knowledge is not shared then the processing effort is greater.

Example 26

I’m sorry if I’ve put your nose out of joint.

(Strässler’s 1982: 103)

As Strässler’s example shows, a speaker can make use of polite formulae but still seem inadequate. The sentence would most likely be interpreted as an aggressive and dominant way of saying *I’m sorry if I’ve* *upset you in any way.* Analysis of such phenomena underlines the convergence of different levels: lexico-grammatical form, communicative function (politeness, face,…), mode, text-type and genre. Sinclair (1991, 2004b) summarized a speaker's use of formulaic expressions thus:

> a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments (1991: 110).

More recently, Wray has defended the view that certain formulas are used in order to favour fluency: "The common set of sequences, which simultaneously aid speaker production and hearer comprehension" (2000: 478) are restricted to specific conversational utterances, such as greetings, apologies, etc. Canale (1983) had provided us with a similar view when he divided communicative competence into four areas of knowledge and skill: *grammatical competence, discourse, strategic competence* and *sociolinguistic competence.* This last area involves appropriateness, both of meaning and form, which, in turn, would entail the appropriate use of politeness conventions.

Ellis, Simpson-Vlach and Maynard have studied how polite formulae contribute to the fluent flow of communication: "A speaker chooses the words and constructions - the linguistic conventions - to communicate a situation based on the prior use of these conventions in similar situations. The hearer does the same…" (2008: 3). These linguists argue that "corpus analyses in fact verify that communication largely consists of prefabricated sequences, rather than an "open choice" among all available words" (2008: 9), and advocate their inclusion in the materials designed for spoken language practice.

Polite formulae are used in conventional speech acts and, as mentioned, in speech functions such as apologising, thanking, requesting or congratulating. As is the case with adjacency pairs, shared knowledge is required because these formulae require an appropriate polite reply. Some of these sequences can be symmetrical:

Example 27
A: **Thank you**.
B: **Thank you**.

Polite formulae, however, tend to need a different answer, depending on the context and situation. When an invitation is made, for instance, the response will depend on whether it is being accepted or refused:

Example 28
A: Would you like to have a drink?
B: Yes, **please**-. (ACCEPTANCE)
Thanks, it could be Diet Coke.
(ACCEPTANCE WITH CONDITION)
No, **thanks**, I've had too much already. (REFUSAL)
(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1083)

According to the politeness codes employed by English NS, a clear-cut *no* would not be considered appropriate. An ESL learner, on the other hand, may find an elaborate answer unnecessary because the politeness code of his/her L1 may be different. Thus, the need to analyse such features through awareness exercises becomes essential. In fact, it has been observed that, at times, NNS do not use the appropriate structures. L2 speakers may sound too formal or far too blunt. However, in apologies, Trosborg (1987) came to the conclusion that the NNS often resort to ritualised formulae whereas NS used other strategies such as repair offers: *Oh dear! Let me get you another*. NS elaborated an apology, while NNS might not have the necessary sociolinguistic repertoire to do so.

In the Spanish context, Scheu-Lottgen and Hernández-Campoy (1998) have mentioned that Spanish learners with proficient lexico-grammatical knowledge often encounter communication barriers when they attempt to apply L1 formulaic sequences or polite formulae to their L2. These researchers sustain that "the limited use of expressions such as *please*, *sorry* and *thank you* in Spanish can induce English speakers to infer a lack of distance, and patronizing familiarity, within the communication" (1998: 385).

Thus, the use of inappropriate polite formulae can lead NS to perceive some degree of impoliteness in NNS and, consequently, "impoliteness brings a negative attitude" (Pablos-Ortega 2010:152). Learners, therefore, need to be made aware of the fact that speech acts like thanking are specific to each culture: they are not necessarily conveyed in the same way in different communicative situations. Pablos-Ortega (2010) explains that, while in English "if an offering or a promise is accepted or rejected by a speaker, thanking is used simply as recognition of that offering or promise" (2010: 150), in the case of Spanish, such types of actions would not require the use of thanking expressions. All in all, the use of polite formulae is bound to the L2 language and culture, and should be part of the learners' *acquired knowledge* in order to ensure that it eventually develops into *shared knowledge*.

Biber et al. note that the most common polite formulae are *please,* with a frequency of 400 occurrences per million words, and *thank you* and *sorry* with a frequency of 200 occurrences each (see table 8). These items are clearly essential in everyday use, as other corpus-based studies (e.g. Butler 1997; Moon 1998 and Stubbs 1998) had previously highlighted: in fact, in some short exchanges, conversational language can consist of up to 80% formulaic material, emphasizing the need to incorporate such elements in L2 curricula.

Table 8: Polite formulas

Lexical item	Frequency [13]	Functions
Thank you	200	• **Used in conventional speech acts: thanking, apologising, requesting and congratulating.** A: Would you like another drink? B: Yes, please. (request) A: Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you.(apology) B: That's okay. (acknowledging apology) A: Tell Teresa I said good luck (good wishes) B: I will. A: or else congratulations, whichever (congratulating) B: whichever.
Thank you very much	50	
Thanks	100	
Sorry	200	
Pardon	100	
Excuse me	50	
Please	400	

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1100)

5.1.2.9. Expletives

The inserts in the previous sections share one common feature: they have no syntactic relationship with the rest of the clause, which, within a corpus-based approach, is not taken as a sign of ungrammaticality. Quirk et al. consider expletives to be spoken formulae together with greetings/farewells, toasts, seasonal greetings, alarm calls, responses to apologies and so on. These formulae are described as "grammatically irregular" (Quirk et al. 1985: 852) because they have limited possibilities of being integrated into the clause elements. Expletives are somehow different, as we shall see in section 6.3., but they are a common feature of unplanned conversations.

[13] per million words

It is also worth mentioning that these peripheral elements do not have a regular frequency in conversation: they may be recurrent in certain exchanges and yet completely absent in others. Even moderated expletives (see below), which are more socially acceptable, may also be completely ruled out in some contexts, such as semi-informal conversations. However, in recent years, the use of expletives has become generalised to the point that they have become fairly common even on British television. According to a report published by Mediawatch-UK2 in the early 2000s (BBC: 16th July 2003), "the 'f-word' was used almost 1,500 times in films on the five terrestrial television channels in the first half" of the year.

Despite the wide use of these words in the media, there is still a "wide variation in the degree of force an expletive carries, and in the degree of offence it can cause" (Biber et al. 1999: 1095). Kaye and Sapolsky stress that *crude* language still "evokes strong emotions and offense" (2009: 28) and add that "concerned parents and lawmakers beseech the television industry to forego all indecent language" (2009: 33). Undoubtedly, not all offensive words have the same impact on the listener. This may be the reason why most authors have graded expletives according to their strength. For instance, Quirk et al. (1985: 852) provide the following list, starting from the least offensive and moving up to the rudest: *My Gosh, (By) Golly, (Good) Heavens, Darn (it), Heck, Blast (it), Good Lord, (Good) God, Christ Almighty, Oh hell, Damn (it), Bugger (it), Shit, Fuck (it).*

Biber et al. divide expletives into two subgroups: (1) taboo expletives would be stronger and possibly more offensive, while (2) moderated expletives are more socially accepted and "can easily associate with pleasant, as well as unpleasant, experiences" (1999: 1095).

Table 9: Expletives

Taboo expletives	
religion	God, Jesus, Bloody Hell, Goddammit
sex	fuck
bodily excretion	shit

Moderated expletives	
euphemistic	my gosh, geez, good grief, heavens

(Adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1095)

This classification shows that both taboo and moderated expletives are used as “exclamations, especially in reaction to some strongly negative experience” (1999: 1094), a function unique to expletives in conversational speech. Unlike other peripheral elements, it is possible to find them attached to larger syntactic units with prosodic features, i.e. tones, edge tones, variation of register, lengthening, voice quality, etc. although these elements are usually found either in stand-alone occurrences or in initial position. Final position is less frequent and medial is very rare. They can also be found along with other inserts, especially interjections, as in *oh God* or *wow my goodness*.

Table 9 does not provide a complete list of expletives, as these controversial expressions are characterised by their versatility. They can be used in elaborate phrases or give way to new words, as in examples 29 and 30:

Example 29
Fucking hell’s bells – Hell’s bells and little fishes you.
(Biber et al. 1999:1103)

Example 30
Absoballylutely
(Quirk et al. 1985: 1536)

The second example is a result of the speaker’s creativity: it is unconventional and reflects the *habit* some speakers have of splitting words and inserting other items which, in most cases, are expletives.

Expletives support Biber et al.’s claim that inserts do not have clear-cut boundaries and that they can be multi-functional. Quaglio and Biber consider that expletives reflect stance, like requests, greetings, offers, and apologies. They can be associated with formulaic expressions capable of showing different grades of politeness and familiarity. Thus, *swearing* can be used in the “establishment of an informal, friendly atmosphere between interlocutors” (Quaglio and Biber 2006: 712). This concurs with Carter and McCarthy, who classify taboo language according to two themes: religion on the one hand, and parts of the body and bodily processes on the other. In their view, expletives can contribute to establishing “a close, intimate relationship with the person or group to whom they are addressed” (2006: 225). Nonetheless, Carter and McCarthy caution that these elements can also expose “threatening and hostile relationships” (2006: 225).

Example 31

A: He's gonna create it too and we'll all finally be fabulously wealthy.
B: **Fuck** you. [laugh]
A: [laugh]
(From Quaglio and Biber 2006: 711)

For example, in this exchange *fuck* is seen as "an expression of informality signalling closeness of relationship between the interlocutors" (2006: 712) and is further reinforced with the laughter present in the conversation.

Expletives are, indeed, very much a part of certain conversational situations, as Murray points out. In his study of university students' speech, he claims that "in a very real and non-prudish sense, the frequency with which college students use dirty words is shocking. One cannot help wondering whether such an abundant use of taboo language doesn't somehow numb its users to the effect of the language on outsider's ears" (2012: 24). It is precisely the term *outsider* that needs to be highlighted here. Whether to use expletives or not is a personal and interactive choice, which conveys the speakers' stance as they (attempt to) identify with the other interactants. The studies mentioned (Quaglio and Biber 2006; Murray 2012) also indicate that English swearing is changing.

As was the case with polite formulae, expletives are socially bound. Scheu-Lottgen and Hernández-Campoy remind us that "all languages have swearwords and the kind of swearing in any given language may reveal to us something about the values and beliefs of the speakers of that language, as there exist intercultural differences on how, when, why, and even to whom swearwords are used" (1998: 390). However, contrary to the case of polite forms, which were more frequent and necessary in English, for these authors, certain forms of swearing, in "its different possibilities (ex*pletive, abusive, humorous,* or *auxiliary/lazy swearwords*)" (1998: 391), can be seen as typically *Iberian,* "both quantitatively and qualitatively" (1998: 391). They illustrate this point by quoting an article by Spanish novelist and former journalist Javier Pérez-Reverte:

> Uno se percataba de eso al oír a los guiris insultarse en su lengua. Un súbdito de Su Grandiosa Majestad, por ejemplo, discutía con otro y cuando le decía *stupid* era ya el colmo. Hasta el *fuck you* de los yanquis sabía a poco … mientras que en castellano podía elegirse, sin problemas entre un amplio repertorio, *pendón*, *mala zorra*, *chocholoco*. O *cacho puta* sin ir más lejos (1994:6).

The somewhat humorous portrayal of the (European) Spanish use of expletives can also serve as a warning to Spanish learners, who should be made aware of the communicative issues that may arise if expletives are translated into English and used as liberally as in European Spanish. In this sense, although Carter and McCarthy support the inclusion of expletives in L2 curricula, they advise NNS not to use them, because a language learner can find it difficult to assess the appropriate context if which these words can be acceptable. These linguists, however, acknowledge that expletives are frequently used in informal contexts and "that such uses of language will be heard" (2006: 226).

In section 6.3, we review these elements as a lexical feature of conversational English. Regardless of their function in spoken discourse, they are a distinctive part of the informal interactional language. Consequently, L2 speakers should be able to have access to these elements in their curricula, become familiar with the situations in which they are used and their likely effect upon the interlocutors. It is only then that L2 speakers will be prepared to decide whether to use them or not. More importantly, learners should also be able to recognise the *real* implications of these elements in spontaneous conversation and interpret them correctly so that communication remains fluent and genuine.

5.2. The clausal unit

5.2.1. Introduction

According to Halliday, language can be analysed in two ways. We can consider the text as an independent object, or we can "focus on the text as an instrument for finding out about something else" (Halliday 2004: 3). Logically, both approaches are compatible and complementary:

> These two perspectives are clearly complementary: we cannot explain why a text means what it does, with all the various readings and values that may be given to it, except by relating it to the linguistic system as a whole; and equally, we cannot use it as a window on the system unless we understand what it means and why (Halliday 2004: 3).

Undoubtedly, the *architecture of language* is complex, even more so if we are referring to the spoken medium. Halliday illustrates this when he states:

> Until now, linguistics has been like physics before 1600: having little reliable data, and no clear sense of the relationship between observation and theory (Halliday 2004: 34).

According to this author, the appearance of different corpora has enabled linguistics to jump forward in time to the twenty-first century. Corpus-based linguistics has made it possible to examine and explore authentic, spontaneous spoken language and consequently, the spoken text can now be approached as an object of study in its own right. What is more, “access to the discourse environment in which individual functions are used further allows for the description of discourse structural patterns in relation to individual speech act expressions” (Adolphs 2008: 131).

The corpus-based descriptive approach to language is giving linguists a better understanding of the pragmatic nature of discourse, which Adolphs sees as essential in the field of English language teaching and learning. In the same vein, McCarthy highlights the fact that most ESL material has tended to *create* overtly simplified *phrasicons*. He strongly defends the use of corpus data as a base for the design of textbooks:

> By using spoken corpora we can also learn very important things about social communication. As a result, the activities in corpus-informed materials can focus on the most important features of speaking and listening skills and produce more effective communication (McCarthy 2004: 17).

For Thornbury and Slade, effective oral communication is a fundamental human activity and it “crosses age groups, gender, class, culture and ethnicity” (2006: 1). Like McCarthy (1998, 2004, 2006), they understand that corpus data will enable L2 teaching to move away from artificially created contexts in which “the nature of spoken language itself was barely understood and for a long time spoken language was taught as if it were simply a less formal version of written language” (2006: 2).

Section 5.1 of this study has focused on some of the peripheral elements unique to spoken discourse. In addition to these, other features may also be considered at a syntactic level. Section 5.2 aims to highlight the most relevant clausal features of spoken English. These characteristics resist traditional grammar labels, which “belong to a ‘text-on-the-page’ view of language, where the constituents of sentences can be unpacked and analysed after the event” (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 76). To avoid terminological discrepancies, I will be using Biber et al.’s terminology. However, inevitable difficulties will arise again, as I will also quote other authors. The grammatical labels the latter use do not always coincide with the terminology used by Biber et al. This will be duly noted whenever necessary.

5.2.2. Ellipsis in clausal units

Clausal grammar is somewhat awkward to apply to conversational discourse. It does not seem to conform to the orderly rules of written discourse. Brazil proposes an approach in which discourse is seen as "something that is now-happening, bit by bit, in time, with the language being assembled as the speaker goes along" (1995: 37). This approach would explain much of the *untidiness* of conversation, which cannot be planned as it relies on the ongoing context.

Example 32
Chris: Is your wife working? She going back to work?
Gary: When she gets motivated I suppose.
Chris: Good on her, stands her ground.
Chris: You going to stay in your mum's house?
Gary: Nah – moving . . . probably. Might move into a, Bardwell Park.
(Thornbury and Slade 2006: 84)

This exchange exemplifies one of the syntactic peculiarities of English conversation. Speakers choose to omit subjects, verbs and even clauses, but communication is successful, as these elements are retrievable from the immediate linguistic or situational context. Example 33 would be unlikely in a real-life situation but not so much in ESL materials.

Example 33
Chris: Is your wife working? **[Is]** she going back to work?
Gary: **[She's going back to work]** when she gets motivated I suppose
Chris: Good on her, **[she]** stands her ground.
Chris: **[Are]** you going to stay in your mum's house?
Gary: Nah [I'm] moving . . . probably. **[I]** might move into a, Bardwell Park.
(Thornbury and Slade 2006: 85)

Ellipsis, i.e. "sentences that are somehow truncated, or missing explicit elements where such elements need to be understood" (Scheffler 2005: 1), is not exclusive to speech, though it is often associated with spoken discourse. Here the context is more immediate and there is a need to keep the message as active and fluent as possible. Halliday argues that ellipsis is a lexico-grammatical mechanism that "contributes to the semantic structure of the discourse" (2004: 562) and adds that the omitted elements are not essential or *prominent* for the comprehension of the text. The listener can elicit these elements due to the continuous flow of information that takes place in discourse.

Carter and McCarthy associate ellipsis with the *grammar of choice*. These structures have not been part of more prescriptive approaches to language, as they depend largely on the "speaker's/writer's interpersonal choices, which are sensitive to the relationship between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader" (2006: 7). These linguists, coinciding with Quaglio and Biber (2006: 703), narrow the use of *situational ellipsis* to spoken discourse, as it involves "the absence of references to entities which are obvious to all participants" (2006: 177) so characteristic of informal speech.

They believe that in conversational discourse it would make more sense to say that there is nothing missing as there is enough information to make the message understood. In their view, items need to be *added* in writing and formal speech in order to elaborate the discourse. Nonetheless, "it is a challenge to specify how listeners and readers get an interpretation even when there is no overt material in the input" (Frazier and Clifton 2005: 122).

This challenge is taken up by Cann, Kempson and Purver. They proposed a theory of *dynamic syntax* that makes an association between syntactic structure and context. This dichotomy can be used to determine the *wellformedness* of utterances: "context dependence and the dynamics of its update […] is central, not only to semantic interpretation, but also to the syntactic process" (2007: 29). Consequently, ellipsis in spoken discourse contributes to the smooth flow of conversation, which means that speech does not consist of tidy sentence-sentence structures but of "utterances are linked . . . as if in a chain" (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 168). In fact, elliptical structures are surprisingly similar to those considered *ungrammatical* for an L2 learner.

Example 34a
Started yet?
[Have you] started yet?

Example 34b
Got any money?
[Have you] got any money?
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 182)

For Mumford (2009), ellipsis of subjects and auxiliaries is among the structures of spoken grammar that ESL learners are likely to find most useful. For this reason, Carter and McCarthy (2006) strongly defend the need to raise L2 learners' awareness of the grammar of spoken English. They believe that if teachers insist that students conform to *written grammar* norms while speaking, their task will be made even more difficult. In order to raise awareness, teachers need, first of all, to understand the nature of these structures. Biber et al. provide a descriptive approach to situational ellipsis based on its frequency in the corpus. These authors divide utterances into *clausal* and *non-clausal,* which can be analyzed in terms of their various components: subjects, verbs, objects, predicatives or adverbials, although some of these elements may be omitted. Ellipsis at this level can take place in *initial* and *final* positions (Biber et al. 1999: 1106). Medial ellipsis is also possible and, although less frequent, will also be mentioned below.

5.2.2.1. Initial ellipsis

In everyday conversational speech, the omission of functional elements is frequent. Pronouns and auxiliary verbs are often omitted if they can be inferred from the context.

Example 35
[I] Saw Susan and her boyfriend in Alder weeks ago.
(Biber et al. 1999: 158)

Example 36
A: I've got a spider in here.
B: You **['ve got]** what?
A: I [**'ve]** got a spider in here.
(Biber et al. 1999: 158)

Biber et al. admit that these structures may still be considered as ungrammatical or incorrect, but their frequency in the corpus validates their widespread use and the need to include them as part of the strategies unique to conversational discourse. According to their data, initial ellipsis takes place 5,000 times per million words recorded. It is the most frequent type of ellipsis. For Carter and McCarthy (2006), the structure is not *ungrammatical*: deleted elements are taken to be among the choices that speakers make in interaction, that is, it part of the *grammar of choice*.

Here follow some of the most frequently omitted elements at the beginning of an utterance:

5.2.2.1.1. Ellipsis of subject

In declarative clauses, ellipsis of the subject is a very common feature:

Example 37
A: Are your parents well off?
B: **[It]** Depends what you call well off.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1105)

In conversational discourse the utterance *don't know* can be used without the pronoun *I*, and further reduced and corrupted as *dunno*.

Example 38
A: Do you know where you put the remote George?"
B: No, Thelma, **dunno**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1105)

Carter and McCarthy (2006) provide further data for this type of ellipsis. In the following structure: pronoun *I* + auxiliary or modal + lexical verb (usually of mental process such as *think, reckon, hope, like, wonder, suppose*), the subject, and often the auxiliary, are omitted in informal conversations:

Example 39
A: What's the matter?
B: **Can't** find my glasses.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 183)

Example 40
A: Can you make those changes to the list?
B: Yeah. **Think** so.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 183)

This also applies to assertions accompanied by tag questions:

Example 41
Need a ticket, do we?
Fooled you then, didn't I?
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 184)

5.2.2.1.2. Ellipsis of auxiliary

This is frequent in yes-no interrogatives. In informal speech, the auxiliary is not necessary as the context allows the listener to infer what the speaker means.

Example 42
Oh, **you** serious?
That too early for you?
(Biber et al. 1999: 1105)

5.2.2.1.3. Ellipsis of both subject and auxiliary

This type of ellipsis is frequent in both assertions and interrogatives.

Example 43
A: I love French beaches.
B: Yeah, **telling** me.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1105)

Example 44
A: Why aren't you working?
B: **Got** a day off.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1105)

Carter and McCarthy (2006: 181) point out that the pronoun *you* and the auxiliary verb are usually considered unnecessary in informal conversation.

Example 45
Started yet?
[**Have you** started yet?]
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 182)

Example 46
Hi, Colin, been working?
[**have you** been working?]
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 182)

5.2.2.1.4. Ellipsis and other elements

Carter and McCarthy (2006: 183-187) stress that other particles are often omitted, provided that the context is clear to all the participants in the conversation. Thus, in specific contexts, the determiner may not be necessary:

Example 47
Black coffee, please.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 186)

Example 48
A: Where do you want this?
B: **Bottom** shelf.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 186)

Even the conditional *if*, considered compulsory in formal discourse, may be omitted in conversational English.

Example 49
You want anything else, just help yourself.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 187)

Fixed expressions such as *no point in, be seeing you, never know* are also prone to be omitted, as shared linguistic and contextual knowledge makes these elements unnecessary.

5.2.2.2. Final (post-operator) ellipsis

Final ellipsis usually refers to the omission of elements that would appear after the auxiliary verb. According to Biber et al., final omission can be found 4,000 times per million words. Most of the examples documented in the corpus are short replies to questions. However, assertions can also be followed by final ellipsis, as in examples 50 and 51.

Example 50
A: I suppose Kathy is still living in the same place.
B: Yeah, she **is**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1106)

Example 51
A: I'm not going out with her at the moment.
B: Ah!
A: **But I should be** … by around Tuesday night.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1106)

Although most cases of final ellipsis involve the omission of the main verb and the complement, Biber et al. also remind us that the elements after *to* and after *wh-* structures tend to be left out:

Example 52
A: Oh! Dear! Take me home!
B: I'd love **to**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1107)

5.2.2.3. Medial (operator) ellipsis

This type of ellipsis, which occurs when the auxiliary is omitted (example 53b), is the least frequent of the three (less than 1,000 times per million words). However, Biber et al. (1999: 1107) consider that the alternative spelling of structures such as *gonna (→be going to)* or *gotta (→have got to)*, very common in certain contexts, is undergoing a process of grammaticalization (example 53a).

Example 53a
When you **gonna** do that then?
[When are you going to do that?]

Example 53b
What she say?
[What **did** she say?]
(Biber et al. 1999: 1107)

5.2.3. Dislocation

Another feature of the contextualised description of spoken grammar is dislocation. The term is commonly used to describe syntactic choices which "involve a definite noun phrase occurring in a peripheral position, with a co-referent pronoun in the core of the clause" (Biber et al. 1999: 956) resulting in the redistribution of information.

It should be noted that dislocation is found almost exclusively in conversational discourse. In the data obtained from the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus (LSWE), "both types of dislocation occur over 200 times per million words in conversation and occasionally in fictional dialogue, but very rarely in written prose" (Biber et al. 1999: 957). This frequency reflects the speaker's need to relocate information in order to make the message more easily understood, thus, "the speaker separates out crucial bits of information which are then attached more loosely to the clause, at the same time as a co-referent pronoun in the core of the clause indicates how the preface or the tag is related to the main proposition" (Biber et al. 1999: 957).

Their role in conversational discourse is widely acknowledged (Biber et al. 1999: 957; Hughes and McCarthy 1998: 272; Rühlemann 2006: 390; Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 2011: 82). In fact, for Carter, Hughes and McCarthy, these structures are a part of the interpersonal grammar of speech as they contribute to the listener-speaker relationship by enabling the listener to have a clearer version of the message conveyed. They also underline that this flexibility in word order does not belong to what could be considered standard language. In fact, they stress that dislocations are used in conversational discourse by “a wide range of speakers irrespective of gender, region, age or any social or geographical factors” (2011: 82). The most outstanding syntactic feature of dislocation is illustrated in the following examples:

Example 54
That picture of a dog, where is [it]?
(Biber et al. 1999: 957)

Example 55
Has [it] got double doors, *that shop*?
(Biber et al. 1999: 957)

In example 54, *that picture of a dog* has been placed before the main clause, while in example 55, the subject has a mirror image in *that shop,* which follows the main clause. Biber et al. call these syntactic choices prefaces (*that picture of a dog*) and noun-phrase tags (*that shop*) (1999: 956-957) respectively. Using a different terminology, Carter and McCarthy (1995) refer to prefaces as *heads* or *headers* and to noun-phrase tags as *tails*. And these are not the only labels used to refer to these structures. Rühlemann offers a possible argument for this terminological chaos in areas such as (applied) linguistics. He states “that a writing-based descriptive apparatus can only explain features of conversational grammar from a perspective *ex negativo* operating with terms that state what the phenomena under scrutiny are *not* but fail to explain in positive terms what the phenomena *are”* (2006: 389). In any case, if a descriptive grammar of conversational discourse is to serve as a universal reference in areas such as L2 teaching, authors should at some point reach an agreement on the terms to be used and their implications.

Returning to the topic at hand, dislocated elements are add-ons to the main predicate and, although the separation is not always a clear one, Biber et al. believe that these elements “cannot be elicited by questions forms of the clause they are attached to” (1999: 136). In other words, prefaces and tags are *loosely* connected to the clause. They reflect the choices made by the interlocutors whereby stance, i.e. feelings and attitudes, is conveyed. Carter, Hughes and McCarthy believe that L2 users of the language should also be able to make these choices and argue that such structures should “be appropriately embedded within language coursebooks and ideally dealt with in a broader framework which, especially in the case of more advanced students, involves greater exposure to authentic spoken discourse" (2011: 82).

If *correctness* in conversational discourse is no longer synonymous with correct written grammar, then learners should be able to experience the most relevant variations existing in both the written and the spoken modes. ESL textbooks and material designers should no longer be reluctant to give L2 speakers the possibility to choose or to participate in the correct listener-speaker relationship at a given time. In other words, learners should be made aware that *incorrect* structures in formal writing, such as *You're all set* and *You ok?*, may be adequate or even necessary in certain contexts of conversational discourse.

5.2.3.1. Prefaces

According to Biber et al., a preface, or left dislocation, consists of a noun phrase followed by a co-referent pronoun in the same clause. They can take place in both declarative and interrogative clauses.

Example 56
This woman, she's ninety odd.
That leather coat, it looks really nice on you.
You know, **the vase**, did you see it?
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 193)

Prefaces are used to establish the main topic of the clause, while the pronoun could easily be replaced by the noun phrase. These elements, as has been mentioned, play an essential role in spoken discourse. First of all, their position helps the listener to establish a relation between the main topic and the rest of the utterance. Second, left dislocation of the subject allows the speaker to organise the information and to make sure that the listener has identified the main topic of the message.

Similarly, Hughes and McCarthy believe that left dislocation is "an act of sensitivity to the listeners, taking them from something or someone familiar to a thing or person that is new and that is the topic of the rest of the clause" (1998: 273). This is associated with the face-to-face nature of conversation, as it requires strategies that give both the listener and the speaker time to process the message adequately. Thus, Hughes and McCarthy stress that these communication instruments should be made available to the L2 speaker, as they not only facilitate the production of utterances by redistributing information, they also achieve the main objective of spoken language by making communication more effective. However, they highlight the terminological problem already mentioned.

This may cause setbacks for both learners and teachers as "one person's fronting may be another's left dislocation, and both are terms that learners (and teachers) may find disconcertingly unfamiliar" (1998: 275).

As for its functions, Manetta (2007) believes that prefaces cannot be given the exclusive role of *topic marking* and, like Prince (1997, 1998), identifies three types of left dislocation structures that point to the fact that speakers may take advantage of this syntactic construction for other purposes: *Simplifying Left Dislocation, Poset Left Dislocation* and *Resumptive Pronoun Topicalization*. The first one "serves to simplify the discourse processing of discourse-new entities by removing the NPs evoking them from a syntactic position disfavored for NPs evoking discourse-new entities and creating a separate processing unit for them" (Prince 1998: 6).

Example 57

We went to Florida last summer, and we went to Disney World. The best ride the whole time was Jurassic Park. It was so scary. **My sister Chrissie**, <u>her eyes</u> were poppin' out.

(Manetta 2007:1030).

In example 57, *my sister Chrissie* has not been mentioned before. Thus, following the criteria stated previously, the dislocated phrase could have been *my sister Chrissie's eyes*. However, the use of the so-called Simplifying Left Dislocation enables the speaker to facilitate or simplify the processing of discourse by moving the noun phrase to the beginning of the utterance and by dividing the topic into two separate units: *My sister Chrissie* and *her eyes*.

In contrast to this, Poset Left Dislocation does not introduce new information. Instead, it contributes to link different entities already mentioned by the speaker. In example 58, the dislocated noun phrase is not new information, as *the youngest brother* has appeared before. In such cases, the speaker has recourse to this structure to indicate that "the left dislocated NP represents an entity standing in a salient partially-ordered set relation to entities already evoked in the discourse" (Prince 1998: 6). In the example provided, the other entities would be *my brothers*, i.e. m*y oldest brother* and *my middle brother*.

Example 58

So I see my <u>youngest brother</u> a lot too. Actually, all my brothers are pretty close by. My oldest brother is a chef, like, downtown and my middle brother lives in Jersey. **My youngest brother**, <u>he's</u> a freshman at Newman.

(Manetta 2007: 1030).

Resumptive Pronoun Topicalization takes place in structures that could be considered grammatically impossible but “where a resumptive pronoun occurs in the extraction site, giving the illusion of a Left Dislocation’’ (Prince 1998: 300). In example 59, if the dislocated noun phrase, *My first book*, were to be replaced by the corresponding pronoun *it*, the utterance would not make sense to the listener as it would be impossible for the book to pay for itself. Thus, in spoken discourse such structures are avoided by using the so-called resumptive pronouns.

Example 59

My first book, I paid half of each trick to the person who gave it to me. After that, it was my book.

(Terkel 1974:95).

Elaborating on the idea that dislocation is not exclusively a topic-marking strategy, Manetta identifies a fourth type of left dislocation, *Unexpected Subject Left Dislocation.* Here, as a result of a previous complex structure, the speaker presents a noun phrase in an unexpected position for the listener, trying “to simplify the discourse processing of entities” (2007: 1034). In the example below, the dislocated NP, *boarding school*, is not new. The speaker is facilitating the processing task for the listener by placing the noun phrase in an unexpected position so that the *shift* from the main topic, the subject *he*, to *boarding school* is clear and understood by the listener.

Example 60

I called him on the phone, to like meet him for the first time. Like, he lives in New Hampshire. He went to boarding school. **Boarding school**, it’s where like big rich kids – [cutoff]

(Manetta 2007:1032).

For Manetta, left dislocation is a syntactic structure that “seems to serve a wide variety of discourse functions and is motivated by a range of discourse circumstances” (2007: 1035). Unlike Prince (1998) and Manetta (2007), Carter and McCarthy do not support the use of the term *dislocation* and use *headers* instead. The term aims to avoid bias towards written discourse by indicating that speech takes place in time and not place. For these linguists, headers can be complex and have various noun phrases in apposition “leading to the noun phrase which is the subject of the following clause” (2006: 193). In any case, they stress that the function of this structure is to provide the listener with as much information as possible so as to make the main topic more identifiable.

Example 61

Madge, one of the secretaries at work, her daughter got married last week.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 193)

Example 62

His cousin in London, her boyfriend, his parents bought him a Ford Escort.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 193)

Headers are frequent and, in Carter and McCarthy's view, "they often lead the listener from given or known information to new topical information" (2006: 193). The utterances above provide examples of noun phrases functioning as prefaces where the referent pronouns are the subject of an assertive clause. Examples 63 and 64 show other variants. In the former, the dislocated element is a non-finite clause, while in example 64 the speaker uses a *there* subject pro-form. The third example shows that interrogative clauses can have prefaces as initial elements.

Example 63

Walking into the room, it brought back a load of memories.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 193)

Example 64

Now **Rio de Janeiro**, there's a fabulous city.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 194)

Example 65

Your sister, is she coming?

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 194)

Headers often refer to the subject of the clause, although it is not infrequent to find these elements referring to the object, the object complement or even to a prepositional complement.

Example 66

Owen, he's my favourite nephew.
Joe, I've never seen him at a single football match this year.
"**The Great Maurice**", they used to call him that, didn't they?
Anita, you should at least feel sorry for her.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 194)

5.2.3.2. The noun phrase tag

A number of terms have been used for this structure including ‘tag statement’ (Melchers 1983), ‘amplificatory tag statement’ (Quirk et al. 1985), ‘postponed theme’ (Downing and Locke 1992), ‘tail’ (Geluykens 1987; McCarthy and Carter 1997; Timmis 2009) and, of course, ‘noun phrase tag’ (Biber et al. 1999). Regardless of this terminological confusion, or perhaps due to it, I shall continue to draw on the terminology in Biber et al. (1999), although alternative terms will be used when considering the different approaches.

5.2.3.2.1. Structure of noun phrase tags

Noun phrase tags are mirror images to the structure described in section 5.2.3.1. Here, a pronoun refers to its proceeding noun phrase tag, which is in a peripheral position in the utterance. The tag is frequently a noun phrase, although it may also be a prepositional phrase or even a clause.

Example 67
They’re incredibly **nice, our neighbours**.
I put it there, **on the fridge**.
I find it annoying that **they didn’t tell us**.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 195)

Another feature of noun phrase tags is that they often appear either before or after question tags.

Example 68
They do take up a lot of time, I suppose, **kids**, don’t they?
‘Cos they tend to go cold, don’t they, **pasta**?
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 195)

The noun phrase tag can refer back to the subject, the object, the complements or even adjuncts. In example 69, *a mosquito bite* serves to clarify the meaning of *one*, the object, while *whippets* makes reference to *they*, the subject of the clause.

Example 69
She’s never had one before, **a mosquito bite**.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 196)

Oh I reckon they’re lovely. I really do **whippets**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 1080)

5.2.3.2.2. Functions of noun phrase tags

These recurrent elements of conversational English tend to have a clarifying function. The speaker uses the pronoun as the nucleus of the utterance and then realises "that it may be unknown or the reference unclear" (Biber et al. 1999: 958). Similarly, Timmis (2009) stresses that the clarifying nature of these tags can be associated with a cognitive value by which the speaker may decide during the utterance that an entity needs clarification. In example 70, the speaker decides in mid-utterance that the pronoun, *it*, needs further clarification.

Example 70
It's awful, isn't it, Tuesday night?
(Timmis 2009: 338)

This way, the dislocated element becomes a tool that enables speakers "to cope with planning pressure, and at the same time to convey some fairly complex messages" (Biber et al. 1999: 1072). Rühlemann states that "unlike writers, who can change or delete phrasings without leaving any trace and the recipient ever noticing, speakers in conversation cannot erase starts or lapses but anything they say will be 'on record' and they can alter their course only by adding alternative words, structures or clauses" (2006: 395).

Example 71
He's amazingly clever, **that dog of theirs**.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 194)

These final elements can also help to reinforce or emphasize an aspect that is explicit in the utterance. According to Biber et al., noun phrase tags can also be associated with one of the principles that constrain conversational discourse. We, as speakers, not only have limited planning time, but "there is also a similar limit to the amount of planned structure we can hold in readiness for future completion" (1999: 1067). As a consequence of this, speakers tend to have simple, unelaborated subjects when compared to the object. Noun phrase tags could be part of the end-weight effect used by speakers to facilitate the comprehension of the message and to make the discourse more fluent.

Example 72
They're an odd couple, **those two**.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 196)

For Carter and McCarthy (1995, 1997, 2006), noun phrase tags or *tails* also help to evaluate an entity in the structure, as they appear in contexts in which personal preferences and evaluations are underlined. The evaluative processes “position the speaker in terms of his/her stance or attitude” (Carter and McCarthy 1995: 151), making these structures common in conversations in which speakers are given or are asked to give spontaneous and emotional reaction. Valdeón stresses that “tails also enable speakers to express positive or negative views on particular actions or state of affairs” (2007: 101). More importantly, he underlines the interactional function of the structure as “the choice of not using a tail construction seems to establish a more distant relationship, or, at least, increase the social distance” (2007: 102) between the interlocutors. He sustains that the structure encourages the *keep talking* principle (Biber et al. 1999: 1067) by avoiding dead-ends in the conversation.

Example 73

She’s great at playing tennis, **Hiroko is**, isn’t she?
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 196)

I just give it all away didn’t I Rudy **my knitting**?
(Biber et al. 1999: 1080)

Timmis also stresses the evaluative character of *tails*. His conclusions concur with McCarthy and Carter’s (1997, 2006) and Valdeón’s (2007), as he notes “the tendency of tails to co-occur with evaluative comments” (2009: 335) in the sub-corpus of conversations. For example, his data confirms that *tails* appear in 46% of the comments made about the weather.

To sum up, these elements convey “a spontaneous and emotional reaction on something (especially in the immediate context) or an emotionally coloured comment on a situation which is familiar to both the participants in the conversation” (Aijmer 1989: 137), and facilitate communication and “at the same time position the speaker in terms of his/her stance or attitude” (Carter and McCarthy 1995: 151). The utterances in example 74 reflect the *emotionally* coloured aspect of tails:

Example 74

You’re a nice set of buggers, **you are**.
They all want throwing out, **the government**, taking the guts out of us.
(Timmis 2009: 330 and 334)

5.2.3.3. Other considerations

Noun phrase tags are a device frequently used in spoken discourse by "speakers of different ages, sexes, dialect groups, and social classes" (Carter and McCarthy 1989: 142) and, thus, cannot be ignored as part of the resources that fluent speakers have at their disposal. Valdeón believes that conversational elements such as noun phrase tags are an unavoidable feature of spoken English and "examples of structures common in speech can be useful to boost the communicative abilities of the learner" (2007: 112). Timmis supports a similar viewpoint by stating that tails have survived the passing of time possibly due to "their ability to meet important psycholinguistic and socio-affective needs" and stresses the need to consider *tails* an essential feature of conversational language that should "have a perfectly proper place in descriptive grammars of spoken English" (2009: 343). He concludes by saying that much research is still to be carried out in this relatively new field of descriptive linguistics and that "there is a *prima facie* case for including tails in the English language teaching syllabus" (2009: 343). In any case, noun phrase tags are essential "in any assessment of the structures required to be an effective communicator in spoken English" (Timmis 2009: 343).

Finally, although noun phrase tags can be effective tools in the learners' communication strategies, Carter, Hughes and McCarthy remind us that L2 speakers should be made aware of the fact that this structure cannot be used "indiscriminately in every utterance in a sequence" (2011: 84), i.e. learners need to become familiar not only with the linguistic tools available to them, but also with *how* and *when* to use them. These grammarians believe that, while the syntactic description of these structures is "relatively straightforward to articulate as rules" (2011: 84), knowing when their usage is appropriate is *more complex* and yet "learning how to form and to use heads and tails is an important part of learning how to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships in and through language" (2011: 95).

5.2.4. Multiple negatives

> One of the most striking features of the development of English negative sentences is that multiple negation, which commonly occurs in Old and Middle English came to be replaced by single negation in Present-day English (Iyeiri 1998: 121).

Iyeiri's quotation may be quite unequivocal, but in present-day informal conversations multiple negation has survived and can be considered a part of many dialects and/or of some non-standard varieties of English. Tieken-Boon van Ostade insists that "despite the efforts of many generations of grammarians and schoolmasters to rid the language of the construction, multiple negation is still very much a characteristic of the more informal, mostly spoken registers" (1995: 131), and adds that "it not only occurs in non-standard forms of English but also in standard English" (1995: 132).

For their part, Quirk et al. believe that multiple negation is a feature of *non-standard* English and stress that it is "condemned by prescriptive grammatical tradition" (1985: 787). They do, nonetheless, differentiate between the *accepted* double negative structure of standard English and the one we find in the non-standard varieties. The latter is "especially associated with uneducated (rather than dialectal)" (1985: 18) and, thus, its use implies having lower social and economic status.

Example 75
None of us have **never** told lies. (standard)
(Quirk et al. 1985: 789)

Example 76
No one never said **nothing** to nobody. (non-standard)
(Quirk et al. 1985: 787)

In example 75, the negative words have their own value and cancel each other out. The result is a positive utterance that could be paraphrased as *All of us have told lies at some point in time.* In example 76, the multiple negatives do not have an independent semantic value: they are used instead of non-assertive forms. Thus, according to Quirk et al., this utterance would normally be associated with uneducated speakers.

Sinclair proposes a radically different line of thought when he states that "there is ultimately no distinction between form and meaning" (1991: 7). Basing his findings on a corpus-driven approach, he defends the view that speakers do not choose patterns or words when elaborating an utterance but phrases "that have a single form and a single meaning", and adds that a language user "has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices" (1991: 110). The level of education or social class of the speaker is not considered at this point, but it is the frequency of the pattern in the data available that determines whether the structure should be considered a regular pattern of discourse.

In fact, Biber et al. find that the frequency of the negative forms is an overwhelming 21,000 per million words. As face-to-face immediacy and a limited time span available to the speakers characterise spoken discourse, repetition of both affirmative and negative structures is common. Besides, Biber et al. associate the interactive nature of speech with the need to agree or disagree during discourse and, thus, with *multiple negations*. According to Cheshire, multiple negation is “grammatically well-formed and, though stigmatised, often appropriate to the situations in which they occur” (1999: 147).

In a recent study, Kortmann accepts that multiple negation is characteristic of non-standard language, although he clarifies that

> it is notoriously hard to define Standard English and even more so what a spoken standard is. Neither of them is a uniform concept, nor is it always possible to draw a sharp distinction between written and spoken Standard English, on the one hand, and standard and nonstandard spoken English, on the other hand (2006: 604).

The difficulty increases when considering the different standards in British English. Anderwald claims that “despite the advances of radio and television, despite increasing mobility, spoken English is by no means becoming more like the written standard” and continues that English dialect grammar is still “a relatively underdeveloped area of research” (2002: 1). According to this author, the frequency of the structure can range from 40 to 45 per cent in the South of England to 10 per cent in the North of England, Scotland and Wales.

Similarly, Kortmann states that, in spoken non-standard discourse, one of the most common features is precisely multiple negation. The frequency of such non-standard characteristics leads him to question “what kinds of grammatical features stand a chance to spread from the non-standard to the standard in the future (spreading first to the spoken, ultimately perhaps to the written standard)” (2006: 615). Due to the stigma associated with multiple negations, he believes that “regardless of how widespread across non-standard varieties, frequent and entrenched in spontaneous spoken English they may be” (2006: 616), it is highly unlikely that multiple negations will become a part of the standardized conversational discourse.

In this study, I focus on the fact that although multiple negations are not part of the standard norm and that “learners of English are advised not to use them” (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 736), they are an unquestionable part of spoken discourse. Therefore, learners should be made aware of their existence and be able to recognize the structure not as a grammatical mistake or as an indication of the level of education, or even the social class of the user, but as a characteristic of a non-standard variety of informal spoken English which is widespread in the English-speaking world, even if students are advised not to use the structure themselves. The following quotation can round off the discussion in this section:

> variation among the Modern Dialects at the grammatical level is certainly still rich and considerable, and happily this diversity seems likely to remain with us as a source of interest, color and enjoyment for the foreseeable future, in spite of the efforts of those in the media and the educational system who would like to see an increase in conformity and uniformity (Trudgill 1999b: 108).

5.2.4.1. Dependent multiple negation

Biber et al. differentiate two types of multiple negation. The first one, called *dependent*, includes the negative forms within the clausal structure. It conveys a single negative meaning. On the other hand, *independent* multiple negation implies that each negative form has an independent negative value. In their view, dependent negation, an "old pattern which is found in casual speech" (Biber et al. 1999: 178), is stigmatised both socially and, undoubtedly, by educators. Cheshire concurs with this idea and insists that it is unfortunate that even today "the National Curriculum for English in England and Wales implies that formal and informal styles of speaking call for identical forms of English" (2001: 141). From a sociolinguistic perspective, she understands that multiple negation cannot be considered as standard, although it is "grammatically well-formed" (2001: 141) and contextually appropriate. She rebels against a prescriptive approach and advocates a language where speakers make their own choices.

The sociolinguistic relevance of dependent multiple negation is questioned by Palacios Martinez (2003). His study, based on the British English component of the ICE (International Corpus of English[14]), found only two examples of dependent multiple negation and, although these were spoken utterances, neither was spontaneous conversational language. This evidence seems to contradict Biber et al., who also state that it "is generally restricted to conversation and fictional dialogue"

[14] The International Corpus of English (ICE) began in 1990 with the primary aim of collecting material for comparative studies of English worldwide. Twenty-four research teams around the world work on electronic corpora of their own national or regional variety of English. Each ICE corpus consists of one million words of spoken and written English.

(1999: 178). This lack of consensus seems to emphasize the need to continue comparing existing data, but it may also be indicative of the conscious syntactic choices speakers make. Since dependent multiple negation is socially stigmatized, it seems logical that speakers should try to avoid it, as Biber et al. stress: “this is apparently a case where prescriptive traditions have been particularly influential, resulting in present-day distribution of the form” (1999: 178). Although Nevalainen does not attribute its bad reputation to prescriptive linguistics, he does mention that this structure began to disappear “from the evolving standard language in the Late Middle and Early Modern English periods” (1996: 264).

In any case, the dependent structure is generally accepted to consist of the repetition of *not*. Thus, the negative elements take advantage of the two most prominent positions in an utterance, the beginning and the end (examples 77 and 78 below).

Example 77
A: Did Jill say what time Caroline’s appointment was?
B: No, Er – **not** to me she **didn’t**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 178)

Example 78
A: The fact you get the films or – recent films.
B: **Not** all of them they’re **not**.
(Biber et al. 1999: 178)

Examples 79 and 80 below might appear in non-assertive sentences in written texts or even in carefully planned speech. The multiple negations in the examples seem to have an emphatic function and, according to Palacios Martinez, they reflect the speaker’s intention “to heighten the negative meaning” resulting in a “more negative than it would be with a single negative expression” (2003: 485).

Example 79
And now they just don’t know what to do, there’s **no** jobs, **there’s nothing**.
But without that heater they’ve **no** hot water, **no nothing**!
(Biber et al. 1999: 178)

Example 80
But if they are for war **shouldn’t** it **not** be for all the consequences of war.
(Palacios Martinez 2003: 485)

5.2.4.2. Independent multiple negation

Independent multiple negation cannot be replaced by non-assertive forms. They would otherwise appear as independent negative structures. The negative elements have independent negative value and they do not form part of the same clause.

Example 81
Won't eat veggies you know, **none**.
No, **not** tomorrow, she said.
(Biber et al. 1999: 179)

Biber et al. also provide examples in which multiple negation takes place within the same clause and cancel each other out. Example 82 below actually implies that *you can't stay awake*.

Example 82
Oh well, you sleep on sherry though – it makes you sleepy, you **can't not** sleep.
(Biber et al. 1999: 179)

For Biber et al., independent multiple negation is frequent in conversational discourse, although it is considered "a complex choice which requires deliberate planning" (1999: 170). Unlike dependent multiple negation, it "is not stigmatised and is found particularly in writing" (1999: 179). In a more in-depth analysis of multiple negation, Palacios Martinez classifies independent negation into two subtypes: clause negation + subclause negation, whereby there is a negation in the main clause "plus a subclause negation within the same clause" (2003: 486), and clause negation + clause negation, where negation occurs in a main clause and "another negative in a clause" (2003: 487).

Example 83
Australia have been making the errors but they are **not** the world champions for **nothing**.
(Palacios Martinez 2003: 487)

Example 84
Don't tell me you heard **nothing**.
(Palacios Martinez 2003: 490)

Example 83 represents independent multiple negation of clause + subclause. In this coordinated structure, the conjunction *but* introduces a contrast between the second clause, where *not* is the main negation, and *nothing*, in the subclause. Multiple negation conveys a litote in which the speaker is actually saying that the Australian team have not become champions by chance. In example 84, the clause *don't tell me* is not actually communicating a negative meaning but "expressing incredulity" (Palacios Martinez 2003: 490).

Palacios Martínez provides a considerable number of examples where multiple negation "may adopt different structural patterns" (2003: 495), but the author defends the view that the structure has a communicative role as it "does not respond to a single use or meaning" (2003: 495). While dependent and, in some cases, independent negatives "intensify or heighten what is being said" (Palacios Martínez 2003: 495), it is also possible "to express an understatement on the speaker's or writer's part, that is, the negative meaning is weakened by affirming something through the contrary (litotes)" (2003: 495).

5.2.4.3. Multiple negation or no multiple negation

Multiple negation seems to be a paradoxical structure in the English language. In a prescriptive approach, Trudgill categorically claims that "standard English lacks multiple negation" (1999a: 125) and adds that it should be discouraged, if only to avoid "the discrimination which is currently exercised against non-standard dialect speakers in most English-speaking societies" (1999a: 127).

Even if multiple negation is considered a stigmatized structure, this does not justify omitting it from the L2 curriculum, as, at some point, learners are likely to come across the structure in real contexts. I have repeatedly mentioned that L2 learners need and want to be in contact with real language. This may imply becoming familiarized with less conventional structures, such as multiple negation. Whether it is dependent or the more socially accepted independent multiple negation, both are features of spontaneous spoken discourse. Additionally, multiple negation may be a choice made by speakers to transmit specific attitudes. NNS need to recognize these traits and, why not, be given the choice to use them. Milroy and Milroy provide us with a less biased perspective of the structure:

> It is possible that a majority of all English speakers use multiple negation in speech, despite the efforts of prescribers and correctors. This is not to say that these speakers use multiple negation all the time; the probably switch between simple and multiple negation. A socially neutral approach to this requires us to consider the possibility that multiple negation is an additional resource of speech and not a defect due to ignorance or illogicality (1985: 53).

Saying nothing... sometimes says the most.
—EMILY DICKINSON

CHAPTER SIX

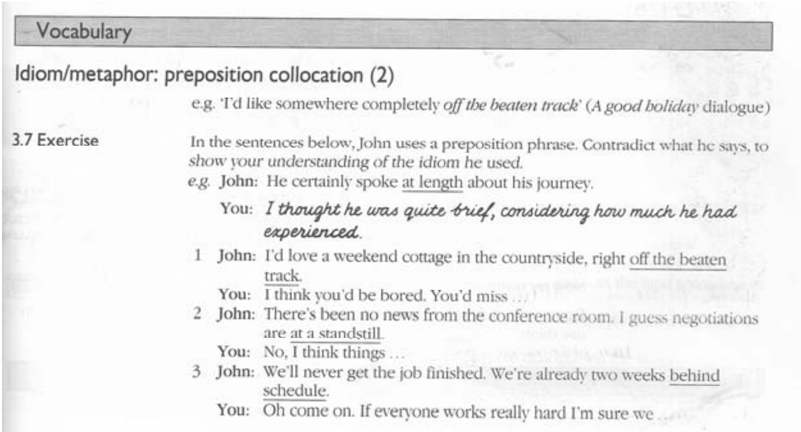
LEXICAL ELEMENTS

Vocabulary has been traditionally associated with fluency. This is illustrated by the endless lists of words found in ESL textbooks, aiming at enabling learners to express themselves more accurately, more idiomatically and more proficiently. Furthermore, there is an intimate connection between lexis and syntax, as textbooks tend to link the main topics of their units to relevant syntactic or grammatical structures. However, the CA does not focus on the acquisition of lexico-grammatical forms as such; instead, it strives to "make the communicative competence the goal of language teaching" (Richards and Rodgers 1990: 66). Words, nonetheless, are part of the communicative act. Widdowson (1978) encouraged the teaching of adequate lexical items, insisting that NS familiar with the accurate vocabulary have fewer problems understanding utterances than those with adequate grammar but incorrect vocabulary. Similarly, Wilkins (1974) defended the view that in order to acquire a high level of communicative competence, learners needed to dominate the lexical-syntactic system of the language:

> … the ability to refer to concrete and conceptual entities is as fundamental to language as is the capacity provided by the grammar to relate such entities to one another. Knowledge of a language demands mastery of its vocabulary as much as of its grammar (Wilkins 1974: 19).

Larsen-Freeman (1986) encouraged the contextualisation of lexical items by focusing on discourse rather than on the sentence level. This was a step in the right direction although it was insufficient. Contexts were aimed to "develop strategies for interpreting and using the language as it is actually used by native speakers" (Zimmerman 1997: 14), but these were based on intuition rather than on real data, as they offered a somewhat *neat and tidy* version of speech. The short extract below (the original exercise consists of 15 sentences) shows how dialogues or *natural-sounding* discourse have been traditionally used to contextualise lexical items.

Figure 6: Extract from *Paths to proficiency*



Vocabulary

Idiom/metaphor: preposition collocation (2)

e.g. 'I'd like somewhere completely *off the beaten track*' (*A good holiday* dialogue)

3.7 Exercise

In the sentences below, John uses a preposition phrase. Contradict what he says, to *show your understanding of the idiom he used.*

e.g. **John:** He certainly spoke at length about his journey.

You: *I thought he was quite brief, considering how much he had experienced.*

1 **John:** I'd love a weekend cottage in the countryside, right off the beaten track.

You: I think you'd be bored. You'd miss …

2 **John:** There's been no news from the conference room. I guess negotiations are at a standstill.

You: No, I think things …

3 **John:** We'll never get the job finished. We're already two weeks behind schedule.

You: Oh come on. If everyone works really hard I'm sure we …

(Naylor and Hagger 1992: 141)

Corpus-informed data has enabled linguists to analyse lexico-grammatical patterns in authentic contexts. Lewis, for instance, argues against the dichotomy grammar versus vocabulary when he states "language is grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (1993: 89), and defends a methodological approach based on naturally occurring lexis. This chapter focuses on some key lexical features that form part of naturally occurring conversation and have, nonetheless, received insufficient attention in ESL materials.

In the 1970s, Crystal and Davy had already acknowledged that "lack of precision is one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation" and "the use of lexical vagueness is undoubtedly a main sign of social and personal relaxation … the "choice" of the vague lexical item is conducive to maintaining the informal atmosphere of the situation" (1975: 111-112). Therefore, vague language characterised certain casual conversations. In the same way, NS may also choose to use slang expressions and even taboo words, which can be acceptable in certain contexts.

With regards to taboo language, Mercury believes that adult learners "could benefit from lessons that focus on the nature and the use of taboo language" and "what it signifies sociolinguistically" (1995: 28), although she insists that this does not imply that L2 speakers have to be taught to swear. She insists, though, that learners who understand the use of taboo words are able to communicate more effectively in everyday situations. In the same way, Mattiello defends the need to include these lexical items in the ESL curriculum to enable learners to differentiate between neutral and strong language. Like Mercury, she does not encourage the use of these words, but believes that L2 learners can benefit from a familiarity with it, as this colourful and risky language not only allows them to understand everyday conversation more efficiently (that is, it allows them to read between the lines and interpret the underlying message), but it can also enable them to “socialize and create intimacy with their peers” (2005: 36).

For Jay and Janschewitz, “the main purpose of swearing is to express emotions, especially anger and frustration” (2008: 267). When considering this sociolinguist function, it makes sense to allow learners to choose whether to use them or not, but also, to be able to appreciate the emotional impact such language has, an aspect that is conditioned by “one’s experience with a culture and its language conventions” (2008: 267). In other words, the bizarre and rebellious *slanguage* and taboo words reflect the speaker’s stance: whether it is hostile or jocular, it inevitably reflects a precise and intentional choice in the NS lexical choice. As Pooley wrote in 1972, language should be “restrained only by strict attention to meaning, to the tone and intent of the communication, and to a due regard for the feelings of the reader or listener” (1972: 1019), and not by prescriptive conventions that decide what language an L2 learner should or should not become familiarized with.

6.1. Vague language

Conversation is usually synonymous with face-to-face interaction. This implies that speakers and listeners share a physical context and, often, cultural, social and even institutional knowledge is common to both. This, in turn, is closely related to the data obtained in the LSWE corpus, which highlights the fact that the lexical density in speech is lower than in any other register. When face-to-face interaction takes place, there are contextual aspects that speakers incorporate into the act of communication often making it redundant to be too specific, as is the case of example 85: without an explicit context there seems to be little or no connection between the utterances. However, the interactants share contextual knowledge. This allows speaker B to reply by means of what appears to be an irrelevant answer.

Example 85

Two people having a snack while watching TV.
A: Do you want any more?
B: I think I’ll go to bed, there’s nothing on TV worth watching tonight.
(Kennedy 2007 :157)

Here previous context contributes to smooth communication even though some of the words are rather vague. Being vague and inexplicit or, rather, not needing to be explicit, has an impact on to the lexical density of conversation. Biber et al. use the LSWE to highlight this by comparing a news report and a short conversation in order to show "the distribution typical of these two registers" (Biber et al. 1999: 61). In example 86, the number of lexical words (in capital letters) and of function words (in lower-case) denotes the differences between the two genres.

Example 86
Text sample 1: NEWS REPORT

MR LADISLAV ADAMEC, the CZECHOLOVAK PRIME MINISTER THREATENED to QUIT LAST NIGHT, as HARD BARGANING CONTINUED for a second DAY with the OPPOSITION over the SHAPE of the NEW GOVERNMENT.

MR ADAMEC HAD TALKS with the OPPOSITION LEADER, MR VACLAV HAVEL, on the CABINET LINEUP. He LATER WENT on NATIONAL TELEVISION to STATE that he would STAND-DOWN unless his NEW GOVERNMENT GAINED PUBLIC BACKING.

Text sample 2: CONVERSATION IN A BARBER SHOP

A1: i will PUT, i won't SMILE. – TELL me what would you LIKE NOW?
B1: **erm** – SHORTENED-UP **please** PETE – **erm** – SHAVED A-LITTLE-BIT at the BACK and SIDES – and THEN JUST SORT-OF BRUSHED BACK on the TOP A-BIT.
A2: right and when you SAY SHAVED A-LITTLE-BIT
B2: **yeah** yo – you SORT-OF-JUST – GOT your THING and zazoom!
A3: **yeah** but – is it SHORT REALLY?
B3: **yeah** to -, yeah and i
A4: <unclear> you WANT a NUMBER four?
B4: **yeah** i think so.
(Biber et al. 1999: 61)

While in the written news report the number of lexical words (in capital letters) was 63%, in conversation it came down to 41%. The results are representative of what takes place in both registers and emphasises the interactional function of conversation, as the informational aspect is less pronounced than in written discourse. According to Biber et al. "the fact that information is less tightly packed simplifies the tasks of both the speaker and the listener in online processing" (1999: 62). Similarly, for McCarten, the use of vague expressions such as *or something, and things like that, and stuff, and everything, or whatever, and that kind of thing,* and *and that sort of stuff* simply mean "I don't need to say this in detail because I think you know what I'm saying" (2007: 11).

Most of the features examined in the previous chapter also result from shared contexts. Ellipsis, dislocation and the use of inserts clearly demonstrate the simplification process of spoken discourse to the extent that it "is dependent on the immediate context" and yet "it is less dependent on the articulation of overt grammatical structure" (Biber et al. 1999: 1043). Conversation is full of resources that point to the simplification of the message. McCarten (2007) insists that it would be very difficult to communicate effectively if a speaker were to say everything that sprang to mind. Besides, removing vague language from speech would make the conversation sound artificial and perhaps blunt and pedantic.

In fact, further analysis has shown that descriptive words such as adjectives are infrequent, as is the use of genitives and possessives. Instead, the use of possessive pronouns *mine*, *his*, *her* seems to be preferred by speakers. Verbs, however, have a higher frequency than in any other register, perhaps because they help speakers speak about actions and attitudes. In other words, they compensate the lack of elaboration and specification found in noun clauses. This tendency to inexplicitness also applies to aspects such as quantity and quality. In conversation, the use of expressions such as *kind of, sort of, like* is a clear example. Biber et al. stress that this lack of elaboration is not a sign of the *slovenliness* of conversation but one of its phatic features: "Being inexact about values and opinions, like being unspecific in reference, is a strategy which relies on an implied sharing of knowledge and experience" (1999: 1045), thus enabling both the speaker and the listener to have a more fluent and dynamic conversation.

Another aspect to consider is that vagueness allows speakers to maintain a *polite and non-threatening interaction.* The use of polite or inadequate words in a conversational context can lead to a communication breakdown, as precise language can sound formal and distant. The use of imprecise words and expressions has also been related to power relations. For Carter "vague language is non-authoritarian and puts speakers on an immediately casual and equal footing with their interlocutors" (1998: 45). He also underlines the importance of teaching vagueness in L2 acquisition. In another study, Carter and McCarthy highlight this viewpoint:

> Vague language softens expressions so that they do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative or assertive. It is also a strong indication of an assumed shared knowledge and can mark in-group membership: the referents of vague language can be assumed to be known by the listener (2006: 202).

Mumford (2009) stresses the need to make L2 learners aware of this conversational tool, thus making it an essential part of the proficiency skills that should form part of the SLA process. He stresses that using vague language in no way reflects an excessive grade of informality, but a process whereby speakers are participants of specific *shared knowledge* and *group membership*. Cullen and Kuo state that vagueness makes a speaker less assertive, “giving the listener room to fill the gaps and form a personal interpretation of the speaker's meaning” (2007: 369). Consequently, vagueness results from the pressures of ongoing interaction. L2 speakers, perhaps “either due to lack of contact with the target language or lack of explicit teaching”, are often “left alone to formulate their own expressions, drawing on their own resources” (2007: 382).

Example 87

A: She doesn’t like coffee.
B: Well, she can have an orange juice or **something**.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 202)

Here, the speaker has a wide range of choices, such as *she can have an orange juice or perhaps she may enjoy another beverage*. To say the least, this would be too formal and pedantic and the speaker would run the risk of being misunderstood. Expressions such as *and things*, *and stuff, and that* are very flexible and can form part of clauses in most contexts.

Example 88

I really don’t know about their environment management systems **and stuff**.

They’ve got a form. They give you a form. You have to fill it in **and stuff**, cos if you don’t you won’t get an interview.

It’s more like a **sort of** gallery. Just a **sort of** arty. Well no it’s **sort of** arty things.

(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 203)

6.1.1. Approximations

Carter and McCarthy (2006) define approximations as expressions that enable speakers to give approximate quantities and numbers, and thus avoid being too exact and blunt. Adverbs and prepositions are frequently used with the meaning of *approximately,* which is more common in writing and formal contexts.

Example 89
I'll see you **around** six.
I had a goldfish for **about** three years.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 203)

Number + odd often appears in conversations when expressing a slightly higher number the actual figure.

Example 90
We've got <u>sixty</u>-**odd** people coming later today.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 204)

Number + head noun + or so/thereabouts/something is a similar structure.

Example 91
It weighed about <u>twenty kilos</u> **or something**.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 203)

The use of the conjunction *or* between numbers and the suffix *–ish* tend to be used with the similar implications.

Example 92
It'll cost <u>five</u> **or** <u>six</u> pounds but it'll save you a long walk into the town.
I think he's <u>fifty</u>-**ish** but he looks a lot younger actually.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 203)

Speakers can also choose to be vague when referring to numbers or quantities by using exaggerations. The *Cambridge Grammar of English* includes expressions such as *thousands, heaps, lots, tons, zillions, ages, crowds, oceans, masses* and *dozens.*

Example 93
I've told him ***hundreds*** *of times to put the alarm clock on but he just doesn't listen.*
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 205)

More or less is frequently used to refer to the completion of an action or an event.

Example 94
I think she's **more or less** finished with it.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 205)

6.2. Slang language

"Slang has, whether appreciated or not, always been a part of our everyday language. Even before the birth of Christ, ancient Greek writers wrote about slang" (Pedersen 2009: 4). Long before that, Partridge had argued that "slang is easy enough to use but very hard to write about" (1933: 1). In fact, in the first half of the twentieth century, slang was acknowledged as "a peculiar kind of vagabond language, always hanging on the outskirts of legitimate speech but continually straying or forcing its way into the most respectable company" (Partridge 1933: 1). In 1933, *The Oxford Dictionary* considered the entry *slang* as "below the level of standard education speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense". For Fowler, slang was a pastime for *the young and lively* consisting of inventing new words, mutilating or misapplying the old ones "for the pleasure of being in the fashion" (1926: 278). Slang was associated with a very specific social group and had very clear negative connotations.

In the same vein, Kenyon made two clear differences when writing about language: *cultural levels* and *functional varieties.* He placed slang among the lowest cultural levels, among "illiterate speech, narrowly local dialect, ungrammatical speech and writing, excessive and unskilful slang, slovenly and careless vocabulary and construction, exceptional pronunciation" (1948: 26), whereas, in his view, colloquial language was found among the functional varieties as "existing in different degrees of familiarity or formality" (1948: 27). Kenyon saw a clear dichotomy in the definition of the terms slang and colloquial. While colloquial was associated with grades of formality, slang was regarded as unconventional and uneducated.

Later in the century, linguists questioned whether slang should be considered a *violation of good taste*. Pooley sustained that some expressions, such as *hit the hay, cool, chisel, dig* and *antsy*, were readily accepted in everyday informal speech. In his view, the English language is constantly changing and adopting new words and that the "processes that create new words in a language also create slang words" (1972:

1016). He insisted that the difference between legitimate language and slang is simply one of social attitude as, linguistically, "there is no distinction that will hold" (1972: 1017). In the paper he presented at the National Council of Teachers of English in 1971, "Free Speech: How free?", Pooley defended the linguistic creativity of speakers without preconceived judgements. He argued that if the goal of a language was communication, then words were neither right nor wrong: they should be considered within *the communication of which it forms a part*.

Consequently, if slang is considered part of the communication role of informal speech, the next step is obvious: slang is yet another aspect of conversational informal speech that should be considered in L2 acquisition. If non-native speakers of English are to achieve proficiency, then awareness of this creative and changing language should be a piece of the language puzzle offered in language syllabi. Slang, if used adequately, can enable learners to become *belongers,* as they successfully participate in a shared context by using the appropriate language in the appropriate situation.

More recently, Mattiello has pointed out that slang in itself offers an effectiveness that is not always offered by standard language. The term *bimbo* meaning *a young, attractive, empty-headed girl* offers information about sex, age, personal appearance and intellectual power. It also offers information about the speaker. In standard English, the term has no equivalent and would need to be paraphrased. Another characteristic of slang is that it enriches the language with onomatopoeic terms such as *blub* (to sob) or *boak* (to vomit), while adding new meaning to existing words such as *bad* (meaning 'good') or *poison* (referring to alcohol). The author also explains that slang is *necessary* in certain contexts "requiring secrecy or establishing intimacy, arising jocularity or causing offensiveness, entailing sympathy or, in general, mitigating the seriousness of the dominant tone" (2005: 26).

At this point, slang has little in common with the abstract standard model that, for Mattiello, L2 learners are taught. Nonetheless, learners will almost inevitably encounter the less *neutral* and standard uses of English. In informal conversations, formal neutral language would be "situationally inappropriate and unconventional language is instead privileged" (2005: 36). Mattiello stresses that most speakers use some kind of slang language and, consequently, English language learners should be made aware of this social variety in order to have an adequate understanding of real contextualised conversations. Learners are also encouraged to acquire an active knowledge of slang terms "to socialize and create intimacy with their peers" (2005: 36) as well as to enrich their own speech by using vivid, colourful and interesting terms.

As language aims to communicate efficiently and fluently, Mattiello believes that this is achieved not only by acquiring certain vocabulary and grammatical structures, but also by using "the cultural and social world of its speakers" (2005: 36). Pederson shares a similar viewpoint. He argues that speakers use slang "as a way of defining who they are and what group they belong to" (2009: 5). This may be connected to the changing character of slang. If it is a feature of language that allows specific social groups to identify themselves, its mutating nature makes sense: "Slang has a very definite expiry date and the slang of one generation is very often replaced with new slang by the following generation" (Pederson 2009: 6). As a consequence, it is easy to associate certain terms with specific periods of time. For instance *good* was *groovy* in the 1960s, while in the 1990s it became *tight* or *sweet*. More recently, *good* became *wicked*, *ill*, *sick, cool* and *awesome*.

Undoubtedly, slang changes. It could almost be said that it needs to change in order to identify the social and age group it belongs to. But it can no longer be considered the language used exclusively by the marginalised classes or the rebellious, younger generations. Studies have found that slang is incorporated into the speech of all speakers. It is indeed accepted as part of their informal conversational interaction. In a study carried out among college-educated adults on the use of *sick, wicked, ill, bad* and *dope* as slang, Parkes and Wilner reached some surprising conclusions. These words, although used mainly by the younger speakers, are not exclusive to them. These authors defend the idea that slang begins as subversive language: "using *sick, ill, wicked, bad* and *dope* to mean "good," in slang, which is effectively the opposite of their standard definitions was, at one time, linguistically subversive" (2009: 14), but, they continue, "indeed they are becoming the new standard" (2009: 16).

To sum up, it can be argued that time has modified the negative connotations traditionally associated with slang. *The Oxford Dictionary Online* now considers it "a type of language that consists of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people". A very similar definition is offered in *The Cambridge Dictionary Online,* where it is described as "very informal language that is usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular groups of people". In other words, *slang* is now dissociated from the more marginalised or uneducated sectors and is linked to spoken discourse and to different social groups.

6.3. Taboo words

Cursing, taboo words, dirty words, offensive language and swearing are some of the terms used in connection with powerful offensive words or expressions: “taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual’s behaviour where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury” (Allan and Burridge 2006: 1). These words and expressions are part of the language, a linguistic tool available to speakers, and yet, caution is highly recommended here. Although these words do not always sound as aggressive as in *I didn’t know where the fuck I was going,* they always allow the speaker to reflect or express strong personal emotions, which are then passed on to the listener.

According to Wachal (2002), certain taboo words are becoming more widely used and conventional. He quotes Richard Dooling (1996), from *The New York Times,* to show that offensive language is becoming more *accepted*: “vulgar sexual terms have become acceptable in the last two decades while all manner of racial or ethnic epithets have become unspeakable” (published September 6th). Similarly, Allan and Burridge claim that socially, and even legally, expletives are losing their strength: “since the 1980s, obscene language charges from around Australia have been dismissed, with courts ruling that words such as *fuck*, *shit* and *cunt* are no longer ‘offensive within the meaning of the Act’” (2006: 107).

However, Dewaele cautions learners against the use of these expressions. He compares swearwords to nitroglycerine in order to illustrate that “indeed, inappropriate use of swearwords or taboo words might have devastating social consequences” (2004: 204). Nonetheless, he also draws attention to the fact that, although infrequent in textbooks, these words often find their way into learners’ vocabulary. This can turn into a double-edged communication tool, as taboo lexical items need to be used with caution: “knowledge of swearwords and expressions in an L2 allows one to show off at cocktail parties. Yet it can also be a source of potential embarrassment when used inappropriately with NSs” (2004: 205).

In section 5.1.2.9, I argue that L2 speakers need to become familiar with these words so as to increase “one’s experience with a culture and its language conventions” (Jay and Janschewitz 2008: 267). Examples of the strength taboo words can have are constantly present, for example, in most American programmes, where these items are systematically beeped out or spelt with asterisks, as in *f*ck*. In Britain, a BBC news item published on 5th March, 2012 highlighted the fact that an expletive had not been beeped out from the popular ITV1 show *X-Factor*. The consequence was a number of headlines in most newspapers and a formal apology "broadcasted approximately 44 minutes after the offensive language occurred" (BBC News). The f@*! word was not only criticised but the teenage *wannabe* responsible "was later axed from the show because of his behaviour" (whatsonTV.co.uk). It is difficult to imagine this turmoil in Spain, though, where taboo words are routinely used on prime time television.

Another example of the social impact taboo words may still have is the USA film rating system. Movies where the f-word appears once may receive a PG-13[1] rating, but two or more utterances warrant an R[2]. In Great Britain, the British Board of Film Classification affirms that "many people are offended, some of them deeply, by bad language. This may include the use of expletives with a sexual, religious or racial association, offensive language about minority groups and commonly understood rude gestures" (bbfc.co.uk). Thus, offensive language conditions the rating. This is further stressed with content descriptors as shown in figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Definition of Bad Language in Films

Bad Language
Contains bad language. (Possibly includes swearing, sexual expletives or blasphemy. Degree of content will be factored into Age Category.)

Undoubtedly, offensive language is a very powerful tool that must be used with restraint but, in my view, avoiding instructions on the contexts and the strength of swearwords should not be an option in ESL curricula. Although the absence of bad language does not impede communication, some authors claim that it can make *non-native* speech sound less fluent or even inappropriate in certain social contexts, especially in those where taboo expressions can contribute to forming "in-group membership and establish[ing] boundaries and social norms for language use" (Dewaele 2004: 205). In other words, if used in the right contexts, they can transform the NNS into a *belonger,* as Stenstrom's findings (1994)

1 Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.
2 Restricted. Children under 17 require accompanying parent or adult guardian.

demonstrate: teenagers swear more than adults, possibly as a way of establishing group identity.

Additionally, learners need to be able to recognize the inherent message being conveyed in emotionally charged contexts, i.e. they need to interpret what Leech terms *affective meaning*. This concerns how "language reflects the personal feelings of the speaker, including his attitude to the listener, or his attitude to something he is talking about" (Leech 1981: 15). For this reason, Dewaele speaks in favour of making L2 users of English aware of offensive language: "learning should ideally rely on a rich source of diverse types of written and visual authentic material allowing learners to familiarize themselves with a wide range of registers in the target language, including those rich in swear words" (2004: 220). Ideally, this should also be complemented with exchanges with NS, who are likely to use taboo language at some point. In any case, he warns of the danger of using offensive language, which should be limited to very specific situations.

In the same vein, Carter and McCarthy concur that "learners of English should exercise great care concerning such usages" (2006: 225). In their view, taboo expressions are accepted in very specific contexts, such as "close, intimate relationships with the person or group" (2006: 225). They add that, otherwise, they can form part of a "threatening and hostile relationship" (2006: 225). Jay and Janschewitz agree with this: NS learn "with whom it is appropriate to swear, or where swearing would be offensive" and that "swearing is not necessarily impolite, inasmuch as offensive language is often used within the boundaries of what is considered situationally appropriate in discourse" (2008: 268). They stress that most swearing takes place in public and that it is neither rude nor confrontational, making swearing a part of conversation that is tied to "contextual variables such as speaker-listener relationship, social and physical setting, and the topic of discussion" (2008: 285). This implies that NNS should be taught to recognize these contexts. To sum up, Dewaele (2004), Carter and McCarthy (2006) and Jay and Janschewitz (2008) believe that learners should come in contact with taboo language. They do not encourage learners to use it, but students should "appreciate the emotional meaning of taboo English words" (Jay and Janschewitz 2008: 285).

Let us also remember that taboo words can be used as expletives or may have a syntactic function, so it might useful at this point to go back to some of the points made in section 5.1.2.9., where I discussed the use of expletives as *inserts*, i.e. stand-alone items which remain outside the clausal unit. As we have seen, offensive lexical items can also have syntactic functions at the clausal level. According to Biber et al., some taboo expressions function as inserts when they are *prosodically* joined to a larger syntactic structure. Similarly, Carter and McCarthy associate swearing and interjections, i.e. expressions that "do not easily fit into major word classes" (2006: 224) but can, nonetheless, "involve single words or short phrases or clauses that are used to express a variety of strong feelings" (2006: 226).

Example 95
This is, **God**, a bloody afternoon wasted.
I hope it's your hormones, **you stupid cow**.
Lucky bastard! How did you manage to get the day off?
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 226)

According to Norrick (2009), interjections are primarily pragmatic markers, while Romero Trillo considers them to be "elements that fill the discoursal and cognitive slots that spoken language needs in order to weave the net of interaction" (2008). Norrick insists that interjections are "fully integrated into the system of everyday spoken language" (2009: 888). They reflect strong "surprise and either positive or negative emotional involvement" (2009: 867) and it is precisely those "with their roots in religion, sex and scatology" (2009: 868) that express the strongest emotional involvement.

Example 96
A: I was just going oh wow congratulations and=
B: **SHIT** that's great.
(Norrick 2009: 878)

Example 97
Matt: you know what makes a really good dip? you melt like a block of this and a can of chilli and put it in a bowl and serve chips a with it.
David: [oh yeah, people go crazy over that].
Matt: [really g . . . peop- people think ((unclear))]
David: **fuck** it's Velveeta and chili ((laugh)).
(Norrick 2009: 878)

In examples 96 and 97, the taboo words express positive emotion, as these items are coupled with positive statements. The examples also illustrate that swearing is not necessarily an impolite way of expressing yourself, but a way of showing intimacy and empathy. In both, these lexical items function as inserts.

Norrick associates the emotional force of these expressions with their variability. In his view, they constitute a word class that "must always remain open to fresh entries and new combinations" (2009: 888). He provides the following example, with moderated expletives, to illustrate his point:

Example 98
Armrel: is this Debbie's?
Debbie: yeah, that's fine, you've got to hear Vicki's too.
Vicky: okay.
Armrel: oh my **goodness**, you're busy, **jiminy christmas**.
(Norrick 2009: 888)

Indeed, English is full of euphemisms. For Allan (2007), euphemisms contribute to generate new vocabulary, but it is also reasonable to think that the great number of euphemisms in this field is a consequence of the softening effect they have as opposed to offensive language. He also argues that taboo language involves strong emotional involvement:

> to avoid blasphemy, the word God is avoided in euphemistic expletives such as the archaic 'Od's life! Zounds! by gad! 'Sbodlikins! Odrabbet it! and the more contemporary Gosh! Golly! Cor! Gordon 'ighlanders! For goodness sake! Good gracious! These examples demonstrate the generation of new vocabulary by various kinds of remodeling, including clippings and substitutions of phonetically similar words. Jesus is end-clipped to Jeeze! and Gee! (which is also the initial of God); Gee whiz! is a remodeling of either jeeze or jesus. More adventurous remodellings are By jingo! Jiminy cricket! Christmas! Crust! Crumbs! Crikey! (Allan 2007: 1055).

Whether we call them offensive language, expletives or otherwise, and whether we stress their function as interjections or not, taboo words are part of "casual conversation where they often occur one after the other and together reinforce the '*you-and-me'* dimension of the meaning" (Halliday 1994: 134). They are also "expressive of politeness, emotion and attitude" (Biber et al. 1999: 1047). Thus, these elements are part of the attitudinal character of conversation and link directly to its interactive nature, as it is "co-constructed by two or more interlocutors, dynamically adapting their expressions to the ongoing exchange" (Biber et al. 1999: 1044).

In this sense, offensive language should no longer be *taboo* in the ESL curricula. If we consider Allen and Weber's definition of taboo as "a proscription of behaviour for a specifiable community of people, for a specified context, at a given place and time" (2006: 27), L2 learners need to recognize the different functions of this type of lexis in everyday use if only to be able to disassociate it from their own sociolinguistic background (see section 5.1.2.9.).

In this section taboo expressions are considered a feature of conversational discourse that L2 speakers should treat very carefully. Becoming familiar with them will enable students to understand this type of lexis charged with emotion and stance. In fact, the vast majority of L2 learners are often familiar with the most frequent swearwords, but are unable to discern the contexts in which they can be acceptable. As Jay and Janschewitz point out, "the emotional impact of swearing depends on one's experience with a culture and its language conventions" (2008: 267). This reinforces the need to help NNS understand the meaning and strength of such language.

6.3.1. Main topics: Religion, health, sex and bodily excretions

Religion, health, sex and bodily excretions are the four main topics offensive language derives from. The first set of terms is formed by words associated with the "devil, hell, God, Jesus Christ, saints, heaven, salvation and damnation" (Napoli and Hoeksema 2009: 614). Life and death, as well as diseases, are topics that may be linked to taboo language in many languages, but are less frequent in English. However, "sex, reproductive organs, bodily functions, and sexual acts provide strong linguistic taboos, even today" (Napoli and Hoeksema 2009: 616).

6.3.2. Linguistic use of taboo words

6.3.2.1. Swearing

Most speakers associate offensive language with swearing, which, as we have seen, comes in the form of exclamations. Let us remember that for Biber et al., expletives are divided into two: taboo expletives, which "make reference to one of the taboo domains of religion, sex, or bodily excretion" (1999: 1094), and moderated (or euphemistic) expletives, "which camouflage their taboo origin by various phonetic modifications (e.g. *gosh* for God) or by substitution of different but related words (e.g. *goodness* for God)" (1999: 1094).

Table 10: Taboo and euphemistic expressions

Taboo expression	Euphemism
Fuck!	fudge
Shit!	shoot
My God!	My word!/ By Golly! Holy Moses! Holy cow!
Damn!	darn

(adapted from Biber et al. 1999: 1094)

The list of euphemisms is far from closed, as euphemisms reflect the great flexibility of language to change and adapt (Quirk et al. 1985: 1536; Biber et al. 1999: 1103; Allan and Burridge 2006: 88; Allan 2007: 1055). Creativity is a feature of conversational language and, when using expletives, speakers can become extraordinarily innovative. The humorous dialogue in example 99 illustrates how creative name-calling has the sociolinguistic function of *membershipping* the interactants.

Example 99

FIRST YOUTH: Hullo congenital idiot!
SECOND YOUTH: Hullo, you priceless old ass!
DAMSEL: I'd no idea you two knew each other so well!

(from *Punch* cartoon, in Allan and Burridge 2006: 88)

6.3.2.2. Name calling

Many of the terms associated with religion, sex and bodily fluids are frequently used in name-calling, as shown in example 99. This does not always imply a negative relationship between the participants, as in some cases they can actually express humour, sympathy and so on. Taboo words can be used in a playful and affectionate manner. According to Carter and McCarter, "only the immediate context of the use of the expression will indicate which meaning is intended" (2006: 226). Napoli and Hoeksema (2009) offer the example of a young speaker, who, in order to congratulate a friend on the good results of an exam for which they had not studied much, uses the term *you motherfucker!* This and other expressions such as *the old bugger/bastard/fuck* are samples of friendly jargon that can express empathy.

6.3.2.3. Cursing

Cursing or maledictions are closely related to swearing. They usually take the form of imperatives. The preferred topics here are disease and death in general. The ingenuity of speakers is easy to appreciate in examples like:

Example 100
Go to hell! / Drop dead!
Go fuck yourself! / Get fucked! / Shove it up your ass!
Suck a hairy rat's ass! / Suck a hairy moose cock!
Eat shit, asshole! / Eat shit and die!
(Napoli and Hoeksema 2009: 622)

6.3.2.4. Intensifiers

Pinker (2007) stresses the strength of taboo language when he mentions the anecdote in which Bono, the lead singer of U2, exclaimed: "*This is really, really, fucking brilliant*", as he was accepting a prize on behalf of the group. This gave way to a controversy and the network was threatened with sanctions for not *bleeping out* the word. The reason provided by the medium was very simple: *fucking* had been used as an intensifier. Indeed, Carter and McCarthy (2006) have found that taboo words are often used as intensifying adverbs and adjectives. When they function as adverbs, they tend to appear with the post-modifier *well*.

Example 101
Where's the **bloody** key?
That's **fucking** marvelous, that is, isn't it? It's **fucking-well** snowing again.
(Carter and McCarthy 2006: 227)

6.4. Non-Standardness in ESL

> I suggest that if English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard, then the expansion of English in this era of rapid globalization may possibly be for the better rather than for the worse (Norton 1997: 426).

In this open-minded approach, Norton sees language as a means of communication intimately linked to "the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety" (1997: 410). This desire is fulfilled when speakers share sociolinguistic codes. These codes often involve stance-charged language, i.e. vague expressions, slanguage and expletives or taboo words are strategies used by speakers to achieve sociolinguistic *identity* and *membershipping*. Considering language as a means of communication where the speakers' shared knowledge triggers off specific choices in order to achieve sociolinguistic membershipping (Stubbs 1983: 7; Mercury 1995: 29; Halliday 2002: 201; Carter and McCarthy 2006: 208; Fein 2011: 97) implies that *non-standardness* cannot be ruled out from the ESL curricula.

Mercury, for instance, believes that learners' needs go beyond the standard content of traditional ESL curricula and supports the introduction of *bad language.* The aim is not to teach L2 students how to swear, but to make them familiar with taboo lexis and, more importantly, to allow them to understand "why native speakers choose to use it, and what it signifies sociolinguistically" (1995: 29). Mercury believes that "why a speaker would choose to use obscenities and when she or he would choose not to" (1995: 29) is part of everyday language use and can give learners an adequate view of how and when taboo words may be used, a vision that may otherwise be distorted "due to the influence of movies, hit songs, and popular books where obscene language seems to flow unchecked" (1995: 35).

Similarly, Jatkowski and Piippo (2011) state that learners should be made aware of the *other* language, as it is present in the workplace, in academic environments, in movies and, of course, in the web. On the other hand, Fein defends the need to incorporate non-standard slanguage into the ESL curriculum, although, he also warns of the pitfalls this highly charged vocabulary may have. For this reason, he argues, "many of us are reluctant to include slang as a regular feature of our language teaching" (2011: 97). He is aware of the difficulties that may arise when we introduce non-standardness, but he also adds that students see a need to communicate "because we are so strongly encouraged to study abroad, it would be helpful to not sound like a textbook, and also to be able to understand what people are saying" (2011: 99). Learners want to become a part of their social group, "they want to be able to converse naturally with native speakers, especially those their own age. They don't want to appear uptight or dorky" (2011: 101).

To summarise this chapter, we can say that learners want to communicate effectively and fluently. In order to achieve it, they need to become knowledgeable with the lexis of colloquial English as well as with the vocabulary used in more formal situations. In this sense, Cheng believes that vague language can be used "to achieve solidarity, to cover up linguistic and knowledge deficiencies, to show that they know the rules of information quantity in different speech situations and also to protect one's face and that of others" (2007: 162). However, in her study of ESL textbooks, she concludes that vague language is present in only three of these, while in the rest of the textbooks she found that the *mantra* of "be simple, clear and precise – only serves to perpetuate the negative image of VL use" (2007: 163). She believes that learners need to become aware of the language that is not considered teachable in most textbooks because it "indicates the ways in which its use is context-specific" (2007: 180).

The CA puts emphasis on facilitating learners all the necessary tools to communicate effectively and efficiently. Corpus-based studies have shown that, in conversation, standard grammar and vocabulary are simply not enough. Conversation is neither "degenerate [n]or inchoate" (Biber et al. 1999: 1039): it is socially-dependent as it takes place in a shared context. Being vague or imprecise and using colloquial language contributes to making communication easier as these resources "encourage students to build up the confidence to be able to communicate" (Cheng 2007: 179). On the other hand, becoming aware of the different sociolinguistic uses of taboo or swearing can also help L2 speakers, as they discriminate the implied sociolinguistic functions that these expressions may have in various contexts, even if they are recommended to refrain from using it.

Undoubtedly, further research is necessary into the teaching of non-standard vocabulary to ESL learners, but textbook authors need to provide students with essential information as regards the communicative characteristics of conversational English. Although it has already been established that "there are significant discrepancies between researchers' analyses of naturally occurring conversations and the language of ESL textbooks" (Jiang 2006: 36), the aim of the present study is to analyse how or if corpus-informed research into conversational interaction has influenced ESL textbooks.

In the final section of this book, I will present the study of twenty British mainstream textbooks in order to ascertain whether and how peripheral elements, informal grammatical features and lexical elements have been incorporated into the curricula in the period 1990 to 2010.

If a foreign language learner says five sheeps or he goed, he can be corrected by practically every native speaker. If, on the other hand, he omits a well, the likely reaction will be that he is dogmatic, impolite, boring, awkward to talk to etc, but a native speaker cannot pinpoint an 'error'

—SVARTVIK

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONVERSATIONAL FEATURES IN ESL TEXTBOOKS: A STUDY OF TWENTY MAINSTREAM BRITISH PUBLICATIONS

7.1. Introduction

Within the Communicative Approach, the speaking skill has been addressed with different degrees of success. Richards describes conversation classes as "the opportunity for untrained native speakers to get students to talk for the duration of a class period, using whatever resources and techniques the teacher can think of" (1990: 67). In other words, conversation is considered a time-filler. It is left to the teacher's intuition and to the criteria of L2 textbook designers. This may be a die-hard attitude, as proficiency in informal conversation has rarely been considered a priority for L2 speakers, who are taught English grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and rhythm, but are rarely taught *how* to converse. Turn-taking, hesitation, interrupting, and other features of everyday communication have simply been taken for granted.

In the preceding sections, we have seen that linguists agree that the description of spoken language is relatively new and that research should continue. In chapter 4, we quoted Biber et al., who underline the need to give learners the ability to choose because "we are faced with a myriad of choices: not only choices in what we say but in how we say it" (1999: 4). For Carter and McCarthy, this myriad of choices becomes a grammar of choice "allowing speakers considerable choice in the expression of interpersonal meaning" (2006: 11). These linguists insist on the need to offer L2 speakers a contextualised grammar of spoken language that can allow them to express and understand meanings not only in relation to *what* is said, but to *whom* it is being said. Corpus-based grammars perceive the acquisition of spoken language as a compendium of contextualised lexico-syntactic features and communication strategies.

Based on techniques such as concordancing, word frequency counts and cluster analysis (see section 4.3.4.), linguists and ESL materials writers can define what language and communication tools learners are more likely to encounter in real communication and, thus, determine the most adequate contents for the curricula. These, in turn, will present natural spoken English as part of what Savignon has called *complexity and interrelatedness of skills.* The data should condition the materials offered in comprehensive textbooks of all levels so that L2 formal training allows learners to become aware of the differences in the two modes, i.e. written and spoken.

Timmis (2002, 2005) upholds that further changes related to how learners approach a second language are necessary. He maintains that a more analytical viewpoint should be encouraged so that students can be part of their learning process. He also believes that learners are more motivated when they are given the possibility to study real NS discourse and are asked to "reflect on why speakers use certain forms, what the effect of them is, and whether or not it would be appropriate for the learners themselves to produce such forms" (2005: 121). In other words, they are not told *what* to say in specific situations, but are offered a choice of socially contextualised structures.

In this section, we consider these changes as well as the adaptation process that ESL materials might be undergoing in order to bring L2 speakers closer to more genuine everyday language. My aim is to explore the changes in the materials designed to teach conversational strategies. Consequently, it studies the extent to which corpus-based research has influenced newer materials. Although a number of authors have delved into how spoken discourse is dealt with in textbooks (Biber et al. 2002; Aski 2003; Biber, Conrad and Cortes 2003; Rogerson 2006; Lam 2009; Deschambault 2011), these have focused on how specific elements of spoken interaction are addressed. This chapter aims to describe a more general picture of how conversational features have been introduced in ESL materials over the last two decades.

At this point, it is necessary to emphasise that the overall effectiveness of these materials is not questioned as such. It is also acknowledged that the design of ESL textbooks is a challenging issue, as "very few studies attempt to quantify the learning resulting from consulting concordances as opposed to more traditional methods" (Chambers et al. 2011: 88). This could be the aim of future research. However, the study finds resonance with linguists who consider the close connection between spoken discourse and language education, and encourage the use of corpus-informed data to enrich our understanding of classroom teaching materials (McCarthy 1991, Hatch 1992, McCarthy and Carter 1994). It also endorses the idea that learners should be exposed to real interaction, without barriers or adaptations. In this final chapter, it is fair to admit, some subjective evaluative comments will be made. These are based on my own professional experience and aim to support and personalise the theoretical background provided as well as the concepts previously mentioned.

To sum up, the need to communicate in everyday situations without sounding *bookish* makes it necessary for ESL materials designers to bridge the gap between corpus-informed data and ESL textbooks in order to enable NNS to have access to real language in informal interaction. The success of these materials will undoubtedly be determined in long-term studies. Nonetheless, this monograph aims to ascertain to what degree the two perspectives, the theoretical and the practical, are being fused into ESL materials.

7.2. Overview of the study

As indicated, the features of speech studied in the preceding sections are essential tools used by NS to make communication more effectively by "sharing devices and intimacy signals in our everyday talk" (Quirk 1985: 179). The study of British textbooks aims to give an overall perspective of the extent to which such communicative *devices* are present in these essential ESL teaching tools, as well as to assess how the latter have incorporated recent findings in corpus-based research.

Resources such as the student's workbook, DVDs, CDs, online exercises, whiteboard interactive methodologies, and so on are readily available nowadays. However, not all teachers or students have the necessary infrastructure or technical knowledge to use new technologies. Consequently, the textbook continues to be the principal tool for both learners and teachers. Thus, textbooks should lay solid foundations for the acquisition of conversational skills in ESL.

Historically, the written language has had a relevant and deterministic role in the content and design of textbooks and grammars. As we have seen, this role changed over the last two decades (Timmis 2005; Richards 2008; Wong and Waring 2010). The increasing importance of corpus-based linguistics, the pioneering publication of the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* by Biber et al. (1999), as well as the ground-breaking *Cambridge English of Grammar* (2006) by Carter and McCarthy have set the foundations for new ESL material that will enable speakers to communicate more naturally and effectively. As early as 1993, Glisan and

Drescher perceived the need for textbooks not only to have a communicative approach to language acquisition, but also to reflect "*real* language as the basis for our teaching" in order to achieve "performance-based outcomes" (1993: 32). Some years later, Basturkmen suggested that advanced learners "who aim to become more sophisticated language users" (2001: 12) should be able to work with authentic material and be made aware of the techniques used in conversation. Nonetheless, she added that "awareness on the part of learners cannot be equated with immediate production of target items" (2001: 12).

Romero Trillo stresses that non-native learners acquire language through *formal* channels, i.e. grammatical and semantic rules, while native speakers learn the pragmatic use of language. Thus, native speakers pick up "the social use of language in different contexts and registers" (Romero Trillo 2002: 770), while L2 speakers "fail to acquire the appropriate markers that scaffold adults' speech" (Romero Trillo 2002: 783). Although Romero Trillo does not analyse the influence textbooks have on the acquisition of these pragmatic elements, he does highlight the fact that they are "difficult to implement in educational syllabuses" (2002: 770).

Writing about the pragmatic elements used by native speakers, Muller believes that these "are largely overlooked in language learning, with only a few studies exploring their (mis)use by learners of English" (2004: 1158). In her study, she observes that although German learners are exposed to discourse markers, there is a preference towards specific elements in their learning process, leading to overuse because "*well* sounds more English than *so"* (2004: 1179). She does not *blame* textbooks exclusively, as they are not "the only factor influencing the EFL speakers in the classroom. Of course their content has to be mediated by a teacher" (2004: 1178), but most ESL teachers are NNS and, therefore, rely on the ESL materials to enable learners to come in contact with native-like discourse. For this reason, "the textbook contents are at the centre of the teaching" (Muller 2004: 1178).

Similarly, Gilmore is critical of the material present in books published between 1981 and 1997. He argues that features of conversation such as false starts, low lexical density, pauses, hesitation and back-channelling are deliberately deleted from textbook conversation dialogues. He maintains that this does not seem to have a logical explanation, as "it is hard to see why they have not been included more often in textbooks. Perhaps, if they were, we would see more students incorporating them into their language repertoire" (2004: 370). In the study, he also appreciates a slight improvement in more recent publications, but concludes that "if learners' goal is to be able to be able to operate independently in the L2 outside the classroom, then at some point they have to be shown the true nature of conversation" (2004: 371). Rogerson stresses the idea that textbooks provide insufficient native-like discourse because learners

> … develop their listening and speaking skills based on this adapted speaking style. Then they arrive at the host country and are shocked and dismayed to find that native speakers don't actually speak in the way language is written or in the ways their teachers and listening materials represent the language (Rogerson 2006: 86).

His study underlines the importance of exercises in which learners are made aware of pragmatic conversational elements. However, teachers are given almost full responsibility for the elaboration of these materials as well as for encouraging learners to reproduce them *naturally*. This view makes teachers responsible for the task, as ESL textbooks are not effective learning or teaching tools. It is bewildering, to say the least, that in 1977 Sampson already claimed that "effective teachers, however, receive little help, in general, from the writers of ESL curricula" (1977: 247). Two decades later, Hughes and McCarthy made a similar claim: "teachers need materials that provide sufficient linguistic background and context for them to feel confident in what they are using" (1998: 284).

More recently, Cullen and Kuo conclude that there is "a missing link between spoken grammar and ELT material" (2007: 380). They believe that there has been some improvement: conversational features such as vagueness and inserts are, *at least*, present in books, though not always overtly. They, nonetheless, stress the fact that essential aspects of conversational discourse (ellipsis and noun phrase tags), as well as features of non-standard language, "considered grammatically incorrect by prescriptive guides to correct usage" (2007: 371) but accepted as informal conversational language by authors like Carter and McCarthy (2006), are completely overlooked.

Additionally, Cullen and Kuo claim that L2 speakers should come in contact with the "unplanned, interactive and interpersonal nature of conversation" (2007: 382). They also defend the learners' right "to interact with native speakers" and "to be taught for more than just recognition purposes" (2007: 382). They argue that users of the language do not only need to recognize the different conversational strategies used by native speakers, their use is also essential and "learners should not be left alone to formulate their own expressions, drawing on their own resources” (2007: 383), which can have unwanted consequences in the communication act.

Rühlemann claims that “for conversational grammar to be effectively taught in EFL classrooms a rethinking of the role of SE is necessary” (2008: 673). He believes that “those teachers willing to familiarize learners with real conversation face the problem of how to illustrate this register” (2008: 683), as dysfunctional features tend to be removed from interactions in ESL materials and, therefore, cannot serve as reliable models for the teaching of conversation. He states that the integration of conversational grammar in ESL material is still in its infancy. However, he stresses that, while written discourse is no longer the model for the elaboration of the spoken material in textbooks, standard English should not be its underlying model either. This, in his view, should be replaced by conversational grammar. Rühlemann defends “the need to replace the notion of correctness by the notion of appropriateness” (2008: 689). In the same vein, Lam does not underestimate the importance of pragmatic elements in conversational discourse when referring to them as *discourse lubricants,* as they ensure that interactions take place effectively. In fact, he warns us that “failing to master the use of discourse particles may seriously impair the communicative competence of learners” (2009: 261).

Additionally, Wong and Waring believe that ESL/EFL textbook writers are gradually increasing the use of “authentic spoken data for the design of language instructional materials … [but] there is always room for improvement in terms of instructional materials and teaching techniques” (2010: 3). They propose different activities in which teachers can familiarise learners with the structure of conversation. For them, textbooks do not offer the input L2 speakers need. Thus, it becomes the teacher’s responsibility to implement different techniques to compensate this gap between textbook discourse and ‘real’ conversation interaction.

For their part, Chambers et al. point out that, although advances have been made, “we are a long way from a situation where corpus data are commonly consulted by language teachers and learners” (2011: 86). They highlight the idea that research into corpus-based methodology has received “positive reactions from learners and student teachers, such as access to real and up-to-date language use, and uncovering functions and structures not found in grammar books” (2011: 87). However, “while there have been notable successes in the use of corpus data for dictionaries, course books and grammars, corpus consultation literacy is not yet seen as an essential skill for language teachers, let alone learners” (2011: 100).

The publications mentioned so far clearly link corpus-based data and conversational discourse in textbooks, depicting a challenging picture, as material designers have yet to determine efficient ways of incorporating data from corpora into the classroom. In this sense, the CA cannot be considered a finished method, but one that is under construction and undergoing continuous modifications to accommodate the changes brought about by corpus-based findings. These modifications can lead ultimately to more efficient learning and teaching strategies.

7.3. Structure of the study

The study presented in this chapter consists of a comprehensive review of twenty mainstream British textbooks of B2/C1 levels for adult learners. Ten were published in the 1990s and the other ten in the first decade of the twenty-first century (see section 7.6. for a complete list). It seems logical to assume that the earliest textbooks in the study received little or no influence from the corpus-based approach. In fact, the older publications were chosen to have a perspective of how conversational discourse was reflected in textbooks prior to the publication of the LGSWE in 1999. The other ten textbooks were selected to ascertain whether there was an evolution in the way conversational discourse was incorporated in ESL curricula as well as to assess the effectiveness of the exercises.

The study focuses primarily on students' textbooks, as learners do not always use the supplementary material available with most books. Over the years, publishers have increased the material that complements a textbook. Most are now sold in packs including a workbook, student's CDs, CD Rom or Multi Rom packs. Learners can also access websites where they can download or stream exercises, and watch videos related to the contents of the book. Teachers are also pampered with whiteboard interactive books, which promise unlimited teaching possibilities but, even so, the textbook "plays an important role in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom where it provides the primary (perhaps only) form of linguistic input" (Vellenga 2004: 1).

ICT has indeed revolutionised teaching, making it more attractive and motivating for learners, but there are limits. Adult learners of all ages often reject the excessive use of ICT in the classroom. What is more, a lack of time, or even of interest in new technologies, is a factor that determines the limited use of complimentary resources. Consequently, the weight of language teaching/learning in the ESL classroom still lies in the student's textbook.

Although I strongly believe that the features of conversational English studied in this book should be a part of any ESL syllabus, the study focuses on the more advanced levels (B2 and C1). The two pioneering publications (i.e. Biber et al. 1999 and Carter and McCarthy 2006) as well as the *untidy* character of conversational discourse led me to expect such features in the more advanced levels. Based on my teaching experience, I assumed that textbooks for the lower levels (A1, A2 and B1) are less likely to approach conversational skills from a *natural* perspective, as some degree of adaptation is necessary to present and practise grammatical and semantic structures in more or less controlled exercises. Conversely, in the higher levels, learners can be more independent and creative in their use of language. Therefore, I expected a greater number of features of informal conversational English.

After determining that B2 and C1 textbooks should be the main focus of the study, the next step was to decide what common characteristics the textbooks should have (see section 7.6). I decided that I should concentrate on mainstream comprehensive British textbooks, because the Official Schools of Languages in the Principality of Asturias (and, most likely, in the whole of Spain) tend to use books designed in the UK. The students attending Official Schools are a very heterogeneous group of adult learners, from 16 to over 70 years of age, and coming from all walks of life. Additionally, these are the Schools I have been familiar since 1990, having taught in the two largest ones in the region: Oviedo, the capital, and Gijón, the largest city.

The next step was to elaborate a list of parameters based on the different characteristics of conversational discourse, as found in Biber et al. (1999) and Carter and McCarthy, (2006). In order to make the study more systematic, I categorised the features to be studied under three main headings: non-clausal elements, clausal elements and vocabulary, coinciding with the features covered in chapters 5 and 6.

Each textbook was searched page by page for reference material, exercises, and activities that overtly focused on the features of spoken grammar identified in section 7.5. Since the main interest of the research was to find out to what extent textbooks have incorporated features of informal conversational discourse, I did not consider those that were not specifically adapted for learners, i.e. transcripts for listening texts have not been included in the study unless specific reference is made to them.

The study of each textbook facilitated the elaboration of a table showing the number of pages dedicated to conversational discourse. Since textbooks are neatly divided into sections, which tend to coincide with their pages, I was able to keep a record of the sections focusing on everyday informal English, often equivalent to the corresponding number of pages. The total used to calculate the percentages (tables 17 and 19) refers to the units or lessons. In other words, content tables, tapescripts and grammatical explanations present in some publications as complimentary material, often in an appendix, were not considered. The tables aimed to check one of the hypotheses mentioned in the next section: whether there has been a significant increase of corpus-based data in the elaboration of ESL material.

7.4. Hypotheses of the study

The three hypotheses had an overall aim: to ascertain whether the artificial-sounding spoken discourse, based on written rules and the writer's intuition, has given way to more natural spontaneous interaction, based on corpora data. These were the precise hyptheses:

1. Features of conversational discourse will not have a significant presence in textbooks published in the 1990s. Their importance will become noteworthy in the books published in the 2000s due to the availability of corpus-based data and its application to ESL teaching material.
2. Textbooks published after 2000 will show a meaningful presence of conversational features. Exercises will encourage learners to become aware of the specific characteristics of conversational English and to reproduce them in natural speech.
3. As corpus findings have shown the relevance of spontaneous conversational English, they will have an impact upon the quantity of material aimed to improve conversational skills present in the textbooks while eliminating the dependence that spoken discourse on the lexico-grammatical features of a more formal variety of the language. The contextualised materials will focus on giving learners a better understanding of everyday conversation per se.

7.5. Features of conversational grammar used in the study of B2 and C1 British ESL textbooks. Three categories.

As mentioned, the specific features of conversational discourse have been divided into three categories to facilitate a systematic evaluation of how these features are covered – if at all – in the twenty textbooks selected for the analysis.

Thus, the initial assumption was that the earlier textbooks received little or no influence from corpus-based research as it is precisely in the late 1990s when this type of investigation could begin to affect ESL methodology. The textbooks from the 1990s served as a starting point in order to appreciate the changes that have taken place in more recent publications.

Although I anticipated that the earlier textbooks would hardly consider conversational or informal spoken discourse in their curricula, I did expect a certain number of exercises in which clausal elements and the vocabulary characteristic of spoken discourse would be present. I did not expect textbooks to encourage learners to actually reproduce the features below, but I assumed that textbook writers would have recourse to awareness exercises in order to make students familiar with a more informal variety of the language. Here follow the elements surveyed:

Table 11: Non-Clausal elements

Non-clausal elements
Discourse Markers (DM)
Interjections (I)
Attention Signals (AS)
Hesitators (H)
Response elicitors (RE)
Response forms (RF)
Polite Formulas PF)
Greetings/ Farewells (G/F)

Table 12: Clausal elements

Clausal elements
Vagueness (V)
Ellipsis (E)
Noun Phrase Tag (NPT)
Multiple Negatives (MN)

Table 13: Vocabulary

Vocabulary
Slang and Colloquial (S)
Mild Expletives (ME)

7.6. Textbooks used for the study

The books listed below were chosen following a number of parameters:

4. They are adult courses.
5. They all have a communicative approach to ESL acquisition.
6. They have been published at different times during the two decades, i.e. in the 1990s and 2000s, with one exception. *Headway Advanced* was published in 1989, but this book was widely used during the 1990s.
7. They are comprehensive courses, i.e. they offer tasks and exercises aimed to improve reading and listening comprehension as well as the written and spoken skills.
8. They have been textbooks in at least one of the Official Schools of Languages in the Principality of Asturias.
9. They are designed to take speakers from B2 to C1 or from C1 to C2 levels of proficiency in the four skills.

The selection of textbooks also attempted to establish a balance between the first and second halves of each of the two decades so as to investigate any changes within each period. As mentioned, the only exception is *Headway Advanced*. Although it was published in 1989, it was considered suitable for the study not only because it was introduced in the classrooms the following year, but also because it was one of the bestselling ESL textbooks of the 1990s and was extensively used in the Official Schools of Languages throughout Asturias (and Spain) during the decade.

I also selected three textbooks that, besides conforming to the parameters abovementioned, are aimed to cover the specific curricula necessary to pass the Cambridge Certificates of Advanced or Proficiency English. These publications were chosen because they offer a different methodological approach, since they have a double objective; not only do they focus on language acquisition, but they also aim to prepare learners for final assessment in an external examination. In these examinations, the speaking skill is assessed in a three-part test that includes informal interaction. This led me to believe that such publications might provide learners with a number of conversational tools.

Table 14: Textbooks published in the 1990s

Textbooks Published in the 1990s (in chronological order)
Soars, J. and L. Soars. (1989) *Headway Advanced*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Mills, M. (1990) *Nexus English for Advanced Learners*. Oxford: Heinemann Publishers.
Fowler, W. S. and J. Pidcock. (1991) *Synthesis*. Walton-on-Thames: Nelson.
Bell, J. and R. Gower (1992) *Upper-Intermediate Matters*. Harlow: Longman.
Naylor, H. and S. Hagger (1992) *Paths to Proficiency*. Harlow: Longman.
Porter-Ladousse, G. (1995) *Language Issues*. Harlow: Longman.
Aspinall, T. and A. Capel (1996) *Advanced Masterclass CAE*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
O’Connell, S. (1996) *Focus on Proficiency*. Harlow: Longman.
Jones, L. (1998) *New Cambridge Advanced English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Haines, S. and B. Stewart. (2000) *Landmark Upper-Intermediate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Table 15: Textbooks published after the year 2000

Textbooks published after the year 2000 (in chronological order)
Jones, C. and T. Bastow. (2001) *Inside Out*. Oxford: Macmillan.
Gude, K. and M. Duckworth. (2002) *Proficiency Masterclass*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Cunnigham, S. and P. Moor. (2003) *Cutting Edge Advanced*. Harlow: Longman.
Soars, L. and J. Soars. (2003) *New New Headway Advanced*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bell, J., R. Gower and D. Hyde. (2005) *Advanced Expert*. Harlow: Longman.
Gairns, R. and S. Redman. (2007) *Natural English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Redston, C. and G. Cunningham. (2007) *Face 2 Face Upper-Intermediate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Wilson, J. J. and A. Clare. (2007) *Total English Advanced*. Harlow: Longman.
Evans, V., L. Edwards and J. Dooley. (2008) *Upstream Advanced C1*. Newbury: Express Publishing.
Oxeden, C. and C. Latham-Koenig. (2010) *New English File Advanced*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7.7. Results: textbooks from the 1990s

7.7.1. Summary of the study

These textbooks presented few surprises. Table 16 below, nonetheless, highlights the uneven distribution of spoken discourse elements. While in *Paths to Proficiency* (1992), *New Cambridge Advanced* (1998) and *Landmark Upper-Intermediate (2000)* a number of features were found, the remaining textbooks showed either a negligible presence of these elements or a complete absence.

A second characteristic worth underlining is the timeline in which conversational elements appear. Due to the growing importance of corpus-based studies in the second half of the 1990s, it came as no surprise to find that *New Cambridge Advanced* (1998) and *Landmark Upper-Intermediate (2000)* included a noteworthy number of non-clausal elements. However, even if corpus-based publications were less frequent in the first part of the decade, I did not expect that most of the remaining publications would pay very little or no attention to informal spoken discourse. *Paths to Proficiency* (1992) stands out among them. Although in a somewhat rudimentary manner, it introduces overt references to specific conversational features. The table below summarises the findings:

Table 16: Conversational features present in textbooks published in the 1990s

Non-clausal elements										
	Headway (89)	Nexus (90)	Synthesis (91)	Matters (92)	Paths (92)	Issues (95)	Masterclass (96)	Focus on (96)	Cambridge (98)	Landmark (2000)
DM					√					√
I					√				√	√
AS					√					
H					√	√			√	√
RE									√	
RF					√				√	
PF									√	√
G/F					√				√	√
Clausal elements										
NPT										
V										√
E		√			√	√				√
MN										
Vocabulary										
ME										
S/C										

Given that the textbooks analysed rely on a communicative approach, all the speaking tasks expected learners to interact within a specific context: a debate, a formal conversation, a TV interview, and so on. Perhaps due to the fact that the textbooks belong to B1 and C2 levels and learners are expected to have acquired a certain degree of independence and creativity in their language use. Thus, most of the tasks aim at improving fluency. In unit 1 of *Focus on Proficiency*, we find a characteristic example: learners are given lexical input about houses and are then asked to *use* it in "a freer more creative way" (1996: 11). The conversation takes place within an artificial environment and interactive tools are overlooked completely.

Figure 8: Extract from *Focus on Proficiency*

Communication activity

This activity will give you an opportunity to work with a partner using language in a freer, more creative way. One of you should look at the notes for the Housebuyer on this page and the other should turn to the notes for the Estate Agent on page 195.

Before you begin, read the notes for your role very carefully and mark any points that you need to keep in mind. If you are not sure about something, discuss it with your teacher or another student with the same role.

When you start, base your conversation on the notes but don't be afraid to use your imagination!

(O'Connell 1996: 11)

The exercise also highlights a characteristic found in all the textbooks of the 1990s, the pronounced emphasis placed on vocabulary and grammatical structures. In *Upper-Intermediate Matters*, for example, learners are asked to self-assess their spoken skill using the following parameters:

I. Accurate grammar
II. Pronunciation
III. Use of vocabulary
IV. Speaking confidently without too many pauses.

(*Upper-Intermediate Matters* 1992: 5)

These parameters tend to contradict the basic features of spoken interaction presented in previous sections:

I. Basic syntactic structures
II. Lexical vagueness

III. Using inserts and other communicative tools allow speakers time to think, hesitate and reformulate.

On the other hand, all the textbooks but one are designed in such a way that the four skills are integrated in each of the units with the pertinent lexical items and syntactic structures. The exception is *Paths to Proficiency*, which presents a significantly different layout. The course was conceived so that learners could have a tailor-made tool to suit their needs: traditional units are replaced by lessons focusing on one of the four skills. Two final sections are dedicated to *grammar* and *exam practice*. The section dedicated to *speaking,* while reflecting on a number of conversational features, also includes long lists of vocabulary, whose frequency in everyday conversation is questionable. The example below, aiming at teaching vocabulary, puts emphasis on accuracy, while, as we have seen, in spontaneous spoken interaction there is a tendency towards vagueness (section 6.1).

Figure 9: Extract from *Paths to Proficiency*

Descriptive verbs: eyes

e.g. 'I'm happy if I can just *gaze* at the sea.' (A *good holiday* dialogue)

3.8. Exercise Identify the verbs connected with ways of looking which are appropriate to the following situations.
e.g. if you impolitely look at someone for a long time: *stare*
catch a glimpse of gaze gape glare keep an eye on blink glance stare peep wink stare into space

(Naylor and Hagger 1992: 142)

Here, like in most other tasks, L2 speakers are expected to use language with great accuracy by taking advantage of the extensive lists of vocabulary and the many grammatical exercises provided. They are also asked to express their ideas with great *fluency* and *confidence*. *Paths to Proficiency,* acknowledging the lack of interactional tools in the materials presented, suggests to those learners in an English-speaking environment that they should "make a point of listening to the ways people ask questions" (1992: 152). However, even when this is possible, L2 speakers may wonder what they should look for: intonation, pronunciation, lexical features, body movements, pragmatic features of conversational discourse and so on.

In spite of the deficiencies abovementioned, communicative textbooks are effective in offering adult learners varied and interesting topics of conversation, such as homes, working life, the English-speaking world, astronomy and many more. They also propose a great variety of free activities such as debates, TV programmes, interviews and picture descriptions, allowing learners to create a context for their interactions. The controlled activities in the textbooks are aimed at improving pronunciation and intonational patterns. In *Language Issues* (1995), for example, the section called *Talking Effectively* deals mainly with intonation and pronunciation.

Figure 10: Extract from *Language Issues*

TALKING EFFECTIVELY

1. [5.1] Work with a partner to decide whether the underlined syllable in each of the words below is pronounced /aɪ/ as in ‘five’ or /ɪ/ as in ‘skill’. Puth them in the right column and check your answers on the tape if you are not sure.

A B

/aɪ/	/ɪ/
five	skill

definition	explicit	linen
mind-boggling	lattice	minute
coincide	entire	rival
coincidence	examine	slice

…

(Porter-Ladousse 1995: 41)

7.7.2. A closer look at the data

7.7.2.1. Non-clausal elements

Table 16 shows that, out of the ten textbooks analysed, only four deal to some extent with non-clausal elements. Although I had predicted the presence of these features to be insignificant, I did not expect conversational features to be almost completely overlooked. In the 1990s, a learner’s need to be able to identify and reproduce the pragmatic features of informal conversation was already recognised in a significant number of publications (Richards 1990; McCarthy 1991 and 1998; Biber 1993; Lewis 1993; Carter and McCarthy 1995 and 1997; Carter, Hughes and McCarthy 1995; McCarthy and Carter 1997). At early stage, I had anticipated the use of natural-sounding conversations (not necessarily corpus-based dialogues) in order to raise NNS' awareness of spontaneous speech as well as to provide situations in which their use was required.

The analysis shows that the textbooks take advantage of the Presentation, Practice and Production Approach (PPP Approach) (see section 7.9.). Students can listen to naturally-sounding conversations (presentation), and are then asked to carry out controlled exercises (practice). These may include determining what the adequate answer may be to the utterances heard (*Paths to Proficiency* 1992: 139), identifying specific inserts and how these may help communication (*Language Issues* 1995: 44; *Landmark Upper-Intermediate* 2000: 12), or ascertaining the feelings implied in the given utterances (*New Cambridge Advanced* 1998: 20). In the PPP Approach, it is assumed that once the input has been provided, learners will be able to reproduce it in controlled exercises. However, the oral fill-in-the-gap exercises tend to limit L2 speakers' output. The production step consists of freer, more specific tasks. In *Language Issues*, for example, learners are encouraged to use the *English hesitation markers* in a discussion task (see figure 11). No further consolidation or reinforcement exercises follow. The task itself is worth mentioning as it enables learners to become aware of any differences that may exist between L1 and L2. However, the discussion would most likely be very limited, as the book has not provided more input and, consequently, learners will not have done sufficient practical activities to consolidate the markers and be able to decipher how they function and what the differences may be when compared to their L1.

Figure 11: Extract from *Language Issues*

2 Work in small groups.
Think about your own language, and describe any similar speech techniques that are used. Practise using some of the English hesitation markers above as you talk.

(Porter-Ladousse 1995: 44)

Paths to Proficiency and *New Cambridge Advanced* provide less controlled exercises. Learners are requested to work with similar situations as those provided in the recordings. In pairs, they are encouraged to reproduce the clausal elements they have heard. In the case of *Paths to Proficiency* learners are asked to *socialise*.

Figure 12: Extract from *Paths to Proficiency*

1.4 Exercise: further practice	Get up and move around the class, greet another student, socialise for a moment or two, when you hear the teacher's signal, say your goodbyes and move on to someone else. Give yourself practice as both initiator and a responder in these practice situations.

(Naylor and Hagger 1992: 133)

Once learners have gone through the three PPP steps, spontaneous features of spoken English are expected to have been acquired. For instance, *New Cambridge Advanced* includes an exercise about the use of inserts to show emotion, but it has no connection with the following task, which consists of listening and reading comprehension exercises (1998: 21), *Theme Parks* being the main topic of those. For its part, *Paths to Proficiency* links the use of conversational inserts to a substantial list of vocabulary items related to *reactions and feelings* (1992: 134). In both textbooks, inserts are recurrent as passive input, as no further overt reference, let alone systematic presentation, is made to them.

On the other hand, *Landmark Upper-Intermediate* has a regular layout that highlights *features of natural conversation* every ten pages through the PPP approach. Listening, practice and exploitation are the three steps present in each of the 13 units. The exercises do allow learners to have contact with some conversational tools, such as discourse markers and some polite formulae. Yet the situations created for that purpose are far from realistic, as short linguistic contexts are created in order to force the conversation to happen. At any rate, *Landmark Upper-Intermediate* offers the most systematic approach to non-clausal features and seems to open doors for further improvements in the new millennium.

7.7.2.2. Clausal elements

As shown in table 16, conversational clausal elements are present in four textbooks, although they are introduced in two different ways. Both *Nexus* (1990) and *Language Issues* (1995) present *ellipsis and substitution* as part of the *Grammar* sections. They are presented as linguistic strategies capable of avoiding repetition by "leaving out unnecessary words" (*Nexus* 1990: 78). In *Nexus*, however, the exercise is limited to the so-called short answers (*yes, he is; yes, she has*) and to *neither/so + auxiliary + pronoun structures* (*neither do I* or *so do I*).

These structures are contextualised within a section devoted to *agreeing and disagreeing* (see figure 13 below). Ellipsis is mentioned again on page 136 where, after a short fill-in the gaps task, learners are requested to use it in a semi-controlled spoken task.

Figure 13: Extract from *Nexus*

Agreeing and disagreeing

5 Listen to the following exchanges, and repeat what the second speaker says each time.

a	Well that wasn't a very good film.	Yes it was.
b	That was a good film.	Yes, it was.
c	I wasn't rude!	Yes you were.
d	Perhaps I was a bit rude.	Yes, you were.

What is the effect of stress and intonation on the response in each exchange?

(Mills 1990: 78)

In *Language Issues*, ellipsis is also presented in a grammar section. As part of this section, an exercise (page 111) with the heading *Omissions in Spoken English* introduces a short conversation in which students listen to a recording and then have to fill in 14 gaps. In pairs, learners are asked to maintain a discussion in which spoken language is compared to “correct written English” (1995: 111).

In *Paths to Proficiency*, ellipsis is inferred, i.e. learners need to use utterances such as *yes, very cold; and you?*; *you too* and *yes, but don’t forget* (page 133, 136 and 155). Although no precise definitions or explanations are provided, the exercises imply the interactional function of conversation: in turn-taking speakers do not always require complete information. *Landmark Upper-Intermediate*, which also avoids formal terminology, introduces two clausal features, vague language and ellipsis. The features are presented and practised, but no production is expected in either case. It is also worth noticing that the exercises dealing with *leaving out words or phrases* expect learners to “work out what is missing” (2000: 102), implying that the structures are unfinished and inaccurate if compared to written language.

Figure 14: Extract from *Landmark Upper-Intermediate*

Features of natural conversation

In informal speech people often leave out words or phrases which would be necessary in more formal speech or in writing.

1 a Look at places marked • in the extracts and work out what is missing.

Example

• Sounds a bit risky to me.

sounds has no subject – *it* or *that* is missing.

b Here are some more everyday conversations. Work out what is missing.

1 A Got the time?
B Yes, just gone six.
2 A Nice day, isn't it?
B Not bad.
3 A Been here long?
B About ten minutes.
4 A Sorry. Must dash.
B OK. See you later.

(Haines and Stewart 2000: 102)

7.7.2.3. Vocabulary

Not surprisingly, non-standard vocabulary is not a part of the curricula in the textbooks from the 1990s. Although this lexis in an essential part of everyday language, it is fair to say that much of the publications advocating the introduction of conversational words in L2 curricula has been carried out in the twenty-first century. Therefore, this view is expected to have a more significant impact upon textbooks published after the year 2000 (Carter 2003; Fein 2011). In the 1990s, studies focusing on non-standard vocabulary had little relevance and, consequently, the dialogues were based on EFL authors' intuitive use of the language and their views on standard English. Therefore, they did not consider such items as a necessary part of ESL courses.

A noteworthy reference to spoken conversational lexis is made in *The New Cambridge Advanced* (1998), where attention is drawn to the differences between *very formal, neutral* and *familiar language.* The *familiar* style is associated with conversational language. Although a reduced number of contexts is provided, we come across the following piece of advice for L2 speakers:

Figure 15: Extract from *The New Cambridge Advanced*

Using a very formal phrase in an informal situation may sound *pompous* or sarcastic. Informal language in a formal situation may sound rude or disrespectful – or simply silly!

(Jones 1998: 34)

Landmark Upper-Intermediate also points out that certain words may be more frequently used in conversation. On page 79, two such words are mentioned, *nice* and *get*. After a short presentation and some brief practical exercises, finally learners are asked to make up some sentences of their own. Thus, L2 learners are seen as outsiders and are simply shown language; they are not taught *how* and the contexts in which the L2 is used.

7.7.3. What the numbers show

Table 17 confirms that in the 1990s corpus-based data had no significant relevance in the design of ESL textbooks. At this stage, the study shows that, of the ten books analysed, only four showed any relevant presence of the conversational features studied in previous chapters. The percentages point to the fact that conversational discourse was not even considered part of the syllabus until late in the decade.

Landmark Upper-Intermediate (2000) contains the highest percentage of pages in which conversational features are mentioned and used in a more or less contextualized way. This textbook, published in the closing year of the decade, may be pointing towards a trend to increase the presence of such features in future publications. However, we cannot obviate the fact that *Focus on Proficiency* (1996), which aimed to prepare learners for the Cambridge Proficiency Examination, where informal interaction is part of the speaking assessment, surprisingly includes none of the features characteristic of conversational discourse.

Therefore, the first part of the study highlights the wide gap between textbook description of language and real language use. This may be due to the fact that in the 1990s textbooks partly relied on the writers' intuition, rather than on empirical data and, consequently, were not based on evidence revealing the relative frequency certain linguistic features. Textbooks were usually based on written norms and notions of correctness, thus, ignoring the spoken variety of the language or, at least, adjusting and simplifying it to suit specific pedagogical purposes.

Table 17: Percentage of pages - Conversational features (CF) in textbooks published in the 1990s

Textbooks	Number of pages with CF			Total number of pages covering CFs	Total number of pages in textbook	Percentage of pages covering CF
	Non- clausal	Clausal	Vocabulary			
Headway (89)	0	0	0	0	127	-
Nexus (90)	0	3	0	3	154	2%
Synthesis (91)	-	-	-	-	119	-
Paths (92)	4	1	0	5	199	2.5%
Matters (92)	0	0	0	0	145	-
Issues (95)	0	1	0	1	140	1%
Masterclass (96)	0	0	0	0	190	-
Focus (96)	-	-	-	-	190	-
Cambridge (98)	11	0	0	11	171	6%
Landmark (2000)	11	2	-	13	119	11%

7.7.4. First conclusions

The data so far seems to confirm the initial hypothesis, i.e. textbooks in the 1990s show a clear bias towards the written norm. Although speaking is part of the curricula, the language presented is based on the written model and aims to consolidate the lexico-grammatical contents rather than immerse learners in real-life everyday language use. The data obtained underlines the fact that the spoken language acquired was not suitable for everyday interaction and could have negative implications for the non-native speaker (Biber, Conrad and Cortes 2004; Cullen and Kuo 2007; Ruhlemann 2008). As a whole, the textbooks analysed do not provide a systematic study of conversational features. In most cases, these features are completely absent: speaking is often synonymous with correct syntax, semantics and phonetics.

I anticipated that the more recent publications would show greater awareness of conversational discourse, and, thus, incorporate specific characteristics of informal speech. However, the table does not show this tendency clearly. The textbooks published after 1995 provide inconclusive data. It seems that the more recent books may be gradually adjusting their contents to the findings of corpus-based research. It was hoped that the textbooks in the second part of the study would support this tendency.

Finally it is worth underlining is that the textbooks that pay greater attention to conversational discourse do not expect learners to acquire and use the features of speech. I have found that most tasks aim to show learners what NS do with language but do not assume that L2 speakers may need to introduce such features in their own speech (Biber and Reppen 2002; Carter and McCarthy 2006). In other words, the exercises do not aim to give learners the necessary tools to achieve some kind of *membership* in real life contexts, as opposed to artificial classroom interaction.

7.8. Results: Textbooks from 2001 to 2010

7.8.1. Summary of the study: Textbooks from the 2000s

The second stage of the study will check the hypothesis that these books will show a significant increase in the quantity of overt conversational features presented and practised. From the information present in the textbooks themselves, only *Face-2-Face Upper-Intermediate* (2007) guarantees that it is based on the data obtained from the Cambridge International Corpus which, in turn, includes the Cambridge Learner Corpus. This data "shows *real* mistakes students make and highlights the parts of English which cause problems to students" (2007: back cover). Therefore, the rest of the textbooks are assumed, like in the 1990s, to rely on the author's intuition (and/or experience) of what is appropriate material for L2 learners. Even though some textbooks claim to use "a wide variety of authentic sources" (*Upstream C1* 2008: back cover), it should be underlined that the concept of authenticity is dubious. Gilmore mentions different definitions of the term. *Authentic* may refer to material created by native speakers for native speakers, but also to texts created by native speakers to be used in the classroom, i.e. "'authentic', 'genuine', 'real' or 'natural' and their opposites 'fake', 'unreal' or 'contrived' are emotionally loaded and indicate approval or disapproval whilst remaining ill-defined" (Gilmore 2007: 98). Since authentic material does not necessarily refer to previously recorded and analysed data, I have not considered such textbooks to be corpus-informed. It can, therefore, be assumed that all the textbooks but one are based, to some degree, on the designer's intuition of the use of language. Surprisingly, this has not varied significantly when compared to the material of the 1990s.

There is, nonetheless, an augmented presence of conversational discourse features, which indicates that, although the material may not be based on corpus-based data, designers have considered the need to present everyday spoken discourse in different listening and speaking tasks. Undoubtedly, the introduction of conversational language would be more effective if it were informed by corpus-based data, as this would involve some awareness of the frequency of specific characteristics. This material could be shaped into specific EFL exercises for the different stages of the language learning process, thus compensating the authors' tendency to determine what language features are adequate and appropriate for learners to acquire. This point of view, nonetheless, is not unanimously supported, e.g. Widdowson points out that

> The whole point of language learning tasks is that they are specially contrived for learning. They do not have to replicate or even simulate what goes on in normal uses of language. Indeed, the more they seem to do so, the less effective they are likely to be (1998: 174).

This, as can be seen, is a controversial area. Undoubtedly, much of the corpus-based data available can be considered less than attractive and can seem overwhelming to both learners and busy teachers. Indeed the tailor-cut dialogues we have seen so far may look more motivating and appealing. However, ESL speakers need to acquire the skills that should ultimately enable them to interact successfully in everyday conversations. They should be made aware of the most frequent characteristics of conversational interaction and not only of those that fit neatly into the textbook syllabus. At the higher levels of the L2 acquisition process, where a speaker's goal is to operate independently outside the classroom and, at a time when corpus-based linguistics can no longer be obviated, there is no justification for the omission of these features in the syllabus. Learners should be shown the true nature of conversation. Although pedagogic adaptations will be needed, Carter and McCarthy argue that textbooks need to go a step further

> We know from our own knowledge of our first language that in most textbook discourse we are getting something which is concocted for us and may therefore rightly resent being disempowered by teachers or materials writers who, on apparently laudable grounds, appear to know better. Information or knowledge about language should never be held back; the task is to make it available, without artificial restrictions, in ways which most answer learners' needs (1996: 370).

Let us now turn to the books published in the first decade of the twenty-first century to put to the test the tendency I predicted for the second half of the study. The general impression, before we consider the table below, is that there is a slow shift from the passive approach of the 1990s, in which learners were simply expected to *look,* towards a more active approach, where L2 speakers are made aware of conversational features and are asked to use them in specific contexts. At first sight, the information in the table suggests that conversational skills receive more attention in the 2000s, although this attention is still very irregular. Generally speaking, tasks have become more demanding and more focused on some features of everyday interaction, although clear pedagogical objectives are missing.

Thus, the first point worth mentioning is the lack of a systematic approach in the presentation of these elements. While interjections are studied in 9 of the 10 textbooks, other elements are presented in a smaller number of books. For example, attention signals are dealt with in one exercise in *Natural English* (2007), while noun phrase tags, double negatives and most lexical elements are not mentioned in any way. It is reasonable to infer from the data that non-standard elements were simply ruled out. Authors may assume that non-standard informal language is an obstacle to be averted. However, it is surprising to notice that some standard forms, typical of conversational English, are rarely mentioned, and, when they are, the presentation is not systematic.

To sum up, while some features of informal English are on the increase, essential aspects of interactional discourse are overlooked. Conversation is still seen as a means to consolidate structures associated with the written norm and, therefore, conversational features do not reflect real use. In fact, they tend to reinforce or compliment the lexico-grammatical characteristics of the more formal varieties of the language. Let us now have a closer look at the results.

Table 18: Results from textbooks published after 2000

	Inside Out (2001)	Masterclass (2002)	Cutting Edge (2003)	Headway (2003)	Expert (2005)	Face 2 Face (2007)	Total English (2007)	Natural English (2007)	Upstream C1 (2008)	English File (2010)
Non-clausal elements										
DM	√			√	√			√		
I	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
AS								√		
H						√	√	√		
RE				√	√	√		√	√	
RF			√	√		√		√	√	
PF			√	√	√	√		√	√	
G/F			√			√		√		
Clausal elements										
NPT										
V			√	√			√	√		
E			√	√				√	√	
MN										
Vocabulary										
ME										
S/C							√			

7.8.2. A closer look at the features present

7.8.2.1. Non-clausal elements

Table 18 shows a generalised increase in the features considered in the study when compared with the first set of books. However, a more in-depth analysis is needed so as to evaluate the role of these elements in the syllabus.

The first three textbooks present spoken interaction as static and formal. In *Inside Out* (2001), for instance, we come across an exercise in which learners are made aware of certain *sounds* to express enthusiasm or reservations. A section on conversation called "to keep company with" (2001: 34) highlights that "perhaps what you talk about isn't as important as the fact that you are being sociable" (2001: 34). The textbook recognises conversation as having specific characteristics and stresses this point in an extensive reading text where problems in communication arise due to the misuse of pragmatic features of conversation. Thus, a written task is provided to focus on the importance of interjections in speech. In other words, the learner receives input but he/she is a passive observer of how NS converse.

The textbook overtly mentions discourse markers as "used in both speech and writing to give your ideas a coherent structure and to help your listener or reader follow what you want to say" (2001: 74). From this promising statement we move on to an exercise in which learners are provided with examples such as *however, include but crucially, not only… and this meant that …* No reference is made to the differences between spoken and written discourse.

A similar approach to conversational interaction is found in *Cutting Edge* (2003), where we come across exercises like this one:

Figure 16: Extract from *Cutting Edge*

2 **As an interjection, *well* can have subtly different meanings. Match the meanings in the box to the uses below.**

for emphasis	to pause	to accept a situation	to show surprise
to show anger/annoyance	to show you've finished	to express doubt	
to continue a story			

a) Well, well! Fancy Andy and Laura getting married!
b) Well, you know what I think, I completely agree!
c) Well, I think she could have phoned and apologised!
d) Well, maybe … what do other people think?
e) Well, let me think.
f) You know what you told me about Erica the other day, well, after I spoke to you, I saw her in the supermarket and you'll never guess what she …
g) Well, if you're sure that's what you really want …
h) Well, I think that's it then.

(Cunningham and Moor 2003: 94)

The same type of passive approach and artificial-sounding language can be found in *Proficiency Masterclass* (2002). In this book, not only is conversational style completely obviated, it is actively discouraged, as learners are asked to self-assess with these striking parameters: avoid *unnecessary hesitation*, *give full answers* and *express ideas precisely*. In other words, lexico-grammatical contents based on the written norm are a priority.

2003 might seem a turning point in the approach to everyday discourse in L2 materials. In its closing pages, *Cutting-Edge Advanced* (2003) allows learners to use non-clausal elements of conversational discourse. *Surprise*, *lack of surprise* as well as *disbelief* are practised in one semi-controlled exercise, but it is significant that speakers are actually asked to "act out with a partner" (2003: 105).

In the same year, *Headway*, one of the bestselling EFL textbooks ever, appeared in its "*New new"* edition. With its 1989 namesake, *Headway* shares little more than its title. In it, we find an irregular yet significant number of exercises where learners are made aware of informal language in a recurrent section focusing on specific features of speech, *The Last Word*. After *Headway,* textbooks have continued to highlight that spoken discourse will help students "to help you sound more natural" (*Advanced Expert* 2005: 32). In fact, learners are no longer asked to speak without hesitating and with precision, but rather to speak *naturally*. Discourse markers become part of natural conversation and need to be reproduced by learners.

The next three publications promise “a strong focus on listening and social interaction” (*Face-2-Face* 2007: back cover), “to provide solutions to the challenges teachers and students face every day” (*Advanced Total English* 2007: back cover) and to show learners how to “speak English naturally” (*Natural English* 2007: back cover). Sections such as “Real World” in F*ace-2-Face* (2007) and a number of tables presented in *Natural English* (2007) give informal interaction a more relevant role in language acquisition. *Total English* became very successful from its publication in 2007, as it followed the recommendations made in the *CEFR* (2001). The book transforms language into a communicative tool and focuses on what learners *can do* with it. Although it highlights differences between spoken and written texts, conversational features are not seen as a priority. However, learners are no longer passive observers of spoken discourse though, and they are encouraged to produce natural-sounding informal discourse.

Upstream C2 (2008) assigns *Everyday English* a systematic approach, which can be traced in every unit. Learners are provided with oral input within a functional frame. L2 speakers are asked to interrupt, suggest, discuss problems and so on. Although the tasks are part of the *Listening and Speaking* sections, it cannot be denied that it provides a consistent input of natural language while encouraging its use in classroom interaction.

New English File (2010), the most recent textbook in the study provided, however, unexpected results. Discourse markers, for example, are present in chapters 1 and 4, but their use is limited to written language. The book encourages interaction among learners and touches upon issues that may arise in spoken interaction. However, there is no exercise in which non-clausal elements are overtly revealed to L2 speakers.

7.8.2.2. Clausal elements

Conversational clausal elements do not play an important role in the textbooks studied. To a point, this is understandable if we consider that books tend to equate language proficiency in the four skills with lexico-grammatical knowledge. It would, therefore, make little sense to provide speakers with information contradicting the maxim *the more grammar and vocabulary, the better*, as the clausal features of conversational discourse would not help L2 learners to improve their knowledge of written structures but to increase their autonomy outside the classroom.

Clausal elements are present in 5 of the 10 textbooks analysed, but, as table 18 shows, multiple negation is absent from all of them, while noun phrase tags only appear in one instance. It is also worth mentioning that the exercises, as was the case with the textbooks published in the 1990s, do not expect learners to reproduce the structures orally. In some cases, these are associated with both oral and written language, although the main focus tends to be on the latter. This is so in *New Cutting Edge* and (2003: 101) and the *New new Headway* (2003: 98), where ellipsis, found as part of the *grammar extension* or *language focus,* is presented in written exercises with *natural-sounding* dialogues as examples. Learners are asked to fill in gaps, listen and repeat or listen and check the sentences, i.e. the structure is very loosely linked to spoken discourse and it is not expected to become a part of the learner's oral discourse.

The textbooks from the 2000s, which tend to avoid formal terms, elliptical structures appear continuously, offering realistic conversational language within a functional frame. For instance, in *Upstream Advanced* (2008: 61), encouraging the speaker to continue is illustrated with expressions such as *then what? so? Go on?* and *Oh no! and then?* Similarly*, Natural English* (2007) approaches language without using grammatical terms, but highlights contextualised structures that learners can take advantage of in informal conversations.

Figure 17: Extract from *Natural English*

natural English **saying how sure you are**
I'm (pretty) sure (it is). I'm not (too) sure (about that). I don't really know, to be honest. I haven't a clue.
Listen and write the questions you hear. Practise the questions and answers with a partner.

(Gairns and Redman 2007: 28)

Natural English offers a fresh approach to informal interaction and systematically introduces conversational clausal features. The tasks provide learners with both aural and written input, but the final exercise focuses on the use of these features within an informal context.

7.8.2.3. Vocabulary

Table 18 shows a very low presence of non-standard vocabulary. The emphasis placed on associating context with specific lexico-grammatical structures seems to reinforce the fact that expletives, colloquialisms and slanguage are items that would not be readily considered in mainstream textbooks. Consequently, learners are not exposed to items that could be controversial and could cause communication breakdowns if not properly used. However, it is precisely because of this that L2 speakers should be able to identify these items: they should also be able to interpret the force of these words as well as their implications, even if L2 speakers are advised not to use them themselves. Otherwise, a NNS can run the risk of misinterpreting the messages and/or using the wrong lexical and grammatical elements.

Table 18 highlights the fact that in *Total English* (2007) non-standard vocabulary is used only once. However, it is surprising to find colloquial expressions such as *It's my cup of tea, He's one of my old-time favourites* and *It's really not my taste* (2007: 121), which can be construed as old-fashioned. It is true that, as we have seen, colloquial and non-standard language changes quickly; it is also true that textbooks cannot keep up with all these variations, but it is also correct that L2 speakers, especially advanced ones, need some guidance concerning what can be regarded as colloquial, slang and taboo, and when and by whom these language typologies can be used.

At this point, however, it is worth mentioning that we can observe a significant change in the lexical contents in some of the books. Vocabulary in *New new Headway* (2003) can be perceived as less static and more natural-sounding. While in the 1998 edition, the speaking activities consisted mainly of *discussions* leading to other reading or listening tasks, the 2003 edition offers learners *The Last Word* section, where the authors provide students with dialogues that no longer sound artificial and constrained (see figure 18 below).

Figure 18: Extract from *New Headway*

3	**A** You've forgotten the map? **B** Oh, dear. Yes. **A** But I put it next to the car keys. **B** Well, I didn't see it. **A** You're blind. **B**. Oh, and you're perfect?

(Soars and Soars 2003: 46)

Later publications also follow this trend. Even disregarding the fact that there is no systematic presentation of conversational lexical features, the vocabulary is closer to everyday speech, more appropriate in informal interactional settings.

7.8.3. What the numbers show

One of the hypotheses of the study was that the number of conversational features would be increased in the second set of books. However, the figures do not confirm this. In fact, they seem to reveal a less than optimistic outlook in this sense. While up the textbooks prior to 2007 had given informal spoken discourse certain relevance, the figures show a decreasing tendency after that year. Admittedly, the textbooks studied are a small sample when considering the large quantity of ESL publications. However, the survey does show a certain tendency that cannot be ignored.

Back in 1983, Brown and Yule affirmed that an ESL course in spoken discourse should have a main objective: giving a learner the necessary tools so that he is able to "“express himself” in the target language" (1983: 27). The textbooks published in the 2000s do not provide sufficient materials of this type yet, as table 19 demonstrates. Similar results were reached in Jiang's comparative study of two authentic situations and how these were presented in six textbooks. His conclusions revealed that "the discrepancies between real language use and ESL textbooks are still apparent" (Jiang 2006: 36). The study also indicated that the ESL materials are still based on decontextualized language points in monotonous drills and unnatural dialogues. The *decontextualization* of language has also been ascertained in this study: dialogues are made-to-measure in order to illustrate specific language points, while they do not necessarily exemplify contexts where informal communication may develop.

Table 19 also highlights an imbalance in the type of conversational features included. Conversational vocabulary, such as slanguage or taboo words, is excluded from the books examined. Although extensive lists of vocabulary are introduced in all the units, informal lexis is completely overlooked. Keeping in mind that the courses are aimed at ESL adult learners, who are likely to come in contact with this type of informal language at some point, one wonders how learners will be able to cope when they encounter questions such as *what's up*? and exclamations such as *that's awesome*! Carter and McCarthy (1996) affirm that language should be available *without artificial restrictions* and that only then will L2 speakers be able to become competent communicators, as they are given the chance to choose among a variety of linguistic tools based on real use of language and not on lexico-grammatical elements. Only then will learners be able to increase the communicative value of language, as Widdowson had stressed (1978: 11).

Thus, the results of the study are not encouraging. Although being able to maintain an informal interaction is an essential skill for L2 speakers, materials seem to disregard this. Nowadays, student textbooks, containing over 100 pages of diverse materials and designed to cover approximately 120-150 teaching hours, tend to come with various supplementary and complimentary exercises. This additional quantity of input, however, is primarily aimed at increasing or consolidating the vocabulary input in the textbook as well as the learners' knowledge of grammar. Jiang (2006) urges classroom teachers "to realize the limitations of the textbooks they choose to use in their classes and make efforts to compensate for these shortcomings" (2006: 51). Although teachers should be aware of the limitations of any teaching textbook, it is also true that they often have limited resources and are pressured by external circumstances such as course content, objectives, assessments and a heavy class load. Shifting the responsibility of EFL material authors to the teacher is makeshift mending. Within a more pragmatic view, Scheffler openly questions the efficiency of these materials and the appropriateness of the linguistic diet that both teachers and learners are submitted to.

> For many years, EFL/ESL teachers were provided by writers of classroom materials with invented texts that served only to demonstrate a range of grammatical structures. That is teachers and their students dealt with language that was very different from that used in real life: real-life language has a pragmatic purpose and is not created to be a 'display of encodings' (ibid.). One may wonder how learners were supposed to

become effective communicators if such texts constituted their only linguistic diet (2011: 348).

The following table summarises the findings of the study.

Table 19: Percentage of pages - Conversational features in textbooks published between 2000 and 2010

Textbooks	Number of pages with CF			Total number of pages covering DFs	Total number of pages in textbook	Percentage of pages covering CF
	Non-clausal	clausal	vocabulary			
Inside Out (2001)	2	0	0	2	127	1.5%
Masterclass (2002)	0	0	0	0	162	-
Cutting Edge (2003)	6	2	0	8	99	8%
Headway (2003)	6	5	0	11	124	9%
Expert (2005)	6	0	0	6	159	4%
Face 2 Face (2007)	8	0	0	8	95	8.5%
Total English (2007)	4	2	1	7	140	5%
Natural English (2007)	10	2	0	12	139	8.6%
Upstream (2008)	6	2	0	8	234	3.5%
File (2010)	1	0	0	1	111	1%

7.9. Conclusions

7.9.1. Augmented input is not enough

Learning to speak a foreign language is much more than simply learning its grammar and vocabulary. L2 speakers need to learn the rules of social interaction if communication is to be effective and fluent. Interaction involves verbal communication and paralinguistic elements, such as stress and intonation, are also essential. These more *traditional* features of speech have been dealt with in most textbooks with different degrees of success. However, since the publication of the grammars by Biber et al. (1999) and Carter and McCarthy (2006), it has become obvious that spoken English and its characteristics go beyond phonetic and suprasegmental features. Non-clausal elements, such as hesitators, interjections and polite formula, are considered essential in order to achieve effective communication. These features are not exclusive to conversational English, and thus, learners who are not made aware of them may borrow similar pragmatic features from their mother tongue (De Cock et al. 1998).

This study has found that there is still uncertainty in how informal spoken interaction is to be approached in mainstream ESL textbooks. Much of the recorded material, especially in the more recent textbooks, reflects features that are often used by native speakers. However, these features are rarely highlighted or expected to become part of the learner's linguistic and pragmatic tools. Although studentr are given specific instructions and tasks to improve their reading comprehension and writing skills, speakers are not trained on *how* to communicate, they are simply asked to do so. In this sense, Shumin believes that "it is too often assumed that spoken-language skills can be developed simply by assigning students general topics to discuss or by getting them to talk on certain subjects. Evidently not enough is given to the factors that inhibit or facilitate the production of spoken language" (2002: 205).

One of the hypotheses that the current study set out to test was whether there was a gradual increase in the number of conversational features in ESL textbooks, which would bring learners closer to spontaneous language. As expected, in the 1990s conversational features were absent with the exception of *Paths to Proficiency* (1992), *New Cambridge Advanced* (1998) and *Landmark Upper-Intermediate* (2000). In these publications, learners were offered minimal contact with the pragmatic components of speech. The materials were not based on frequency of use, but on the demands of the lexico-syntactic contents presented, making the language artificial and strained. Learners were not expected to become *membershipped* users, but were treated as outsiders.

The opening years of the twenty-first century have proven to be a continuation of the previous decade. The textbooks show an irregular presentation of conversational language. The bias towards the written variety is perceived in publications such as *Cutting Edge* (2003), where inserts such as *well* form part of a written vocabulary exercise. The turning point was the publication of *New new Headway Advanced* (2003), which begins a tendency followed by future publications: the introduction of less formal English, giving learners access to different communication strategies. But conversational interaction implies lexico-syntactic features as well as contextualised paralinguistic characteristics, which are not fully conveyed to learners. Students continue to be passive onlookers. Emphasis is still placed on grammar and vocabulary and "learners are encouraged to focus on the target language present, to 'notice' it, and hopefully acquire the structures more quickly as a result" (Gilmore 2004: 366). Gilmore believes that learners need to be encouraged to interact, but conversation in "real life is not as simple and straightforward as textbooks often suggest" (2004: 366), so speakers do not always cooperate with each other, and answers are unpredictable as are the grammatical patterns and vocabulary used.

Table 19 shows a striking fact, the absence of conversational greetings and farewell formulae. A reasonable deduction could be that these are more likely to be found in A1 or A2 textbooks, where interaction is limited and learners are more confined to the formulaic functional language provided. This may very well be the case. However, lexico-syntactic structures are revised in B2 and C1 textbooks. This indicates that the importance of formulaic vocabulary and grammar does not stop in the early stages of the learning process.

In 1983 Pawley and Syder defended the view that non-native speakers should have a repertoire for various situations. More recently, Tomlinson (2011 and 2012) and Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (2011) continue to argue in the same direction. Therefore, the gap between what published books ask learners to do and real language use continues to exist. The textbooks analysed do share various teaching techniques: their activities are based mainly on drills, testing, substitution, fill-in-the-gap exercises and so on. Their objectives are based on the Presentation, Practice and Production Approach (PPP), which for Tomlinson "contributes to the general apparent 'failure' of so many language courses" (2011: 78). This PPP Approach combines the teaching of *written* grammar and vocabulary with communication skills. The first step is to introduce the grammar structures; these are then practised in controlled activities and are finally reproduced in freer tasks. Carter, Hughes and McCarthy understand that grammatical rules exist and are necessary, but maintain that within "the domain of spoken grammar … rather than absolute rules for certain choices, it may be more accurate to speak in terms of probabilistic or variable patterns" (2011: 96). In other words, the PPP Approach does not bridge the gap between everyday language and textbook language nor does it give learners the tools necessary to analyse how real language takes place. It promotes conversation in a sterilised, safe and unrealistic environment. Some authors (Lewis 2000; Timmis 2005 and Swain 2006) have proposed an alternative procedure involving three steps: Observe-Hypothesize-Experiment (see section 7.9.2.), based on the negotiation of meaning. In *languaging* (Swain 2006), learners work in groups, *talk-it-through* and, eventually, come to an understanding of different language features.

On the whole, the study shows that, although the quantity of conversational features has increased, there is no systematic treatment of informal spoken interaction. Accuracy and fluency, i.e. written lexico-syntactic structures, are still prioritised. A second aspect to be considered is that the presentation of conversational language in these books does not always allow learners to become aware of *how* or *when* its features are acceptable.

7.9.2. Steps in the right direction

Textbooks tend to focus on transmitting information. This transactional function involves tasks such as problem-solving exercises, discussions of sightseeing plans with a partner or simply a search for information. For instance, in *Headway Advanced* (1989) students are faced with the game "Dilemma", in *Upper-Intermediate Matters* (1992) learners need to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of specific jobs, and in *Advanced Expert* (2005) they need to work together in collaborative tasks.

According to Richards, this may be enough for certain L2 learners, "however, students who do need such skills [conversational] and find them lacking report that they sometimes feel awkward and at a loss for words when they find themselves in situations that require talk for interaction" (2008: 24). The interactional function of speech expects speakers to be able to conform to conversation conventions. Speakers are not alone in conversation: talking can be defined as on-the-go interaction that cannot be planned in advance. In this sense, Richards and O'Sullivan stress the importance of making small talk, as interaction is "the most difficult skill to teach since interactional talk is a very complex and subtle phenomena that takes place under the control of "unspoken" rules" (2006: 6).

Although the most effective approach to the teaching of everyday conversation in ESL textbooks is still debated (see section 7.9.1.), it cannot be questioned that L2 speakers need to acquire communicative tools for effective spoken interaction. Authors like Shumin (2002), Timmis (2005) and Richards (2008) defend the view that learners should be exposed to natural conversational speech in order to become aware of the specific features present in it. This exposure is based on research that stresses "learners' needs and desire to conform to native-speaker grammar forms, including norms of informal grammar" (Timmis 2005: 118).

As mentioned, the Observe-Hypothesize-Experiment Approach may provide an alternative, with its emphasis on exercises in which learners are asked to have critical, analytical views of the language they are exposed to. Features of conversation used in interaction are analysed. Their effect on the listener and their appropriateness are discussed. In fact, material based on this methodological approach has been designed and its effectiveness tested in an ESL environment (Timmis 2005). In the study, learners assured that becoming aware of how native speakers talk to each other and how features such as ellipsis and vague language are common in conversation was very helpful. Some interesting remarks by learners follow: "I have realized I don't need to use all the words in a spoken English phrase. It is easier" (Timmis 2005: 123). Teachers also responded positively to this approach: "Very valuable, I think, as almost none of them had ever been made aware of these characteristics of informal spoken English (e.g. ellipsis), whereas of course they encounter this type of language on a daily basis as students in the UK" (Timmis 2005: 123). This alternative approach does not guarantee that learners will actually become accustomed to the *flexible* grammar of conversational speech. It does, however, enable learners to have a realistic perspective of *how* interaction takes place.

The analysis carried out in the final chapter of this book has highlighted the main conversational features and their frequency. It has also shown that the few exercises focusing on conversational features do not expect learners to observe *how* these components are used. In fact, students do not need to acquire or reproduce them. *Cutting Edge,* for instance, includes an exercise designed to improve "your social skills" and yet it consists of a free activity in which learners talk among themselves about the strategies they can use to improve their language skills. It is revealing that one of the suggestions offered to learners is to "speak more in group work; answer more questions in class" (2003: 12). Learners are encouraged to speak, implying that this alone will improve their speaking and social skills. *Upstream Advanced* (2008) provides learners with a subsection entitled "Everyday English", where language is used in conversational interaction. However, it is an add-on at the end of the "Listening and Speaking" section, and no practical activities are provided.

This study has also found that the materials containing conversational features of speech do not seem to familiarise learners with their essential lubricant effect in interaction. In this sense, Tomlinson sustains that little is known about "the actual effect of different types of materials on language acquisition and development", but adds that "there are gaps which I would hope to see filled in the near future" (2012: 170).

Despite all these shortcomings, ESL textbooks have come a long way. The type of input learners are exposed to has changed significantly over the last two decades. While in the 1990s, speech was seen as an extension of written language, we now observe a tendency towards informal, more natural-sounding structures. Textbook writers need to continue along this path and design flexible, motivating materials in order to offer teachers and students opportunities to make appropriate contextualized choices. Research indisputably points to the importance of conversational skills as it is "increasingly acknowledged that discourse particles are crucial for learners to communicate successfully at the pragmatic level of interaction" (Lam 2009: 277). L2 speakers need to have access to communicative tools and this, for Tomlinson, is achieved when a task is "one which is produced in order to communicate rather than to teach, … which involves learners in communication in order to achieve an outcome, rather than to practice the language" (2012: 162).

Materials should not only treat learners as passive participants in the real world of conversation, learners should also be encouraged to use conversational features as part of the ongoing learning process. The absence of such features in L2 informal discourse can lead to interactions where messages can be misunderstood and where communication is unclear and *face-threatening* (Brown and Levinson 1987). Crandall and Basturkmen are on the same page when they argue that the act of communication contains an affective element that can be reflected in the way in which a speaker transmits the message. They argue that "when language learners simply transfer the norms from their culture to a second language, they may fail to achieve their communicative goals" (2004: 39). Reber, for her part, claims that "a learner's awareness of these rules and capability to manage affectivity in interaction in a competent fashion thus enables them to act successfully in an English-speaking and potentially cross-cultural, environment" (2011: 366).

Consequently, conversational English should occupy a crucial role in EFL teaching. Otherwise, "learners are deprived of the right to behave and express themselves in the same way as they do in their mother tongue. The image that they could present in the second or foreign language is, at most, a partial alter ego. At worst, the dearth of discourse particles in their talk could leave them 'potentially disempowered and at risk of becoming a second-class participant'" (Lam 2009: 277).

7.10. The real world of ESL. Future expectations.

On the 26th September 2011, the Joint Council of Europe/European Commission celebrated the 10th anniversary of the European day of languages. In the meeting it was established that,

> Language teaching in vocational education and training and adult learning will be enhanced in order to promote employability and integration. This is a shared priority in both organisations which is being implemented through their respective work programmes (EUROPA 2011: 2).

In Spain, adult learners of English are strongly encouraged to acquire a high competence in English. As mentioned in the EUROPA agreement, the reasons may include working, travelling, studying abroad and establishing contact with non-Spanish speakers. The Spanish public education system acknowledges this need and offers adults the possibility of attending one of the 176 state-run Official Schools of Languages scattered throughout the country. Although the demand to learn English surpassed that of French more than 30 years ago, and, according to 2007 data from the EUROPA website, over 67% of the students in upper secondary education were studying English, a figure that increased to 94% in 2009, Reichelt offers baffling figures when stating that "despite this intense interest, only 18% of Spaniards speak, read, and write English with ease – as opposed to 31% of nonnative- English speakers in the European Union at large" (2006: 4). Even so, she affirms that today "English is perceived as both socially and professionally important, by teens and adults alike" (2006: 4). In other words, English is an asset associated with social and economic prestige. Speaking, perhaps because it is usually our first means of communication, is the skill most adults require.

In June 2012, the EUROPA website published a report with the headline "Eurobarometer: 98% say language learning is good for their children, but tests highlight skills gap". When taking a closer look at the Spanish results, the figures continue to be, to say the least, worrying. Indeed, Spaniards have a very positive attitude towards multilingualism and foreign language learning. 82% of those surveyed think that English is the most useful language to learn and 92% believe that children benefit from learning it. Even so, only 22% believe that they are able to have a conversation in English. Test results confirm that the newer generations have improved very slightly as only 24% of Spanish 16 year-olds reach a B1 level in their oral skills at the end of their compulsory education. So why is English-learning, and, more specifically speaking, such a challenge?

In sections 7.7. and 7.8., we saw a number of deficiencies in the materials aimed at improving spoken interaction. These deficiencies are related to the on-going debate about whether the textbook is the best medium for delivering language-learning materials. For example, Mukundan talks about the *declared agenda* of the classroom, in which the teacher is orchestrated by the textbook writer to create a "zoo-like environment, where learners behave like caged animals, performing planned tricks for the animal trainer" (2009: 96). This seems to be reinforced by a British Council survey (2008) that revealed that 65% of the teachers polled always or frequently used a textbook, while only 6% never did. Whether there are better means to teach and learn a language is debatable. However, some studies (e.g. Tsui 2003; Gray 2010) show that teachers, even when adapting or omitting materials in their textbooks, still see them as time-savers. Teachers want books that cover their teaching needs and yet, in Tomlinson's opinion "in attempting to cater for all students at a particular age and level, global coursebooks often end up not meeting the needs and wants of any" (2012: 158).

At this stage, I would like to stress that ESL material writing is predominantly an economic issue. We live in a model ruled by the law of supply and demand, and not by the needs of specific learners. Official Schools, private schools and even education at upper secondary and tertiary levels are restricted by specific syllabuses that inevitably lead to a final assessment of the students' achievement. This creates a demand that also determines the general contents of textbooks.

Richards specifies that one of the first steps to design adequate ESL materials is to decide "what kinds of speaking skills the class will focus on" (2006: 29). Examinations not only determine the type of language learnt, they also condition how it is acquired. A learner whose goal is to pass an exam, naturally focuses on the required skills to obtain successful results. In this respect, conversational language does not seem to be a priority in most language tests in Spain and other countries, as learners are expected to be able to describe, talk about a specific topic or maintain a formal, artificial conversation in which the formal grammar and the variety of the vocabulary are valued. In other words, "the reality is that most commercially produced materials focus on informing their users about language features and on guiding them to practise these features" (Tomlinson 2012: 144). Thus, L2 speakers focus on *what* is said and not on *how* to communicate adequately in different social contexts.

Assessment and evaluation of language competence may be necessary, as it allows learners to see their efforts compensated. However, I believe that examinations should not constrain course contents and objectives. Formal spoken skills based on lexico-grammatical elements may be assessable, but I question the extent to which a learner's skills in an informal conversation can be determined in exam conditions. This, in no way, means that conversational skills are to be obviated.

Neglecting conversational discourse when learning a second language can imply inefficient communication and ultimate frustration for the learner. As a fourth-year student at the University of Oviedo, in northern Spain, I benefited from one of the first EU-promoted Erasmus grants and travelled to Bradford, UK, with some of my peers. Looking back on the experience from the point of view of an EFL teacher, I now perceive things from a different angle. I recall that my fellow students were frustrated and baffled because the ladies in the cafeteria were always angry and unpleasant to them, although these ladies were quite friendly with other students. More than 20 years later, I understand that a likely reason was that Spaniards do not use the same greeting/farewell and polite formulas as the British. It is, thus, probable that saying "*I want a cheese sandwich!",* translated from the Spanish *"me pone un bocata de queso!",* was interpreted as rude and not merely as a linguistic transfer of Spanish spoken formulas into English.

The previous example may be associated with the 1980s, when corpus-based research was taking its first steps. However, more recently, I encountered another example of frustrated speakers when I met a group of foreign students in a small town in Massachusetts. They attended conversation classes offered to them as a community service by the local library. A lady from South Korea, who had been living in different areas of the USA for over ten years, mentioned that she was uncomfortable with her command of English, as she was still unable to maintain a conversation with a native speaker. This was surprising as her proficiency in spoken English was quite high. She mentioned that she had learnt English in her native country and had not had the chance to use it in the

United States, as she had been living mainly in a Korean environment. Understandably, her conversational skills were very limited: she sounded distant, formal and impersonal. A short discussion with her led to a possible explanation. In her mother tongue, hesitations, interjections, vague language as well as other conversational features characteristics of English are not considered necessary or are not used. Like my Spanish peers, South Koreans have different interactional features, which she was passing on to her spoken English. She felt inadequate and clumsy because she was unable to hold an everyday conversation with people who were not foreign speakers like herself. Making her aware of the existence of conversational elements and some of the features present in conversational English was an eye-opener. She had been in contact with the language in an English-speaking environment for over a decade, and yet she was not aware of these communication techniques.

From my point of view, the abovementioned anecdotes indicate that textbook content can be decisive in the teaching and learning processes. Even L2 learners in English-speaking settings need to be made aware of the communication tools required, and textbooks should provide them with the possibility of *identifying, analysing, using* and *reproducing* language within specific and well-defined contexts. Corpus-based conversational language can offer data that could help to determine which of the linguistic tools learners may benefit most from.

Another aspect that may pose problems in the acquisition of informal spoken language is that although "a greater attempt to create 'reality' in the texts" (Masuhara et al. 2008: 309) has been made, most of the materials are still designed to fit a set of formal linguistic features. In this sense, Rühlemann (2008) argues that corpus data has proven that spoken discourse diverges from written language to such an extent that *standard* language should not be considered the underlying model for speaking material. He believes that learners would benefit from a functional approach in which the notion of *correctness* is replaced by that of *appropriateness,* and stresses the importance of basing textbook material on authentic corpus-based data, while acknowledging the difficulties of undertaking such a task. Lam shares this view because textbooks should present conversational discourse to learners "in the way they are used in naturally-occurring examples so that students can have a basic understanding of these items" (2009: 278) and, thus, be able to decide if they want to "exploit them for productive use or only for reception purposes" (2009: 279).

Thus, *appropriateness* is underestimated in English teaching and, indeed, in language assessment. In June 2011, during the evaluation process at the Official School of Languages in Gijon, northern Spain, I examined one particular student who was a clear example of how L2 speakers can be both fluent and accurate and yet inappropriate. His spoken English was adequate for the level required, as was his pronunciation. And yet the way he addressed the panel and the vocabulary and structures he used would have been more suitable fifty years before. The grammatical structures were obsolete and far too formal. However, according to the parameters of the Department of Education, the speaker's skills were *correct*. I cannot help wondering how a NS would react and whether the L2 speaker would actually achieve efficient communication.

The importance of teaching conversational skills is undeniable, as is the design of adequate material for teaching and learning purposes. The incorporation of corpus-based data in ESL material is a challenging task, which is probably in *its very infancy*. Its effectiveness needs to be assessed and yet there is not only an urgency "to bring school English into closer correspondence with the language actually spoken but also get closer to redressing the balance in the EFL classroom between speech and writing, a balance which has traditionally been in favour of writing" (Rühlemann 2008: 690). McCarten and McCarthy also encourage ways in which textbooks using corpora can describe and give examples of conversational strategies, thus "bridging the gap between corpus and course book" (2010: 11).

Corpus-based data has yet to be naturally integrated into ESL teaching and learning. Even accepting that a corpus-based approach is essential in language acquisition, determining what material is adequate can become an obstacle. In 1998, Prodromou cautioned that "what is real for the native speaker may also be real, say, for the learner studying in Britain, but it may be unreal for the EFL learner in Greece and surreal for the ESL learner in Calcutta" (1998: 266). More recently, Timmis has defended this view because not all the conversational features used by NS should become teaching objectives. He mentions two crucial parameters to be kept in mind, the first one whether the feature in question is "of great value to learners" and the second whether it "can be taught in sociolinguistically appropriate ways" (2010: 66).

On the other hand, Gray's view that textbooks "delivered through the standardized methodology embodied in the coursebook into the global marketplace – in which all are assumed to want and need exactly the same thing" (2010: 138) stresses that materials are not often adapted to learners' interests and needs. The choice of topics, such as personal and professional success, individualism, pleasure, mobility, egalitarianism and materialism, affects the lexico-grammatical contents of textbooks. They often tend to be too formal.

For their part, O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter acknowledge that corpus-based examples of conversations "are in their own authentic context, and they are composed for a particular audience (which tends to be different to that of the language learner)" (2007: 26). In other words, the material taken from its original context may be automatically *decontextualized* and, consequently, learners may need to process the text in a different context to the one in which it occurred. These examples can also be considered culturally bound, leading some textbook designers to prefer contrived materials (Timmis 2010), which are "culturally 'neutral' examples as a more solid basis for a pedagogy that is sensitive to learners' needs" (2007: 27).

Nonetheless, O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter also believe that contriving authentic corpus material is patronising and self-defeating. They argue that teachers have used decontextualized texts from authentically produced materials, such as novels and newspapers, and what is more, today we "are using the world's biggest corpus, the internet, and its associated search engines, in just this way" (2007: 27). For this reason,

> our basic position is that for most pedagogic purposes in most contexts of teaching and learning a language, it is preferable to have naturally-occurring, corpus-based examples than contrived or unreal examples, but always in the context of freedom of choice and careful mediation by teachers and/or materials writers who know their own local contexts (2007: 27).

To contrive or not to contrive learners' input is another issue to be dealt with in the design of ESL materials. However, the various publications mentioned in section 7.1. as well as the results of my comparative study of EFL textbooks urge for a change. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the different methodological approaches to casual conversational features can only be evaluated in long-term studies. Perhaps there is no universal answer, as real language is a living entity, which keeps transforming itself, and perhaps it would make sense for teaching approaches and teaching materials to be submitted to the same ongoing adjustments.

In this monograph, I have tried to highlight some of the existing deficiencies in mainstream textbooks as well as the need for L2 speakers to reach adequate proficiency levels in conversational skills. These deficiencies have been linked to the limitations imposed by the curricula and by the materials designed for teachers and students. But, it would be unfair to state that learners rely exclusively on their textbooks and their contents. Teachers play an essential role in the process and we, obviously, need to be re-trained so that a corpus-based approach to teaching can be integrated into our lessons and, consequently, can help us introduce valuable conversational features. In fact, for Mauranen (2006) “it is not only learners who may entertain notions of speech that derive from written dialogues read aloud. Many teachers are still unfamiliar with authentic transcribed speech. Textbook dialogues in the normal stylized manner do not give teachers or learners a realistic view of what speaking is like” (2006: 151). Furthermore, significant changes in the curricula are required if English is to break its traditional link to *foreignness* and become a means of communication.

Be that as it may, the present study has found that there are wide discrepancies between corpora-based data and teaching materials. The analysis of the 20 textbooks has raised various issues: to what extent have ESL materials been informed by corpus-informed data of real language use? What is more, to what extent do textbooks reflect natural usage and, hence, allow users to become aware of how discourse is used in everyday conversations? The study also supports the inclusion of conversational features in the ESL curricula, as undoubtedly informal interaction is an everyday priority. I have argued that textbooks should at least describe and present them in naturally-occurring examples so that students can have a basic understanding of these items and decide whether they want to exploit these resources for productive use or only for reception.

The fact that this study used a relatively small sample of textbooks, and that conversational features are irregularly scattered throughout the teaching materials do not allow us to draw an unequivocal conclusion. Nonetheless, the implications are clear. First, more investigation into the use of textbooks in the classroom needs to be carried out in order to determine the efficacy of textbooks in the acquisition of pragmatic competence. Second, research into corpus-informed data and ESL materials will contribute to the development of more meaningful textbooks that incorporate user-friendly contextualized language samples, providing a fusion between linguistic information and pragmatic features of conversational interaction.

I believe that the on-going corpus-based research will change the way language education is approached, including both *what* is taught and *how* it is taught. In Savignon’s words,

> … only through a collaborative critique of current programs with systematic exploration of alternative options can there emerge a

sustainable evolution of the policies and practice of language pedagogy in the larger cultural context (2008: 218).

And one thing seems to be clear, there is no turning back as

For the first time in history we are beginning to see real differences between reading and writing, and speaking and listening as communicative activities (Carter 2008: 11).

I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.
—JORGE LUIS BORGES

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