

Analysing spoken language The structure of conversation

Silvia Bruti
s.bruti@angl.unipi.it

Gloria Cappelli
gloria@gloriacappelli.it

Expletives 1

- ◆ Taboo expressions (swearwords) used as exclamation in reaction to some negative experience. They are relatively detached elements, although they can be prosodically linked to other larger syntactic units.
- ◆ Either they are stand-alone elements or occur towards the beginning of a clause, utterance, turn. Occasionally they occur in final position and very rarely in medial position, esp. when introducing direct speech quotation:
You're supposed to [say], golly, thanks Baloo;
She just [thought] my God I only have six months.

Expletives 2

- ◆ Taboo expressions refer to one of the common taboo domains: religion, sex, bodily excretion

Oh **Jesus**, I didn't know it was that cold!

A I know what I forgot to get in town. **Damn!**

B What?

A A comb.

Bloody hell! He's gone mad.

Fuck, I feel fucking sweaty, I can feel it already.

OTHERS: shit, goddammit

Expletives 3

- ◆ Moderated (or Euphemistic expressions) camouflage their taboo origin with some phonetic modifications (*gosh* for *God*), or by substituting words (*goodness* for *God*).

My **gosh**, what a great idea!

A Nineteen dollars.

B **Geez**, that is expensive.

Oh **heck** well you'll have to go on the bus

OTHERS: heavens, good grief, good Lord

Expletives 4

- ◆ There is of course a variation in both the FORCE of the expression and in its APPLICABILITY. Some expressions can be applied to both positive and negative occurrences. Adjs and advs (*bloody*, *fucking*) in themselves are not expletives, unless they are used in fixed expressions like *bloody hell*.

Syntactic non-clausal units

- ◆ These structures can be described in terms of sentence grammar, e.g., noun phrases, adj. P, etc.

Poor kids, no sweat	NP
Perfect, good for you	ADJ P
Not really, absolutely	ADV P
For goodness' sake	PREP P

Sometimes they are augmented by inserts or other peripheral elements such as vocatives:

Oh shame!
Good play there, dude!

Their fragmentary nature reflects a dependence of the message on context, explicable in general terms either by anaphoric or situational ellipsis.

Vernacular or non-standard grammar

1

- ◆ Range of phenomena in popular speech which are perceived as inappropriate for public and written communication: signs of 'ill-educated' usage, avoided in teaching. Yet they have a role in establishing SOCIAL SOLIDARITY among speakers and in making conversation lively and colourful.

Morphonemic features

That's what me mum always said me instead of my
'em instead of them
Ya instead of you

Vernacular or non-standard grammar

2

Morphological features

Yous as a plural
Throwed instead of thrown
Ain't instead of isn't, aren't, hasn't, haven't, 'm not (Ain't you lot ever heard of teabags?)
Innit as a generalised tag (teachers are unfair in this school, innit?)
Y'all /yous (North. Ireland) (Well, thank y'all, y'all have a nice day)

Morphosyntactic features

Apply especially to irregular verbs. Morphological spelling and pronunciation variants rarely occur in adult speech. Forms which occur in standard English are used with different syntactic and semantic functions.

Vernacular or non-standard grammar

3

s with plural: I says no, they gets
Was for were: My legs was hurting
Don't for doesn't: He don't have manners
Present for past: They've force his bank account
Past participle generalised to the past tense function: You done it last year
Generalisation of base form of verbs: Well she give me that one the other night
Zero plural: The most you're spendign for that is ten pound
Accusative pronoun in place of nominative: Well us lot must walk about half a mile a day
Them instead of those: Did I post all them letters on Monday?
What as rel pron: Gotta make sure she's got the book waht I had last week

Vernacular or non-standard grammar

4

Intrusive WHAT introducing a comparative clause: It's harder than what you think it is
Adjectival form in an adverbial role: I wanted to go back so bad; > REAL in AmE = Real good

Syntactic features

Multiple negative construction: Don't say I never gave you nothing
Double comparative: Sometimes, that is so, so much more easier to follow