

(8.2a)

Encounter 2

S1: Do you sell stamps?

S2: We do. How many do you want?

S1: Four.

S2: One twenty.

(8.3a)

Encounter 3

S1: a bag of potatoes

S2: The four ninety nine bag?

S1: Yes.

S2: Seven eighty three. [sound of till]

S1: Is there a lad around that will lift it?

S2: I'll get someone for you. See the lad there he'll lift them in for you. He's actually outside.

What the three encounters show us is that while we could interact in a purely transactional way, especially at a shop counter where a transaction is expected, we very often modify our language so as to attend to the relational side of the interaction. That is, we try to create and maintain good relations with our interlocutor. Table 2 summarises the features of relational language in extracts (8.1) to (8.3).

Table 2: Summary of relational language features used in extracts (8.1) to (8.3)

| feature of relational language | example |
|--|---|
| conversational routines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thanking • leave-taking • requestive routines | <i>Thanks, thanks a million</i> <i>bye now, bye</i> <i>Can I have . . . please?</i> |
| small talk | <i>Coolish isn't it?</i> |
| hedging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hedged syntactic structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – negative declarative + tag question – noun phrase + tag – vague interrogative + hedging modal verb <i>would</i> | <i>You don't sell stamps do ye?</i> [unhedged version: <i>do you sell stamps,</i> <i>even less hedged: I want stamps]</i> <i>Four scones, is it?</i> <i>is there any lad around that would lift it?</i> |
| discourse markers | <i>now, ah, oh, Last of all, right, okay</i> |
| vagueness and approximation | <i>Coolish, any lad around, tis kind of dry</i> |
| vocative use (endearment form used) | <i>dear</i> |

As we have discussed in other chapters in this book (for example in relation to fixed expression in chapters 3 and 4), the question of whether features such as relational language should be taught is really for teachers and learners to decide. Many of the items are core spoken vocabulary (see chapter 2) and so it is legitimate to argue that they can be learnt as vocabulary items or as part of discourse strategies, but equally they may be rejected as something that a non-native user might not be comfortable with. Nonetheless we feel that, as core features of English, all learners need, at a minimum, a passive understanding of these high-frequency items.

8.2 Conversational routines

As noted in chapters 3 and 4, formulaic utterances can extend from multi-word chunks to discursal routines. Wray (2000: 466) points out that utterances may be formulaic 'even though they do not need to be'. In other words, they can be generated by the rules of open syntax and vocabulary selections to fill the syntactic slots (for example: *It was lovely to see you*). Such utterances are formulaic because of a combination of their recurrence, established colligations and their pragmatically specialised functions. In this chapter, we hope to show how interesting examples of pragmatic specialisation can be found when we look at small corpora of data from specific social interactions. These patterns might not become obvious when they are part of a large corpus. Patterns emerge in these small specialized datasets because they are linked to very specific socio-cultural contexts of use. These patterns become pragmatically specialised over time. For example, in a corpus consisting of calls to an Irish radio phone-in programme, the phrase *thank you very much indeed for talking to us* has a pragmatic specialisation for the presenter at the closing of the calls, which has become routinised in this show:

Figure 1: Concordance lines from a corpus of Irish radio phone-in (*Liveline*) closings

| | |
|----------|---|
| listen | thank you very much indeed for talking to us. Thank you for |
| | thank you very much indeed for talking to us. Okay thank you. |
| Richard | thank you very much indeed for talking to us. |
| Donnelly | thank you very much indeed for talking to us and thank you Una. Thank you. All |
| Dowell | thank you very much indeed for talking to us. Thank you Marian |
| Brian | thank you very much indeed for talking to us. Right you are Marian. |
| Anne | thank you very much indeed for talking to us. Thank you. |

Listeners to the show become familiar with this call-closing pattern and this familiarity also has a relational function, in that it generates a sense of pseudo-intimacy (see O'Keeffe 2006). In a very different context, a corpus of service encounters at an electrical shop (a sub-corpus of CANCODE), we find the two-word chunk *you've got* within the top ten two-word items. When we explore this through concordance lines, we find that it has acquired a pragmatic specialisation within the shop encounter in the context of selling/demonstrating a product to a customer. For example: