

## The Power of Language.

*How people agree and disagree and complain in everyday conversation.*

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### 1. Assessments: when speakers evaluate something

Assessments are a common action in conversation. Assessments can be done with adjectives (1) or verbs (2):

(1) *Kate and Jade; classmate*

01 K =she's- she's- she's **rea:lly nice** isn't she

(2) *Lottie and Emma; nude swimming*

01 E I always h:ave **liked** to swim in the nude.

### 2. Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments

After an assessment (1→), the next speaker has a chance to make a *second assessment* (2→), which is also a place for them to agree or disagree.

**Agreements** are generally done quickly, and with an expanded vocal range as compared to the other speaker.

(3) *Lottie and Emma; nude swimming*

01 E 1→ I always h:ave liked to swim in the nu:[de.]

02 L 2→ [M E]: TOO YOU KNOW

**Disagreements** are more complex. There are two broad types: outright disagreement, and mitigated disagreement.

Outright disagreement (2→) is done quickly and with an expanded vocal range. It can escalate the discussion.

(4) *Marion and Wendy; window seat*

01 M I hate people that- seeing you eat

02 W 1→ oh I like sit[ting in the window,]

03 M 2→ [oh I h:]Ate it

Mitigated disagreement usually involves: (a) a weak agreement (2→), with a narrower vocal range, followed by (b) a disagreement, or a reason not to agree (3→). Mitigated disagreement often includes an explanation of why the speaker disagrees.

(5) *Kate and Jade; classmate*

01 K 1→ she's- she's- she's **rea:lly nice** in't [she

02 J 2→ [she is nice,

03 3→ .h I do find that she just says stuff just for the sake of

04 saying stu(h)uff though

### 3. Closing assessments

Assessments that summarise earlier talk are a common way to close something down and start a new topic. There is agreement (2→), but it's done with a narrower vocal range than the prior turn.

(6) *Lottie and Emma; sun*

01 Emm: The SU:N'S COMING OU:T.

02 Nan: I know it.h

03 Emm: 1→ Beautifu[l.

04 Nan: 2→ [Jus' beautiful.

05 (0.3)

#### 4. Complaints

**Why do people complain?** A common motivation for complaints is social affiliation: if two people agree that a third person/situation is problematic, there is social solidarity between them.

**What kind of response is a complainant looking for?** Usually the complainant wants the listener to show that they understand what the complaint is about. The complainant might also do things to encourage the listener to go along with the complaint.

**How are complaints constructed?** Complaints are often constructed over a longer sequence of talk. They often involve negative assessments. Things are presented with reference to an inappropriate quantity (too much/not enough; too long/too little time); they are described in extreme terms; the complainant can present themselves as a victim.

**What does a complaint sound like?** Complaints often have high pitch; are loud; they often sound expansive. *Responses which match these, like agreements, are treated by complainants as agreement with the complaint. Responses which don't match are treated as resisting the complaint.*

**How do complaints end?** Two main ways:

- **Provide an assessment that sums up the complaint.** Perhaps reuse an assessment that's already been made. This can also be an idiomatic expression. This shows the complainant that you've understood what the complaint is about. **Say it quietly and gently.** This works like a closing assessment.
- **Acknowledge the complaint but don't engage with the content of it.** Many complaints in everyday conversations run out of steam. The risk in an institutional setting is that the complainant will feel not listened to.

(7) *Lisa and Ilene; doctor*

Ilene says that she's kicked herself on the ankle. She moves to complaining about her doctor.

10 I it's probably a bruise, yeah  
 11 L no it's not, I think it'll be sprained  
 12 the do[ctor says he wasn't worried so that's all ri[ght  
 13 I [oh [yeah  
 14 L I'm glad he's not worried I'm the one who's living with it  
 15 I yeh-heh-heh- hh-hh  
 16 L he wasn't worried when I broke my thumb twelve month[s  
 17 I [.t  
 18 L ago and i[t's still broken  
 19 I [eh  
 20 (0.8)  
 21 I oh really they are casual aren't they  
 22 L well he i[s  
 23 I [yeah yeah

#### References

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- Ogden, Richard. (2010). Prosodic constructions in making complaints. In D. Barth-Weingarten, E. Reber, & M. Selting (Eds.), *Prosody in interaction* (pp. 81–104). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.