

The Grammar
and Lexis of
Conversational
Informal English
in Advanced Textbooks

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7241-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7241-6

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' learning¹ 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 2011², the results of the final exams of the state-run Official School of Languages in Gijón (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 skill⁴, 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 environment. It, 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

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 lexicogrammatical 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. Egging 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 like “Chlorophyll makes food by photosynthesis” 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 *membershopping* 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,