

GLOSSARY

Accent

The way pronunciation indicates regional or social identity, eg. an Irish accent, a London 'youth' accent, an upperclass accent.

Adjacency pairs

Pairs of utterances in a conversation that follow on from each other e.g. greeting and greeting, question & answer.

Agenda/agenda-setting

The person who is more powerful in a particular situation 'sets' the agenda — the subject or topics to be discussed.

Backchannelling

Feedback from listeners to show that they're interested and understand,

e.g. saying 'mhm', 'yeah' or nodding.

Back-tracking

Going back to something in the conversation that's already been started or has already been said.

Dialect

A variety of language which has its own words and grammatical features, used by people in the same region, or social group,

e.g. Scouse or Geordie, Cockney or youth dialects.

Discourse

Any bit of spoken or written language that is longer than a sentence or a type of language and its typical features, e.g. the discourse of the law, advertising or politics.

Ellipsis

Missing out parts of a sentence,

e.g. in a text message, a sports commentary or spontaneous conversation. This happens a lot in speech without affecting what's understood and has the effect of making it sound more informal.

Fillers

Items in speech that allow time to think, or create a pause, e.g. 'erm',

Formality/informality

Formal language is used in situations which are more distant and impersonal. Informal language is used in situations which are more relaxed, intimate or casual. People move along the continuum between formal and informal, depending on the context and who they are talking to.

Hedges

Words or phrases which soften or weaken what's said, for instance 'kind of', 'sort of'.

Idiolect

Each individual's unique and distinctive way of speaking.

Intonation

The rise and fall in someone's voice when speaking.

Jargon

Specialist language associated with a group, or activity or occupation. Jargon usually has negative connotations, suggesting that it is being used to exclude, or confuse.

Technical language, scientific language or subject-specific language are all more neutral terms.

Paralinguistic features

Forms of non-verbal communication, e.g. body language and tone.

Pragmatics

The ways in which things are understood in context, such as things that are implied or left unsaid but are perfectly clear from the context, e.g. "see you're on time as usual" - meaning the exact opposite.

Prosodic features

Aspects of voice such as pitch, volume, pace, pauses and rhythm. If you're just looking at a transcript it's hard to pick up any of this. In texting or internet talk, emoticons, capital letters and punctuation are often used as a way of showing prosodic features in writing.



Register

The kind of language used in a particular context, e.g. the register used in an occupation might include typical formats, levels of formality, kinds of vocabulary.

Rhetorical question

Asking a question for which you don't expect an answer.

Rhetoric

The use of persuasive techniques to create an effect on an audience. In speeches for instance, rhetorical devices include rhetorical questions, lists of three and so on.

RP (Received Pronunciation)

An English accent not associated with any region of the country. It used to have social status but nowadays is a bit less obviously a mark of high standing. For instance all news presenters used to speak with RP accents but nowadays many have regional accents.

Slang

Non-standard words or phrases used informally by particular groups. The word slang often has a negative connotation — people are criticised for using slang.

Spontaneous speech

Naturally occurring speech that is of the moment and isn't rehearsed or scripted.

Standard English

The form of language that is seen as the norm for any formal contexts and is used for education, government and the law. Variations from Standard English, such as dialects, are said to be non-standard. Standard English can be spoken with a regional accent.

Transcript

A written record of spoken language. Symbols and special markings can help to show aspects of speech, such as overlaps, pauses or loudness or softness that aren't a feature of written language.

Vague language

In speech there is sometimes less precise language because speakers are thinking quickly. Examples of vague language might be 'stuff' or 'thing' e.g: 'pass me my stuff' rather than 'pass me my book, bag, scarf and mobile phone.'