Talking my language?

Contents sheet and teaching notes

The following workpack includes activities and teaching notes for ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ and ‘Guyanan Creole 1’ from the Edexcel CD-rom of spoken language. Some tasks have been identified as being more suitable for higher ability students.

Please note that although some linguistic terms are introduced in this resource, students will not be assessed on their knowledge or use of such terms in the Spoken Language Study task at GCSE.

The starting point for controlled assessment should always be the live task (which changes every year), and any materials and activities used in the classroom need to be relevant to the chosen task.

Activity 1 – Find the GAPS

The first task aims to introduce students to the texts and get them to make initial comparisons based on format alone. They should be able to notice the question-answer pairs in the interview and the different lengths of response.

Using the grid, students examine the context of the talk. Encourage students to consider the following concepts:

- Talk has many purposes.
- The speakers have goals that they wish to achieve through talk and this determines how they select language and employ other features of talk.
- Speech is adapted to suit the type, or genre, of talk.
- The audience, or listeners, also affect the type of language used.

Activity 2 (Higher ability) – Narrative structure

This activity introduces students to the structure of oral narratives. The students explore three of the ‘9-11’ stories sound files in order to discover a pattern for themselves before using the notes that accompany the transcripts to help them explore the structure of ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ in more detail.

Extension work: Invite students to research narrative theory. Encourage them to find simple explanations that make the main features clear. Can they find any other grammatical or language features to explore in this transcript?

The features of interest could include:

- hyperbole (exaggeration for effect: ‘it was so awful’ – students may notice certain emphasises in the recording)
- shifts in tense (present tense tends to be used at the most significant part of the story, so may not be sustained throughout)
- the use of demonstratives that denote nearness, rather than distance (‘this woman’ instead of ‘so that woman...’)
- chronological order (the stories tend to be told chronologically and when they are, speakers use a high proportion of coordinating conjunctions such as ‘as’, ‘then’ and ‘so’).

**Activity 3** - Formally speaking

The students explore Standard English through a simple rewriting exercise for ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ and an exploration of the interviewer's language in ‘Guyanan Creole 1’. It is important that they collect some evidence to support their conclusions.

**Activity 4** - What is an interview?

This activity can be used as an introduction to the conventions of interviews.

**Activity 5 (Higher ability)** - Ask me another one

This exercise is designed to help students understand the role questions play in this interview. This interviewer asks predominantly closed questions. However, the interviewee does not always respond in detail when asked an open question. There is clearly something artificial about this interview and perhaps neither party can overcome their inhibitions!

Tag questions are not evident as they tend to occur in spontaneous talk. These questions are planned and the interviewer is using a script.

**Activity 6 (Higher ability)** - Dialect

Students are introduced to Creole and encouraged to explore dialectal features in the transcript. They are guided to look at both vocabulary and grammar.

A significant point of comparison is the lack of dialectal features in the ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ speaker, in spite of a strong, regional accent – the speaker uses Standard English vocabulary and grammar. Students should be encouraged to think about the communities from which both people being interviewed come from and consider why the speaker in ‘Guyanan Creole 1’ retains such distinctive features of dialect while the Northern Ireland speaker does not.

**Extension work:** Research the Guyanan English Creole and Northern Island dialects to determine their prestige in our society.

Note: Geographical isolation often leads to a stronger regional accent, which might explain why both Northern Ireland and Guyanan have kept theirs. However, the use of dialect is often eroded by the educational, political and media influence of Standard English, in relation to which the dialect is considered to have less prestige. Guyanan is not in fact a dialect: it is a **Creole** – a language in its own right. It is therefore spoken nationally by native speakers and has prestige as the native language of their country.

**Activity 7** - Collect your ideas

This is the final exercise to help students collate their knowledge and select the most apt points to develop further in their controlled assignment.
### Activity 1 - Find the GAPS

#### Task 1: Format

Lay both transcripts side by side on the table. Do not read them - just look them over. What do you notice? What stands out? Make brief notes about both texts.

#### Task 2: Context

Read each transcript as you listen to the sound recordings and then complete the grid below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Text 1</th>
<th>Text 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Type of talk, e.g. presentation, informal chat etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>Audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Who is listening?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong></td>
<td>Purpose(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Why are they talking?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td>Speaker(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Who is talking?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circumstances of production</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Whether the talk is prepared, planned or spontaneous, where it takes place etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlight anything that the two examples of speech have in common.
Activity 2 - Narrative structure

Task 1

You are going to explore the structure of the talk in the ‘9-11 Story Northern Irish’ recording.

Speakers often talk in similar ways for similar purposes because speech is communication: generally we want to cooperate with our listeners and we want to be understood.

The speaker in ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ has been asked to tell her listener what she was doing when she heard that the Twin Towers in New York had been hit by a plane. In essence she tells a story. The notes which accompany the transcripts read:

Story telling is part of the way we socialise with each other. We take our experience, and turn it into a narrative, often a very short narrative.

- Listen to ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ plus two other recordings of people talking about where they were on that day.
- As you listen, notice the structure of each talk. How does the speaker start? What comes next? How does each story end? If there were stages or parts to the story, how might you describe them? Share your observations with a partner and look for similarities or patterns.

Now read the rest of the notes that accompany the transcript, where the following six part structure to spoken narratives is described:

1. We signal to the listeners that the story is about to begin:
   I can remember yeah erm nine eleven...

2. We give a quick outline of where we were, who was involved and what took place:
   I’d been at college for most of the day so I’d been sort of immersed in work...

3. In many cases, when we tell stories, we change to a different tense. Instead of using the past tense, we change to the present tense.
   ‘well there was some girl on the bus yeah she must have think she was big yeah cos she’s in erm year eleven

4. We then tell the actual details of the story:
   and there were these pictures of the erm the (.) towers of New York both of them were

5. The narrative usually ends with a conclusion that ends the actual story:
   I tried e-mailing a couple of my friends in New York who were able to e-mail back so I knew they were OK

6. The conclusion is often followed by an evaluation as the story teller reflects on what happened.
   it was just it was just unbelievable just unbelievable
How closely do your own findings mirror this structure?

**Task 2**

Answer the following questions.

**Hint:** In your response to the controlled assessment task, you will need to show the evidence for any conclusions you reach, so it’s a good idea to keep notes!

1. Why might this structure be such a common pattern? What is it about the context of stories which leads many speakers to follow this structure or pattern?

2. With the transcript ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ in front of you, use the notes given with the transcript to help you explore this structure. Mark the transcript and make notes around it as you work.

3. Discuss with a partner how typical the recording of ‘9-11 Story 1 Northern Irish’ is in following this structure and tense change. Identify where it differs. Discuss the differences and why they may occur with this particular speaker.

**Activity 3 – Formally speaking**

**Task 1**

Rewrite the transcript ‘9-11 Stories 1’, taking out anything that is a feature of spoken language and leaving only those words and phrases that you might expect to find in a written narrative. Don’t take something out if you think that doing so would prevent the sentence or the story as a whole from making sense. If in doubt, leave it in.

**Task 2**

Look at your written version. How formal is it? How do you judge this?

- How close is it to Standard English vocabulary?
- How close is the word order of the sentences to a written narrative structure?
- Is there any evidence of ‘casual’ language, slang or dialect? Why do you think this is?
- What does your written version reveal about the level of formality in this talk?

Look at the possible explanations listed below for the speaker’s level of formality. Decide which of them are reasonable and which are not:

- The speaker is educated.
- The speaker and listener are not of the same social group, class or age.
- The speaker wishes to be clearly understood.
- The speaker wishes to be efficient.
- The speaker knows the talk is being recorded.
• The listener is educated.
• The speaker and listener have a formal relationship.
• The topic is serious.
• The speaker wants to impress.

Which explanation do you most agree with? Discuss with a partner why the reasons you have selected could result in the levels of formality you have identified.

Task 3
Now read the transcript ‘Guyanan Creole 1’, paying attention to the interviewer. Using the three bullet points from Task 2, discuss with a partner how formal the interviewer’s language is.

• How close is it to Standard English vocabulary?
• How close is the word order of the sentences to a written narrative structure?
• Is there any evidence of ‘casual’ language, slang or dialect? Why do you think this is?

Now briefly look at the language of the other speaker. Compare the ways in which the two speakers use Standard English.
### Activity 4 - What is an interview?

You may know that **question-answer pairs** are typical of interviews.

First make a list of all the different types of interviews or reasons for interviews that you can. Here are two to start you off: **job interview**, **chat show**...

Using your list as examples to help you decide, sort the following statements about what an interview is into three groups: **always**, **sometimes** and **never**.

You can either cut the cards out, or use different coloured highlighters/pens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An interview has pre-planned elements.</th>
<th>An interviewer has an open mind.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In an interview, the relationship doesn’t matter, only the questions.</td>
<td>An interview is always for information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An interview is spontaneous.</td>
<td>The interviewer’s role is to support the interviewee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An interviewer’s job is only to ask questions.</td>
<td>An interview is planned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interviewer and interviewee always share the same goals.</td>
<td>An interviewer typically asks follow-up questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 5 - Ask me another one

Task 1: Context

Discuss with a partner the relationship between the two participants in this interview. Use your understanding of the context of the interview and your opinion of the tone and mood of the interview. How comfortable do the participants seem? What do you notice about the question and answer pairs?

Task 2: Question types

Match the question types below with the definitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Only asks for a specific answer (could be ‘yes’, ‘no’, a name, a date, etc.):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Did you get the apple by buying it?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Suggests the possible answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘How much do you think the price of apples will go up?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading</td>
<td>A statement which is turned into a question by a phrase at the end:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I knew my apple would make a good pie, didn’t I?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag</td>
<td>Allows a more general answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘What do you think will happen to the price of apples?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Why do you think there are no tag questions in this particular example of talk? Make a note of your answer.

Draw the following grid and copy out each question that the interviewer asks, putting each into the appropriate column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Discuss: Which type of question occurs most often? Why might this be?
Task 3: Closed questions

1. Take two examples of closed questions and rewrite them to make them open questions. Practise them by asking your partner. What did you have to change, or what key words did you use, to make them open?

2. What effect does the use of closed questions have on the person being interviewed? Find an example from the transcript and explain it using the PEE structure.

Task 4: Open questions

1. Find an example of where the use of an open question results in a longer, more detailed answer. Mark on the transcript and add notes explaining it.

2. Does the person being interviewed always respond as we might expect to open questions? Explain your answer.

Task 5: Follow-up questions

Look at both the planned and the unplanned questions being asked. You may have noticed that some questions are asked in response to the answer given just beforehand, in order to get extra information from the person being interviewed.

- Discuss the differences between planned questions and unplanned follow-up questions and why they occur.

- Examples from the transcripts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned questions</th>
<th>Follow-up questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>Which are?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like films?</td>
<td>What else?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever had a serious accident?</td>
<td>Anything else?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- How helpful are the follow-up questions in encouraging the other person to speak?
Activity 6 - Dialect

Remind yourself of the meaning of these terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
<th>Accent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Task 1: Dialect

1. Listen to the sound recording: ‘Guyanan Creole 1’.

Look at Patti’s utterances in the transcript and highlight the following two aspects of her dialect using two different colours:

- words with a different meaning to Standard English
- phrases with a different word order to Standard English.

2. Look at the words with different meanings and sort them into word classes (nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs). What do you notice? Is their meaning always clear?


Task 2: Accent

All speakers have accents, although some are more easily noticed than others. How do the speakers’ accents differ?

Select one utterance from each transcript to compare and comment on. Use any previous knowledge you have and do some research into attitudes to different accents to help you make notes.

A pidgin language develops when a large number of people, all speaking different languages, live together. Their need to communicate means they develop a hybrid, or mixed language.

This often happened as a result of slavery when different African tribes were mixed on large sugar plantations. At first these people still spoke their own native languages, but gradually words from other languages were adopted and a pidgin language developed that came to be used more than the original native languages. When this happens a pidgin is called a Creole, meaning it has become a fully developed, independent language of its own.

Guyanan is a Creole language that started on English plantations, which is why it is largely composed of English words. The grammar, however is very different from English and it has many features of African dialects.
**Activity 7 - Collect your ideas**

Work in small groups to share your points and evidence about these two recordings on a poster or a PowerPoint presentation. Make notes under the following headings:

- Context (purpose, audience, type of talk)
- Formality and Standard English
- What the speakers do and say - and why?
- What the listeners do and say - and why?
- Dialect features

As you work at this, identify similarities and differences in the recordings. Consider how to present these – you might like to use a Venn diagram, for example.

Make sure you can explain each point you have chosen.

Consider:

- the context in which the talk takes place
- the things that the previous/other speakers say or do.