Teaching Spoken Grammar
Today’s goals

- Discuss features of spoken English
- Discuss Pedagogical Issues
- Share some activities for teaching spoken grammar

Today’s Presentation based on:
TEXTBOOK

A: My little brother is a really good student.

B: Why do you say that?

A: Well, he is really smart, so he always gets good grades.

B: Maybe he gets good grades because he studies hard.

CONVERSATION

A: Didn’t know you used boiling water.

B: Pardon?

A: Didn’t know you used boiling water.

B: Don’t have to. But it’s um… they figure it’s um, quicker.
How is spoken English different than written English?
Spoken English

• Untidy compared to written English
• Usually spontaneous and unplanned in real time without editing
  • (Carter & McCarthy 1995)
• Face-to-face, interactive situations with a shared context
  • (Cullen & Kuo 2007)
• Omits words and phrases
• Often repetitive & formulaic
Why teach spoken grammar?

- Stresses Communication & Authenticity
- Improves students’ fluency & face-to-face conversation
- Prevents students from speaking English like a textbook
- Not teaching it impedes students’ ability to speak fluently and appropriately (Mumford 2009)
Pedagogical Issues

- Noticing vs. producing spoken grammar
- Using Authentic Texts
- Identifying when to teach Spoken Grammar

Using Authentic Texts
Textbook dialogues are usually artificial
- Textbook conversations are not reliable models
- There is a need to analyze a larger corpora of language than is currently covered in classrooms
- Teachers need to supplement inauthentic textbook activities with authentic materials
“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”

- McCarthy (2006)
3 I’s Approach

- Illustration
  - Spoken data is presented

- Interaction
  - Spoken grammar is highlighted

- Induction
  - Learners are encouraged to draw their own conclusions about features of spoken English.


- Part of teacher's job is to create the conditions under which students can notice aspects of language use that are important for developing their interlanguage.
Features of Spoken English

- Ellipsis
- Heads
- Tails
- Fillers
- Backchannels
- Phrasal Chunks
Ellipsis
The omission of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues.

Example:
Do you have any questions?

Any questions?
A: So, uh, how long have you been in London?
B: I have been in London for two weeks.
A: Is that really true? So, what do you do?
B: I study graphic design at Camberwell School of the Arts.
A: Ok, so this is your first two weeks here?
B: Yes, this is my first two weeks. It’s quite a big impact. London is very big, there are lots of people, and it’s quite expensive as well.
A: So, uh, how long have you been in London?
B: I have been in London for two weeks.
A: Is that really true? So, what do you do?
B: I study graphic design at Camberwell School of the Arts.
A: Ok, so this is your first two weeks here?
B: Yes, this is my first two weeks. It’s quite a big impact. London is very big, there are lots of people, and it’s quite expensive as well.
1. What kind of words were omitted?
   - Subjects (nouns) and main verbs were omitted.

2. Why do you think they have been omitted?
   - The meaning is clear from the context.
   - The people are speaking casually.
LONG VERSION
FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

A. _____ _____ wanna go to the party on Sunday?
B. Sure, _____ sounds good!

SHORT VERSION
OMIT APPROPRIATE WORDS

A. Shall we go get lunch now?
B. Yeah, that is a good idea!
Ellipsis Activity 2
Long and Short Versions of Conversations

LONG VERSION
FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

A. **Do you** wanna go to the party on Sunday?
B. Sure, _that_ sounds good!

SHORT VERSION
OMIT APPROPRIATE WORDS

A. **Shall we** go get lunch now?
B. Yeah, _that_ is a good idea!

Which words can be omitted in informal conversations?
Ellipsis

The omission of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues.

- **Situational Ellipsis** – omitting items that are apparent, given the immediate situation.
  - Often results in the omission of subjects and verbs
  - S & V are often replaced by phrases like “sounds good,” “that’s right,” etc.
  - Arises from a combination of informality and shared context.
Heads & Tails
Dislocation
Heads & Tails

- **Head (Left-dislocation)** - A sentence in which a word (or a group of words) is advanced ahead of the rest of the sentence and separated by a pause.
  - Ex. Mary and Peter, they went to the store.

- **Tails (Right-Dislocation)** - A sentence in which a word (or a group of words) is postponed behind of the rest of the sentence and separated by a pause.
  - Ex: They went to the store, Mary and Peter.
This presentation, it’s going to be long and boring.

You wouldn’t think he could sleep at night. That man, he’s guilty.

Some of those people, they smell funny.

They are all corrupt, those politicians!

Where did he come from, that new guy?

They’re awful, aren’t they, Monday mornings?
Identify which sentence is more formal. Underline any heads or tails.

1a. Isn’t your sister an artist?
1b. Your sister, she’s an artist, isn’t she?
2a. Robert is really quite nice.
2b. He’s really quite nice, Robert is.

Add a head or tail to the sentences below. Then, rewrite each without a head or tail.

3. Samantha is a great singer, _______.
4. _______, can play soccer well, can’t he?
5. _______, it costs only 100 RMB, right?
6. You ate a lot of food tonight, ______.
Heads & Tails
Why use them?

- Heads introduce listeners to a topic before giving information on the topic.
- Heads allow speakers to highlight the topic they want to talk about before commenting, giving the speaker and the listener more processing time.
  - (Cullen & Kuo 2007).

- Tails allow speakers to emphasize their comments.
- Tails can be used to clarify the subject of the sentence
  - (Timmis 2009).
Fillers & Backchannels

**Fillers**
Give you time to think, create a pause, or indicate that you’re not finished talking.

**Backchannels**
Show you are listening and understand what someone else is saying.
Fillers & Backchannels Activity 1
Put the utterances in the correct column. Then, add two more.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>hmm, um, er, eh, uh</td>
<td>oh, ah, I see, uh-huh, really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional fillers: well, and, so</td>
<td>Additional backchannels: wow, yeah, yes</td>
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**Additional fillers:**
- well, and, so

**Additional backchannels:**
- wow, yeah, yes
## Fillers & Backchannels Activity 2

Count the fillers and backchannels you hear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oh</th>
<th>Hmm</th>
<th>Ah/Uh</th>
<th>Um</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>I see</th>
<th>Uh-huh</th>
<th>Er</th>
<th>Really</th>
<th>Yeah/yes</th>
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Manager: Jesse, I’ve been meaning to talk to you. Do you have a second?
Jesse: Sure, What’s up?
Manager: Let’s go back to the office and sit down before you get into uniform for your shift.
Jesse: OK!
Manager: I was just doing the payroll for the last pay period and I noticed that you signed in more than 15 minutes late on 3 out of your last 6 shifts. Are you having a problem getting here after school?
Jesse: Yes, I have been having some trouble with my math class which is last period and sometimes I have to stay a few minutes after class to be sure I understand the homework assignment.
Fillers & Backchannels
What are they used for?

- Fillers signal that the listener needs a little time to respond
- Speakers can use fillers to buy time when they have not finished speaking
  - (Willis, 2003).
- Backchannels let the listener show that they understand and want the speaker to continue.

Why teach them?
- Common in conversation
- Serve important functions
- It would be awkward to have conversations without them (Willis, 2003).
- Students who underuse them may have difficulty in natural communication with native speakers.
Phrasal Chunks

Fixed phrases that act as ready-made lexical units, just like words
### Phrasal Chunks

Put the phrases into the appropriate column. Think of 2 more

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Create vagueness when you cannot be or do not want to be very specific</th>
<th>Modify to modify an amount or be polite</th>
<th>Mark discourse structures to connect ideas</th>
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<td>Possible Answers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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1. By the way
2. Sort of
3. a bit
4. speaking of
5. a little bit
6. You know
7. stuff like that
8. kind of
9. I mean
10. As I was saying
11. Or something
12. quite a lot
13. plenty of
# Phrasal Chunks

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<td>Sort of, kind of, stuff like that, or something</td>
<td>A bit, a little bit, Quite a lot, plenty of</td>
<td>You know, I mean, as I was saying, By the way, speaking of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or so, more or less, and so on</td>
<td>A great deal of, a little, a large number of, the majority of</td>
<td>On the other hand, basically, actually, let’s see</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phrasal Chunk Activities

1. Find the phrasal chunk in the video clips of conversations
2. Add phrasal chunks to conversations in the textbook or dialogues written by students
   - Act out the dialogues for the class
Tying it all together
Multiple Grammar features in one exercise
Interview Project

- Have Ss interview a native speaker or a more advanced speaker of English and record it.

- Have them transcribe it and highlight the characteristics of spoken grammar in their transcript.

- To prepare for this, Ss could first transcribe and analyze texts in class.
Sample Interview
Write down as much as you can
A: So, are you from London?
B: Yep, I sure am.
A: How long have you lived here
B: 21 years.
A: Right, okay. So, uh, what’s the best thing about it?
B: Best thing, there’s always something to do, places to go. There’s lots of tourist attractions around here. Um, things, that’s the main thing, it’s things to do. You can never be bored in London. Always places, things to see.
A: So, are you from London?
B: Yep, I sure am.
A: How long have you lived here
B: 21 years. (Ellipsis)
A: Right, okay. So, uh, what’s the best thing about it? (backchannel, filler)
B: Best thing, there’s always something to do, places to go. There’s lots of tourist attractions around here. Um, things, that’s the main thing, it’s things to do. You can never be bored in London. (Yeah) Always places, things to see. (head, filler, head, backchannel, ellipsis)
Today’s goals

- Discuss features of spoken English
  - Ellipsis
  - Heads
  - Tails
  - Fillers
  - Backchannels
  - Phrasal Chunks
- Discuss Relevant Pedagogical Issues
- Share some activities for teaching spoken grammar
Hilliard, Amanda (2014) Spoken Grammar and Its Role in the English Classroom
_In English Teaching Forum._ (Vol 52, 4)

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