Feeling tired, she went to bed early. <rather formal>	[1]
As she felt tired, she went to bed early.	[2]
She felt tired, so she went to bed early. <rather informal>	[3]

Sentence [2] is a 'common core' construction. It could, for example, be used either in speech or in writing. Sentence [1] is rather formal, and typical of written language. Sentence [3] is rather informal, and is likely to occur in relaxed conversation. In this book, you can assume that features of English given no variety label belong to the 'common core'.

Grammar in spoken and written English

Different transmission systems

17 English, like other languages, makes use of two channels: speech and writing. They have different transmission systems. Speech is transmitted by sound-waves, originated in speaking and received in hearing. Writing is transmitted by letters and other visible marks, produced in writing and received in reading. Good, all-round communicative competence involves all four skills:

- speaking and writing (production)
- hearing and reading (reception)

Spoken and written English do not have different grammars, but the shared English grammar is used differently on the two channels. For the benefit of those who want to acquire good, all-round communicative competence we will therefore indicate in this book many such differences in the use of English grammar.

What is relevant to this book is how the different systems affect the grammar of spoken and written English. We treat the two channels as of equal importance. But sometimes, when we give intonation marks (see 33) or present examples of dialogue, it will be clear that we are thinking of spoken English.

Transitory speech and permanent writing

18 Normal **speech** is processed in real time and is **transitory**, leaving no trace other than what we may remember. Our memory being what it is, this is often limited to just the gist of a conversation or some particularly interesting points in a lecture. **Writing**, on the other hand, takes longer to produce and can be read not just once but many times. **Writing** leaves a **permanent** record. Moreover, writing that is made public in some way, such as in printed books and journals, leaves a record which can be read by millions of contemporary readers, and also by later generations.

Such differences between the two channels affect our language use in several ways. One is that spoken communication requires fast, almost instantaneous production and understanding. On the other hand, when we write, we usually have time to revise, check and rewrite what we have written. Likewise, when we receive a piece of writing we can read it, reread it, ponder over it, and discuss it.

19 In spontaneous speech we have no time to prepare what to say in advance, but we must shape our message as we go along. Here is an example of such speech <in BrE> (a dash – indicates silent pause):

Well I had some people to lunch on Sunday and – they turned up half an hour early – (laughs) – I mean you know what [g] getting up Sunday's like anyway and – I'd – I was behind in any case – and I'd said to them one o'clock – and I almost phoned them up and said come a bit later – and then I thought oh they've probably left by now – so I didn't – and – twelve thirty – now that can't be them – and it was – and they'd they'd left plenty of time for all their connections and they got all their connections at once – and it was annoying cos they came with this – child – you know who was running all over the place and they kept coming in and chatting to me and I couldn't get on with things and I I get really erm – you know when when I'm trying to cook – and people come and chat I I get terribly put off – can't get on with things at all erm – and yet you feel terribly anti-social if you you do just stay in the kitchen anyway.

On the audio-tape, this recording sounds natural and is quite easy to follow. However, when transcribed as here in written form, it looks fragmented, rambling, unstructured and is rather difficult to read. In this short extract from a conversation, we can note several features typical of informal talk:

- **silent pauses** (indicated by a dash –):

  *they've probably left by now – so I didn't – and – twelve thirty – now
  that can't be them – and it was – and*

- **voice-filled pauses** (indicated by *erm*) indicating hesitation:

  and I I get really erm – you know when when I'm trying to cook

- **repetitions:** *I I, when when, they'd they'd, you you*

- **false starts:** the speaker may fail to complete a sentence, or lose track of the sentence and mix up one grammatical construction with another:

  *I mean you know what [g] getting up Sunday's like anyway and – I'd –
  I was behind in any case*

  *and I I get really erm – you know when when I'm trying to cook – and
  people come and chat I I get terribly put off*

- **discourse markers:** When we speak we often use small words or fixed phrases (like *you know, you see, I mean, kind of, sort of, like, well, now*) that indicate our involvement in the discourse, and how we

want it to continue – or just to signal that we intend to go on talking. The opening *well* in the extract is a typical in this use of 'signalling a new start' (see 353). Another example is *I mean* in the second line of the extract.
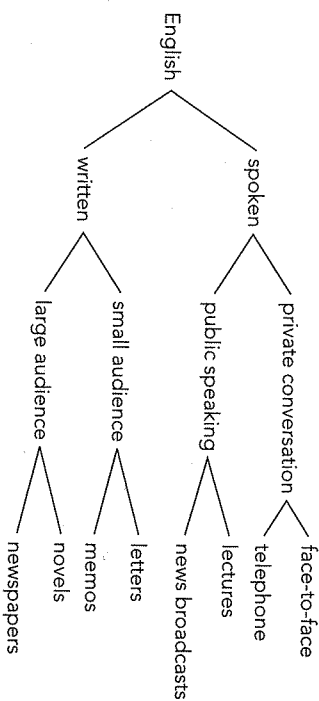
● **short forms** such as contractions of the negative *not* (*didn't*) and verb forms (*I'm, I'd, they've*), and *cos* for *because*.

In the next sections we will discuss why such features are so common in speaking.

Interactive and non-interactive uses of English

20 Spoken language is the most widely used form of language. Within spoken language there are many variations, but we will distinguish two main uses of spoken English. The first, and by far the most common use, is **conversation** with two or more participants taking their turns when talking to each other, either face-to-face or via some technical device such as a telephone or computer. For the foreign student of English, this is a particularly important type to learn because it is the most common everyday use of speech. Moreover, it cannot be prepared in advance: conversation is impromptu and spontaneous.

The second use of spoken English occurs with one person speaking at a time to an audience of people who do not talk back but just listen. We call this **public speaking** in contrast with conversation, which is **private speaking**. Conversation is typically **interactive**, and public speaking is less interactive, or even **not interactive** at all. Public speaking is intermediate between conversation and writing, in that a speech can be (and often is) prepared in advance in writing, and read aloud to an audience. In public speaking we include such spoken varieties as lectures, radio talks and TV news broadcasts. The figure below shows some of the different uses of English, and indicates that the relation between spoken and written English is more like a scale than a simple division. On the whole, the varieties of language towards the top of the diagram are more interactive than the varieties towards the bottom.

```
                                    ┌─ face-to-face
                   ┌─ private conversation ─┤
                   │                └─ telephone
        ┌─ spoken ─┤
        │          │                ┌─ lectures
        │          └─ public speaking ─┤
English ─┤                           └─ news broadcasts
        │                            ┌─ letters
        │          ┌─ small audience ─┤
        └─ written ─┤                └─ memos
                   │                 ┌─ novels
                   └─ large audience ─┤
                                     └─ newspapers
```

Cooperation in conversation

21 In a conversation, the speaker can check if the listener has understood by asking 'Do you see what I mean?', and the listener can ask the speaker for clarification: 'What did you mean by that?', etc. In writing we have no such direct contact between writer and reader and, in writing made public (as in newspapers, periodicals and books), we may not even have any idea who will ever read what we write. This gives speaking an advantage in providing us with an opportunity for **immediate feedback**, to find out whether our message has been properly received, or is acceptable. This feedback can be verbal (*yes, uhuh, I see,* etc.) or non-verbal (a nod, raised eyebrows, etc.).

But, usually, a conversation is not just a matter of giving and receiving information. It is also, perhaps primarily, a form of social interaction, and **participant cooperation** is indeed a basic feature of conversation. There exists a **give-and-take process** which is manifested in several ways.

22 One case of participant cooperation is **turn-taking**, which means sharing out the role of speaker in the conversation, as one speaker takes a turn, then another. In this extract from a <BrE> conversation, a young girl [A] is telling a female friend [B] about her recent very pleasant holidays in Spain (dash – indicates silent pause):

[A] but it's so nice and relaxed down there I mean compared with London – I mean I I I I – I found myself – going into shops and people smiled at you and I – I was quite taken aback genuinely I mean I

[B] m m

[A] erm you know the feeling you you you you

[B] yes one asks oneself if you're putting on this deadpan face you know

[A] yes

[B] yes

[A] and these people smile and you – well you don't know how to react at first because it's so strange

[B] yes I felt that in Scotland – yes (laughs)

A smooth conversation is characterized by a general atmosphere of cooperation and harmony. Little expressions such as *you know* and *I mean* appeal for understanding and sympathy, and *yes* and *m m* express interest and support the speaker. Multiple repetitions, such as *I I I I* and *you you you you*, signal the girl's excitement as she tries to keep the conversational 'floor' and tell her story.

23 Cooperation is largely achieved by using **discourse markers** – variously called **interactional signals, discourse particles, backchannels** and **inserts**, which are a number of words and expressions typical of English

spoken discourse. Below we list some such interactive expressions which are frequent in English conversation. We put them under three headings, indicating a scale from 'only interactive functions' (which are above all characteristics of conversation) to 'also interactive functions' (which are more grammatical and frequently used also in public speaking and writing: see 249):

● Only interactive: *ah, aha, gosh, hm, mhm, oh, quite, uhuh, yes, yeah, yup*

● Mainly interactive: *I see, I mean, I think, no, please, OK, that's OK, right, all right, that's right, that's all right, well, sure, you know, you see*

● Also interactive: *absolutely, actually, anyway, certainly, honestly, indeed, in fact, maybe, obviously, of course, perhaps, probably, really*

Most of these expressions are commonly used in conversations among native speakers, and it is therefore important for the foreign learner to be familiar with them and be able to use them quickly, and appropriately, in different situations. Interactive expressions may add little information, but they tell us something of the speakers' attitude to their audience and to what they are saying.

Some grammatical features of spoken English

24 *Tag questions.* A highly typical feature of speech is tag questions (see further 684). There are two main types:

Positive + negative: *We've* **met** *before,* **haven't we?**

Negative + positive: *We* **haven't met** *before,* **have we?**

Tag questions fit in nicely with the need for cooperation between speakers and the feature of turn-shift from one speaker to another. First the speaker asserts something (e.g. *It was a couple of years ago*), then invites the listener's response (*wasn't it?*), as in this example from the beginning of a conversation:

[A] We've met before, haven't we?

[B] Yes, we certainly have. It was a couple of years ago, wasn't it?

[A] Oh yes, now I remember: at the Paris exhibition. How are you these days?

25 *Ellipsis.* In some cases part of a sentence can be omitted, for example:

Hope you're well.	~ I hope you're well.
Want a drink?	~ Do you want a drink?
Better be careful.	~ You/We'd better be careful.
Sounds fine to me.	~ That sounds fine to me.

This type of omission, which is called **initial ellipsis**, is another characteristic of informal talk. It helps to create the sort of relaxed atmosphere that we try to achieve in a cooperative social situation.

26 *Coordination and subordination.* Coordination (*see* 515) of clauses is a characteristic of speech:

Hurt yourself? Okay, just rub it a little bit **and** then it will be okay.   [1]

The **and** here expresses a condition, equivalent to *if* in a subclause (see 709):

If you just rub it . . . it will be okay.

However, it is wrong to suppose that speech avoids subordination. In fact, *if*-clauses (see 207) are generally more common in conversation than in written language:

Yeah but **if** **you talk to Katie and Heather** you will get a different story.   [2]

Another type of subclause more common in conversation is the *that*-clause (*see* 712), especially where the *that* itself is omitted ('zero *that*'), as in [3]–[5]:

I don't think **you can do that.**   [3]

I suppose *I do.*   [4]

I said **you can have anything on the table,** okay?   [5]

In [2] above we see that the coordinator (*but* in this case) occurs at the beginning of a sentence or turn, and links to something in a previous turn. This is again very characteristic of spoken dialogue:

A: Horses love carrots yeah . . .

B: **And** horses love apples too.   [6]

Again, in [6], the coordinator *And* comes at the beginning of a sentence and turn. This is very different from serious written language, where the use of a coordinator at the beginning of a sentence is often regarded as 'bad grammar', and is usually avoided. The coordinator in [6] is typical of speech, but in writing, it would be normal to make the coordinator a link between words and phrases rather than between clauses or sentences:

Horses love **apples and carrots.**

On the whole, coordination at word level and phrase level is much more common in writing, while coordination at clause level is more common in speech.

27 *Finite clauses.* In written English we often use non-finite and verbless clauses (see 494) as adverbials and modifiers, as in this example:

When fit, a Labrador is an excellent retriever. <rather formal, written>

Such constructions are unlikely in <informal speech>, where finite clauses are preferred, as in

~ A Labrador is an excellent retriever if it's fit.

~ If a Labrador's fit, it makes an excellent retriever.

Here are some other pairs of examples:

Lunch finished, the guests retired to the lounge. <rather formal, written>

~ They all went into the lounge after lunch. <more informal, spoken>

Ben, knowing that his wife was expecting, started to take a course on baby care. <rather formal, written>

~ Ben got to know his wife was expecting, so he started to take a course on baby care. <informal, spoken>

Discovered almost by accident, this substance has revolutionized medicine. <rather formal, written>

~ This stuff – it was discovered almost by accident – it's made a really big impact on medicine. <informal, spoken>

28 *Signposts.* The grammar of spoken sentences is, in general, simpler and less strictly constructed than the grammar of written sentences. In <writing> we often indicate the structure of paragraphs by such **signposts** or **linking signals** (*see* 352) as

firstly, secondly, finally, hence, to conclude, to summarize, e.g., viz.

Such expressions would not be used in informal talk where they would sound rather stilted and give the impression of a prepared talk. In a <spontaneous talk> we are more likely to introduce new points by such expressions as

the first thing is, and so, in other words, all the same

For example:

well – you know – the first er – thing that strikes me as odd about this whole business is – for example that . . .

29 *Contracted forms.* When the auxiliary verbs *do*, *have*, *be* and some modal auxiliaries occur together with *not*, they can have either uncontracted or contracted forms (*see* 582):

do not ~ don't	*does not ~ doesn't*	*did not ~ didn't*
have not ~ haven't	*has not ~ hasn't*	*had not ~ hadn't*
are not ~ aren't	*is not ~ isn't*	*could not ~ couldn't*
were not ~ weren't	*was not ~ wasn't*	*should not ~ shouldn't*

Uncontracted (or full) forms are typical of <written, especially formal> English. The contracted forms are typical of <spoken> discourse, but they also occur in <informal writing>. In some cases there is more than one contracted form available:

I **have not** seen the film yet. <typical of writing>

I **haven't** seen the film yet. <typical of speaking> OR

I**'ve not** seen the film yet. <also possible in speaking>

Later on in this book we will comment on other constructions that are used differently in <spoken, informal> and <written, formal> varieties, such as the subjunctive (*see* 706) and the passive (*see* 613).

Spelling v. pronunciation

30 In <writing> we have to observe a number of spelling changes (*see* 700), when we add a suffix to a word, for example

● replacing one letter by two, e.g. when adding *-s*:

they **carry**	BUT: she **carries**
a **lady**	BUT: several **ladies**

● replacing two letters by one, e.g. when adding *-ing*:

they **lie**	BUT: they are **lying**

● adding letters, e.g. when adding *-s* or *-er*:

one **box**	BUT: two **boxes**
they **pass**	BUT: she **passes**
a **big** spender	BUT: **bigger** spenders, the **biggest** spenders

● dropping letters, e.g. when adding *-ing* or *-ed*:

love	BUT: **loving, loved**

hope /houp/	~ hoping /ˈhoʊpɪŋ/	~ hoped /houpt/
hop /hɒp/	~ hopping /ˈhɒpɪŋ/	~ hopped /hɒpt/

There are some spelling differences between British and American English: *centre* || *center*, *levelled* || *leveled*, etc. (*see* 703). There are some differences in pronunciation, too, but these are independent of the spelling differences, for example /ˈkʌlə || ˈkʌlər/ for *colour* || *color*.

The reason why written English has such spelling rules is often to indicate the correct pronunciation of the inflected forms with suffixes. Note, for example, the following contrasts (for phonetic symbols, *see* 43):

In nouns with regular plural, the written distinction between the genitive plural (*boys'*), the genitive singular (*boy's*), and also the common gender plural (*boys*) does not exist in the pronunciation /bɔɪz/ (*see* 664).

Written representation of speech

31 In some writing representing spoken English, for example comic strips and popular fiction, we can meet the form *got to* or even *gotta*, pronounced /'gɒtə/, corresponding to <standard> *have got to*:

> You **gotta** be careful with what you say. <non-standard written>
> You've **got to** be careful with what you say. <standard written>

Similarly, *gonna*, pronounced /'gɒnə/, is sometimes the written form for <standard written> *(be) going to*, as in

> What (are) you **gonna** do now? <non-standard in writing>
> What are you **going to** do now? <standard in writing>

These non-standard written representations of the spoken form reflect a typical phonetic reduction of vowels and omission of consonants in everyday speech. However, the written language rarely captures these simplifications. For example, in

> They could have gone early

could have is commonly pronounced /'kʊdə/, but even in representations of the most casual speech, the non-standard written form *coulda* rarely occurs.

Punctuation v. chunking

32 We become familiar with the structure of written language through normal education, but the way spoken language is structured is more difficult to observe and to study. In writing we work with sentences. But it is often hard to divide a spoken conversation (such as the extract from a conversation in 19) into separate sentences. Part of the reason is that the speakers rely more on the hearers' understanding of context, and on their ability to interrupt if they fail to understand. Also, in 'getting across' their message, speakers are able to rely on features of intonation which tell us a great deal that cannot be rendered in written punctuation.

● **Punctuation in writing.** The written sentence is easily recognizable, since it begins with a capital letter and ends with certain punctuation marks (. ? !). Within the sentence we can indicate clause and phrase boundaries by commas (,), dashes (–), colons (:), and semi-colons (;).

● **Chunking in speaking.** Punctuation marks cannot be pronounced or heard but, in speaking, we use other devices to indicate what belongs together in an utterance. A piece of spoken information is packaged in **tone units** (*see* 37). They are usually shorter than a sentence, averaging about 4–5 words, and have a separate intonation contour. The most heavily accented word in a tone unit contains a focal point called **nucleus** (*see* 36). There is no exact match between punctuation in writing and tone units in speaking. Speech is more variable in its structuring than writing. Chunking speech into tone units depends on such things as the speed of speaking, the emphasis given to a particular part of a message, and the length of grammatical units (*see further* 33, 397).

● **Sentence adverbials** (such as *evidently, naturally, obviously, see* 461) are often separated from what follows by a tone unit boundary in speech (indicated here by a vertical bar '|') or a comma in writing. Compare:

> | *Obviously* | they expected us to be on time | <spoken>
> *Obviously*, they expected us to be on time. <written>

● **Non-restrictive apposition** (*see* 471) is usually set off by a separate tone unit in speaking, and by commas in writing:

> | Dr Johnson | **a neighbour of ours** | is moving to Canada | <spoken>
> Dr Johnson, **a neighbour of ours**, is moving to Canada. <written>

● **Comment clauses** are often marked off from other clauses, by having a separate tone unit in speech and commas in writing (*see further* 499):

> | *What's more* | we'd lost all we had | <spoken>
> *Moreover*, we had lost all we had. <written>

As a general comment, we may note that features marked as <informal> in this book are more likely to occur in <speech>. On the other hand, <formal> features are more likely to occur in <writing> (*see further* 45).

Intonation

33 You will need some knowledge of English intonation patterns if you are to understand English grammar more fully. This is because features of intonation are important for signalling grammatical distinctions, such as that between statements and questions. For example, a sentence like *They are leaving* can be a statement when said with falling intonation, but a question with rising intonation:

> | They are leaving | [statement with falling tone]
> | They are leaving | [question with rising tone]

Here we concentrate on explaining those features of stress and intonation which play a significant role in grammar, and which therefore need