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**'The Ups & Downs of Working in Telesales':  
An analysis of the development of prosodic style in a  
Scottish call centre**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the prosodic style of workers in a Scottish outbound call centre during telesales call openings.

I describe the conversational structure and accompanying intonational patterns of a corpus of scripted call centre telephone openings, and investigate if this provides evidence to suggest the emergence of patterns of prosodic style or 'tone of voice' used by workers in the call centre during telephone sales encounters. I investigate how and why workers come to adopt ways of speaking via data collected during long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the call centre, paying particular attention to the training and prescriptive processes to which new employees are exposed. Examination of the classroom training period and other methods put in place by the call centre, such as scripting and managerial surveillance, reveals that prosodic style is not overtly prescribed in the same way as other aspects of the agents' linguistic performance. It emerges that the on-the-job period of training known as 'nesting' is where most managerial prescription of style takes place, at a point when workers are making the transition from apprentice to expert via increasing participation in local practices. It is during this transitional phase of apprenticeship that individual speakers begin construction of a new, activity-based persona, of which their prosodic style is a defining part.

*For My Parents*

*On my first day of work in the telephone banking call centre I sat waiting for the trainer with six other smartly dressed young men and women in a small air-conditioned room, each of us facing one another at a large table. The sound of voices and computer equipment in the next room was just audible; through the internal window opposite I could see into the open-plan office where workers were seated at desks in groups of three or four. Each of them was wearing the familiar headsets one now associates with call centres. Some of them were talking to one another; some were busy with piles of papers and other administrative tasks, but most of them were conversing with what appeared to be an invisible interlocutor. The woman nearest us was smiling as she talked. Occasionally she would pause, look at the screen in front of her and begin typing quickly. Or she would nod as if in agreement, laugh and type some more. Sometimes she would stop talking completely for a few minutes and her smile would drop slightly as her gaze drifted to her colleague sitting next to her. The two would talk briefly until one of them abruptly turned back to the screen and began to smile broadly and talk into space once again.*

*Before I ever set foot inside a call centre, like many people I had a mild contempt for the industry and those who worked within it. I had encountered them many times before: when I moved house and had to organize my gas and electricity supply; when I wanted to check my bank balance or pay a credit card bill; when I was in the middle of an evening meal and was interrupted by a faceless salesperson on the telephone trying to persuade me to take out life insurance or have my windows double glazed.*

*Whether agreeable or not, these encounters were frequent but mostly forgettable experiences which I had never spent any real time considering. Perhaps this explains why call centres have been somewhat overlooked by linguists in the past: the presence of call centres in our everyday lives is now so routine that we barely give them a moment's thought. However, it is precisely their prevalence which should make them so linguistically interesting to us.*

## **Acknowledgments:**

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## CHAPTER 1: PRELIMINARY ISSUES

### 1.1 Introduction

*The phone rings for several seconds before Mrs. McKee picks it up. She is greeted by a young man with a Scottish accent who asks politely to speak with her husband. Before he says anything more, she asks, "is that British Gas?" The agent confirms this. "I thought it might be" says Mrs. McKee, "I recognize the voice".*

*'Hello, is that Miss Watson?' says Brian, an agent at NTB. 'Yes' replies the customer. The agent pauses and continues, 'hi there, it's Brian at British Gas'. "Yes', interrupts Miss Watson, 'I know the voice well'.*

British Gas Data 2007

What was it about the callers' voices that prompted those two customers to recognise them as being agents from the British Gas call centre? Do agents from call centres speak in a way which makes them instantly recognisable as such over the phone? At present, we know relatively little about the phonetics of call centre speech, and therefore any lay intuitions or preconceptions about what characterises it are merely that; there are currently no objective linguistic data which tell us what call centre speech actually sounds like and why.

In 2002 I took on a part-time job in a telephone banking call centre in Glasgow, and from there my sociolinguistic interest in call centre speech began. Although I had not previously been inside a call centre I already had a good idea of what to expect, partly because of the large amounts of publicity given to the industry over the last two

decades (with much of this publicity being rather negative)<sup>1</sup>, and partly because, like many consumers I come into contact with call centre agents regularly, during various different types of business-related contact, initiated by both the call centre and myself.

Images of workers sitting in rows at desks wearing headsets whilst simultaneously talking and typing have been well popularised by the media, giving call centres their own particular, highly recognisable, public image. The telephone-banking call centre in which I worked, as well as those within which I would later come to carry out research, all conformed closely to the popular stereotype of call centres both in their physical layout and in the type of routinised, standardised interactions which take up the majority of the working day. Although there are a huge number of different types of companies which use call centres for their own individual ends, certain operational features can be said to be universal to all. What makes call centres interesting from a *linguistic* perspective is that the central focus of the job is talk, and that the physical, organisational, and interactional influences on call centre work appear to have a direct effect on that talk. An aspect of this which has already been placed under linguistic scrutiny (Cameron 2000a, 2000b, 2008), and which is discussed in detail below, is the process by which workers are ‘styled’ by management to behave in a certain way linguistically. A related issue, but one which has not yet been investigated in any great detail, is the distinctive ‘tone of voice’, or ‘prosodic style’ which appears to characterise call centre speech to some extent. If workers are styled by management as Cameron suggests, then it is as yet unclear whether prosodic features are affected by this process or not. Crystal’s (1969, 1975) work on prosody in context/ prosodic style looked at the concept of ‘vocal stereotypes’, referring to tones of voice which he

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<sup>1</sup> A less favourable portrayal of call centre employment, is that call centres are ‘customer service factories’ and ‘dark satanic mills’ (Belt et al. 2000: 368), where workers are expected to toil in poor conditions, constantly under the watchful eye of the management.

argued were easily identifiable as belonging to individuals employed in certain occupations. However, as Wichmann (1996) points out, this is rather misleading, ‘as it implies that a member of a profession always speaks in the same way, whatever the circumstances’. Instead of referring to certain professions as having associated tones of voice, therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to talk about the prosodic features associated with *a specific work-related task* carried out by an employee or member of a profession, i.e. the ‘activity type’<sup>2</sup> (Crystal & Davy 1969), of which call centre telephone interactions can be considered an example. However, it seems far-reaching to assume that all call centre agents in all call centres sound the same prosodically – even when performing the same specific activity (i.e. a call centre call). What may be the case is that call centre interactions all have certain *prosodic features in common* (to varying degrees, depending on the individual call centre and the nature of its business) which are in part attributable to ‘call centre constraints’ (i.e.: reading from a script; high degrees of managerial control; the medium of the telephone; and engagement in repetitive, routine interactions – all of which will be examined further), and in part attributable to the local stylistic practices of each individual call centre community of practice.

This study presents an interactional analysis of the prosody of agents making sales calls from a call centre near Glasgow in an attempt to reveal whether or not they adopt a particular prosodic style when talking to customers, whether this style is adopted by all workers in the same way, what characterises it and, if it *is* present, what causes its emergence in the first place. This work presents a systematic attempt to identify

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<sup>2</sup> This corresponds to the concept of genre in written language.

certain prosodic features (especially pitch contours) which are associated with specific interactional events within a corpus of call centre telephone openings.

As part of locating and defining this style, an attempt is made to show how workers new to a call centre develop ways of speaking with which they assert a specific activity-related persona. This is part of the on-going process of becoming a competent and successful community member. In order to understand this process, a conceptualisation of style is required which departs from traditional methods of correlating stylistic variation with the use of individual variables, and instead views style as a fluid and complex process of *bricolage* where speakers construct styles by appropriating variables from the wider sociolinguistic world and giving them new meaning at the local level (Eckert 1996, 2004). Long-term, ethnographic fieldwork within the subject call centre has enabled access to local practices (linguistic and otherwise) which are examined in order to contextualise the speech corpus and inform the findings of the study. Further investigation of work already done on call centre style by Cameron (2000a, 2000b, 2008) will continue her examination of the call centre styling process in what she (2008) refers to as a 'top-down' type of talk where participants are not in full control of their linguistic performance due to various forms of managerial interference. The data will be examined using a conversation analysis-grounded approach which looks at the interactional structure of calls alongside prosodic features (rather than treating them as separate) in order to understand fully how they operate. Although this is in keeping with methods applied in interactional phonetics, e.g. Couper-Kuhlen (2001), consideration will be taken of observations made by Cameron (2008) that this macro-analytical approach needs to be informed by

additional analyses which account for stylistic control by parties not involved in the interaction at the local level.

## 1.2 The Call Centre Industry

Since the 1980s, the call centre sector has established itself as one of the fastest growing and most lucrative industries: not just in the UK, or in Western society, but throughout the world (Taylor and Bain 1999; Zapf et al. 2003). Despite often being negatively portrayed in the media,<sup>3</sup> call centres remain an attractive mode of business to companies, providing a cheap and highly efficient method of communicating with new and existing customers. In essence, call centres facilitate a way of carrying out business which is immediate, which transcends distance, and which can operate on a twenty-four hour basis.

The call centre industry in the United Kingdom has seen a massive surge in employment, with estimations at the end of the twentieth century that 3 per cent of the population work in telephone-related industries (Taylor and Bain 1999). Call centres are firmly established as an important part of modern British industry, replacing many of the traditional blue-collar industries that closed in the late twentieth century with thousands of white-collar jobs. As the number of call centres has risen, causing competition to increase between companies offering similar services over the telephone, the battle between them has shifted its impetus so that the goal is not just to

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in her article for *The Herald* (2001: 19), MacLaren reinforces the fact that there are certain long-established prejudices which many people have about the call centre where she says, “who has not heard the tale of the workers who were told they would have to wear nappies if they visited the lavatory too often?”, and in his ‘undercover’ exposé of the Directory Enquiries call centre in Glasgow, *The Scotsman’s* reporter, Matt Warren paints a bleak picture of work there, where he explains, “the calls are non-stop, with no more than two or three seconds between them...[and]...a fully trained operator is expected to take a call every 28 seconds” (2001: 2).

be the most accessible, but to also offer the most professional and personal service on the market.

Call centres operate on several basic principles which distinguish them from other industries. Regardless of the nature of the business itself, the most important feature that all call centres share is that interactions with customers are conducted entirely over the telephone. In this way, call centre agents often provide the single line of contact between company and client, both initiating and facilitating business transactions which are negotiated entirely through talk. It is for this reason that call centres are such a rich source of linguistic data.

There are two types of call centre call: 'inbound' calls where the interaction is first initiated by the customer and the business is generally customer-service related as a result; and 'outbound' calls, which are initiated by the agents themselves, either in the form of 'cold calling'<sup>4</sup>, or by calling existing customers, usually with the aim of selling a product or service. Many modern call centres use Visual Display Units (VDU) and Automated Call Distribution (ACD), an electronic system which processes and controls individual calls and distributes them to each agent to ensure all calls are answered or made as efficiently as possible, often tying an agent to the phone for extended periods of time.

Because call centres often set up a situation where the operators are the only or main conduit between consumer and company, the pressure for the call centre employees to perform is noticeably high. Moreover, comparisons are often drawn

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<sup>4</sup> Cold-calling is an often-used term for the process of calling customers without their prior permission. As a result, this type of contact is often unwelcome. Telesales calls (i.e. sales encounters mediated via the telephone) are often of the cold-call variety.



between call centres and the factory assembly line because the work is often repetitive and workers are under pressure to get through a certain number of calls per day (in a factory a similar situation exists where workers are expected to perform the same 'basic' function over and over again an optimum number of times during the working day). Through these comparisons, call centres have developed a somewhat negative reputation – a reputation acknowledged (and sometimes reinforced) by academics, the press and the public. As Taylor and Bain (1999:102) note: “recent descriptions of the call centre labour process have elicited pictures of Orwell’s ‘Ministry of Truth’ with ‘Big Brother’ management exercising total control”, and that “the ‘tyranny of the assembly line’ is but a Sunday school picnic compared with the control that management can exercise in computer telephony”. Whether this negative image of call centres is generally accurate or not, what is interesting from a linguistic point of view is whether such working conditions have any effect on the linguistic behaviour of workers.

### **1.3 Style in Sociolinguistics**

This research is concerned with understanding better the process of stylistic construction within a call centre and therefore a review of some of the most influential sociolinguistic research on style is presented, followed by a discussion about how the issue of style is approached by this present study of call centre talk.

The concept of style has been central to sociolinguistic study since Labov’s (1966) New York study where he described style as being organised along a single dimension, measured by amount of attention paid to speech (Labov 1972). This assumes that the more closely speakers monitor their own speech, the more they shift towards the formal end of the style continuum. He found that within each of the four

stylistic contexts outlined for the study, the slope of style-shifting was practically the same for each class group, and conversely, differences between social class groups tended to be preserved in each of the style contexts. He also found that different linguistic variables had different levels of salience for speakers, which led him to distinguish between those which are socially stratified but do not show style-shifting (indicators) and those which show both social stratification and style-shifting (markers). This approach is problematic for several reasons, most notably because the style continuum which he proposes is unidimensional and therefore cannot represent the range of stylistic options which are usually available to speakers. It also poses problems in that by focusing solely on attention paid to speech by the speaker, it ignores other possible important contributing factors, such as addressee effect.

Slightly later work by Labov in the late 1960s (Labov 1972) on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Harlem did consider addressee influence on speaker style, looking at variation in speech across different audiences. However this was not a central focus of the investigation. In actual fact, addressee effect did not feature again in a sociolinguistic study of style until Blom and Gumperz (1972) carried out their study in Hemnesberget in Norway where they looked at the way community members style-shifted depending on whether they were interacting with locals or community outsiders. Blom and Gumperz (1972) differentiate between situational switching, i.e. behaviour influenced directly by the addressee; and metaphorical switching, i.e. as a result of changes in topic and role relationship but where the addressee remains a constant. This study was followed by several further variationist studies which focus specifically on addressee effect, including Hindle (1979); Coupland (1980, 1984); Trudgill (1981) and Bell (1984). Coupland and Trudgill both

borrow from the socio-psychological Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) in order to explain the stylistic variation which they find. SAT posits that speakers will shift their own speech towards that of their interlocutor in order to gain certain social and communicative rewards. As Rickford & McNair-Knox (1994: 240) point out, “in this model, the theoretical significance of the addressee is paramount since speakers are seen either as converging with or diverging from their addressees depending upon their relationship to them and their desire to gain social approval”.

In Coupland’s (1980, 1984) study of phonological accommodation in a Cardiff travel agency, he investigated style-shift by a single informant, a worker called Sue, during interactions with 51 clients. The speech of the participants was quantified for four variables, the variants of which were ranked on a continuum of standardness – nonstandardness and the frequency of the less-standard variants of each variable was measured in the speech of the 52 participants. Accommodation theory predicts that Sue would (within limits) vary her use of each variable according to the speech of her interlocutor. The results of the study led Coupland (1984: 63) to conclude that ‘in an objective sense, phonological accommodation is a speech strategy that the assistant uses in her daily association with clients’.

Coupland suggests (1981: 146) that the travel agency setting “embodies a single context of situation”, i.e. the travel agency daily business and the types of activities associated with this. It is possible to draw important comparisons here with the call centre situation because they are both service-work settings. Within the travel agency Coupland identifies several sub-contexts across which the assistant style-shifts, and four contextual styles: ‘casual’; ‘informal work-related’; ‘client’; and ‘telephone’,

with telephone being the most formal of the four contexts. His findings show that the more casual the style context, the greater the percentage of the non-standard variants found in Sue's speech. In addition to this, he found that Sue accommodated stylistically to her interlocutors in the way that SAT would predict, i.e. via convergence. Coupland (1982: 165) suggests "we are beginning to see the dynamic potential of style-shifting, where manipulation of social style carries social meaning and contributes to the speaker's control and the hearer's interpretation of the encounter".

Bell's (1984, 1997) study of style-shifting also places its central focus upon the addressee, or 'audience'. At the centre of the audience design model is the idea that *speakers design their style primarily for and in response to their audience* and that style-shift occurs as a direct result of influence by a number of potential ratified and non-ratified audience member-types, of some of whom the speaker may not even be aware. Audience design views style-shift as bi-directional: that a speaker can shift their speech to be more (convergence) or less (divergence) like their addressee, behaviour which can be accounted for by speech accommodation theory, as discussed above. Bell's original study (1984) centred around radio DJs in New Zealand who were working on news programmes for two different radio stations, one of which had a higher status audience than the other. Bell looked at a number of phonological and syntactic variables for the study. One of these variables, intervocalic /t/, was subject to a pronounced style-shift when news readers switched between outputs for the two different radio stations. Bell argued that of all the possible factors at work on the speech of the DJs, it appeared to be the audience which was the main correlation with the shift.

These findings tie in with another influential sociolinguistic study of style by Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994) which provides evidence to support the assertion that style-shift is influenced by addressee. Their informant was a teenager called Foxy Boston, who was interviewed by two different interviewers in sessions a few months apart. Foxy was more familiar with the first interviewer, whereas the second was a complete stranger and of a different racial background to Foxy. The study looked at several grammatical variables and found that across the two interviews most of them were sensitive to style shifting. Foxy's language was reported as 'less vernacular and more standard' (1994: 248) in the second interview which appears to be a direct result of addressee change. Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994: 242) conclude that 'stylistic differences between Foxy Boston's speech in interviews...taken as wholes, will be regarded as instances of addressee-influenced style-shift, since the primary situational differences between the interviews are the race and the familiarity of the interviewers'. One might suppose, then, that as the main difference between repetitive call centre calls is a change in telephone interlocutor, any instances of style-shift on these calls can be attributed to a change in audience.

More recent re-examination and application of the audience design model occurs in Bell's (2001) Maori study where the Maori language is revealed as a resource for speakers to either put across their own ethnic identity, or show an awareness of the audience's ethnic identity. As a result, this study indicates the need for a slight re-think of some of the main limitations of the audience design framework. As Bell (2001: 167) explains, in the Maori study the speakers 'are not accommodating to the interviewers through convergence... nor are they necessarily dissociating themselves

from the individual interviewer through divergence'. One of the main theoretical problems with the original audience design model, as Bell (2001: 162) himself admits, is that it does not adequately account for 'initiative' style shifts which Bell (2001: 147) defines as 'a redefinition by speakers of their own identity in relation to their audience'. In order to achieve this, Bell (2001: 162) proposes an integration of audience design and 'referee design' (also referred to as hyper-speaker shift (Bell 1984: 2001)). Bell (2001: 162) argues that 'individual speakers use style – and other aspects of their language repertoire – to represent their identity or lay claim to other identities'. Referee design explains how speakers use linguistic resources to identify with a reference group that is important to them, which helps to explain why the Maori speakers in Bell's (2001) study may appear to be diverging from their interlocutor when in fact what they are actually doing is affirming their ethnic identity. Moreover, they may not achieve this via consistent patterns of style shift, but instead via individual tokens. The Maori data show that 'individual tokens of the variable may have heightened significance in the flow of the interaction' (Bell 2001: 167) In this way, one-off, salient tokens may have the power to signify an identity and 'stake a stylistic claim' (Bell 2001:168).

The idea of initiative style-shift, i.e. speakers drawing on linguistic resources available within the speech community in order to respond to different audience-types (Bell 2001:145) links in with a type of linguistic stylisation known as 'crossing' (Rampton 1991, 1995), which he describes as 'the use of language varieties associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker does not normally "belong" to' (1995: 14). In this way, by employing crossing strategies the speaker does not appear to be responding directly to audiences present, but to an absent reference group, which

tends to be associated with a minority group or subculture. The school children in Rampton's study were 'performing' Asian speech against a backdrop of their own non-Asian habitual speech styles, often as an anti-racist strategy. This phenomenon of stylistic performance of an 'other' is dealt with in an institutional setting by Coupland (2001) on dialect stylisation, where he examines the behaviour of speakers on an early morning radio show broadcast by BBC Wales. Coupland (2001: 345) describes stylisation as the 'knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context' (characterised by Rampton's (1991, 1995) work) and dialect stylisation as 'performing non-current-first person personas by phonological and related means, sometimes in play or parody'. Coupland's (2001) research shows that during broadcast, the radio presenters in the study playfully select from what Coupland (2001: 347) refers to as 'a pre-existing repertoire of culturally significant Welsh dialect forms of English to project shifting social personas and stances'.

Coupland's (2001) and other more recent formulations of an addressee-based model of style attempt to explain motivations for style-shift which do not restrict themselves to a conceptualisation of style which operates along a single dimension. Moreover, modern approaches to style have begun viewing it as a resource used by speakers during the construction and co-construction of individual and group identities. This functional, multidimensional approach views the divide between stylistic and social constraints, as "a fine and highly permeable one indeed" (Eckert & Rickford 2001: 6) and does not see style as secondary to linguistic and social constraints which is what some of the earlier studies of style mentioned above have tended to do.

In attempting to contextualise her own theory of style, Eckert (2005) provides a comprehensive review of other previous approaches, including some of the studies already mentioned here, and groups them into the ‘first wave’, ‘second wave’ and ‘third wave’ theories. First wave theories, (of which Labov’s 1966 study is one), tend to look at what Eckert (2005: 2) refers to as ‘the big picture’ by looking at the way variables are distributed across large urban populations. These studies place their primary focus on capturing the vernacular and, as explained above, they associate this with least attention paid to speech by informants. Fieldwork techniques for these studies tend to involve minimal contact by the researcher with the community, and speakers are classified according to social categories, especially relating to class and gender, which are pre-determined rather than being informed via detailed examination of the local community from within. This causes a range of theoretical difficulties, which Eckert lists in detail (2005: 5). As she (*ibid*) explains:

“All of these complications of categorization schemes point to the probability that there are dynamics underlying these categories that deserve attention: that explanations for variation are to be found in the culture of class and gender, and further that the avoidance of stigma is not the only form of agency in variation.”

Second wave studies sought to avoid these complications via a different fieldwork methodology. Instead of brief, macro-investigation of the community, second wave studies sought to examine what was happening at the local level and therefore provide data which fill many of the gaps left by first wave theories. They use ethnographic fieldwork methods in order to gain insider knowledge of local practices. By spending long periods of time immersed in the community, the fieldworker is able to “discover, rather than to assume, locally salient categories” (Eckert 2005: 5). Some of her own,



most well known research, including that on the Jocks and Burnouts in Detroit (1989, 2000) which is discussed further below, is carried out using this second wave approach.

In comparison to first and second wave theories of style which focus on the way in which individual linguistic variables index identity, are third wave theories of style. This approach concentrates on the ways in which speakers select linguistic resources from the wider 'sociolinguistic landscape, recombining them to make a distinctive style' which they do via a process of *bricolage* (Eckert 1996: 3). Eckert (1994) refers to her work in Detroit (1989, 2000) in order to exemplify the 'third wave' approach to style. Her ethnographic research in the school revealed that language was not operating on its own in the process of stylistic construction, but instead forms 'part of a broader semiotic system that includes such things as clothing, territory, musical taste, activities, and stances' (Eckert, 2004: 6). The two ideologically opposed groups of the jocks and the burnouts had different styles which were made up of combinations of many different features, some of which were linguistic. For example, burnouts were found to have an 'urban-orientation' which was characterised by leather jackets, dark clothing, wallet chains, etc. as well as the use of the urban variants of /e/, /uh/ and /ay/. The jocks, on the other hand, had a style which was 'anti-urban' and orientated towards the high school as an institution which, among other things was manifested by 'decorating their lockers, wearing school jackets and using standard grammar' (Eckert, 2004: 6). These sorts of findings suggest that in order to understand the way in which linguistic variables are used, researchers need to look from the 'top down' at wider styles and stylistic meaning.

### 1.3.1 Styling

The concept of style in the call centre has already been examined rather extensively by Cameron (2000a, 2000b). She argues that the nature of call centre work is such that workers are often subjected to various degrees of control by management to ensure maximum productivity and also to ensure they project a predefined brand persona. As there is no visual channel with the customer, the agent is expected to achieve this using only his/her voice. At the crux of Cameron's argument is that although the agent is responsible for such a projection in daily interactions over the phone, the means for constructing the persona via language, and specifically, via stylistic practice, are not under his/her exclusive control.

Cameron's (2000a, 2000b) main focus is a process which she refers to as 'styling', which she relates but distinguishes from other stylistic phenomena discussed above, e.g. crossing and stylization. The distinctions lie in the way in which workers are linguistically groomed via various measures peculiar to the call centre industry. These measures include training, scripting, other forms of linguistic codification, and surveillance, so that workers talk and interact in ways which are designed by call centre management in order to promote a positive brand image. Cameron argues (2000a: 99) that call centres "put emphasis on standardising the output or 'product', talk" with the goal being to "give customers a completely uniform and consistent experience of the organization, regardless of what employee they happen to find themselves talking to". As a direct measure to ensure these goals are consistently achieved by workers, their performance is constantly under scrutiny by management, enabling routine assessment of the linguistic performance of an individual based on a

set of pre-defined criteria. The main method of ‘overseeing’ workers in this way is usually done via the routine recording and monitoring of all calls by management. This operates under the assumption that if workers are aware that they are potentially being overheard by at any time, this supposedly motivates them to adhere to the prescribed style of speaking<sup>5</sup>.

Cameron (2000a) argues that call centre surveillance is closely tied to the overall process of ‘codification’, itself a key component of the styling process, whereby the agent is told what to say and how to say it<sup>6</sup>. She explains (2000a: 98):

*“By ‘codification’ I mean that workers are not just told in general terms what kind of role they are expected to play, but given detailed rules for the enactment of that role, or even a fully specified script”.*

She draws parallels with Eckert’s (1996: 3) third wave account of style construction as a process of *bricolage* and the idea that speakers select linguistic resources from the larger world and use them in new ways in their local communities of practice. Although Cameron argues that this is also an appropriate framework in which to account for the way in which style is constructed in call centres, she suggests that the role of speaker and stylistic agent are somewhat separate (2000a, 2000b). She suggests that agents themselves do not have full control in the process of stylistic construction, but rather pre-determined styles are *imposed upon them* by management

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<sup>5</sup> Fernie & Metcalf (1998) argue that call centres are characterised by the operation of an ‘Electronic Panopticon’ originating from Jeremy Bentham’s design for a prison which was later adapted by Foucault (1977), the Panopticon is based around a central observation tower from which individuals can never be sure if they are being watched. As Foucault summarises, “the surveillance is permanent in its effects even if it is discontinuous in its action” (1977: 201).

<sup>6</sup> The extent to which this occurs is dependent on the individual call centre. For example, in the telephone bank in which I worked, the linguistic prescription was far greater (at least overtly) than the British Gas call centre analysed for this present study.

in an attempt to ensure they speak in a certain way. She describes the call centre as ‘a community of practice with a distinctive way of speaking’ which is ‘constructed through bricolage, using resources for meaning’ (Cameron: 2000a: 88). Importantly for this present study, she cites prosodic phenomena as prominent in this process.

Cameron (2000a: 106) argues that ‘many call centres seek to control not only *what* operators say but also *how* they say it’. In other words, linguistic codification in call centres goes beyond simply providing agents with a script and telling them to read from it; they are also given explicit directions relating to the spoken performance of the scripted text, paying particular attention to prosodic features such as speed and volume of delivery and ‘tone of voice’. She found that in the call centre training materials she examined, these prosodic features are directly related to degrees of emotion and/or friendliness projected by workers during calls. One example she gives comes from a call centre instructive checklist (2000a: 107), which states: ‘the depth of pitch in the member of staff’s voice will determine the degree of sincerity and confidence associated with the message that they are giving the caller’. She notes that instructions like this which relate to an agent’s prosodic style are rarely scripted (2000a: 108). Instead, they tend to be prescribed via training manuals and instructive checklists like the example cited above<sup>7</sup>. It should be pointed out here that ‘depth of pitch’ on the instructive checklist is a rather subjective and fuzzy description which does not appear to be based upon any measurable linguistic criteria. Cameron (2000a: 108) herself notes that the statement is not particularly helpful for either assessors using the checklist or for linguists taking an analytical perspective. She (2000a: 108)

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<sup>7</sup> The extent to which agents/ managers understand what is meant by these rather vague instructions is not particularly clear at this point, and therefore qualitative examination of workers’ interpretation of and attitudes to these type of instructions was carried out for this present study and is reported in Chapter 3 below.

comments that ‘the most obvious possibility is that it [‘depth of pitch’] means something roughly equivalent to fundamental frequency, but if so it is still unclear what a satisfactory performance would be’.

Cameron’s (2000a; 2000b) research highlights that any study of call centre style must pay heed to these issues of codification and surveillance which are so prominent in call centre working practices. So far, the evidence suggests that these practices have some degree of an effect on the stylistic performance of call centre workers, at least in theory, but there is not a great deal of objective data which show this in practice, especially where prosody is concerned. It might be possible to tell agents to use a ‘friendly’ tone of voice in a coaching session or via a printed training document, but exactly how far reaching is this on the actual performance of the worker?

### **1.3.2. Style in this Study**

Cameron’s (2000a, 2000b) research suggests that in general, call centre agents have less control over their own stylistic practices than speakers in other situations and therefore this is also an important area for investigation using the British Gas data. For this reason this research aims to get a fuller understanding of how much control agents actually have over their own stylistic performance and how much the prescriptive practices of management affect this. In this respect, some aspects of the audience design model may appear relevant for this study of call centres because it includes a taxonomy of different audience member types, some of which can be used to account for the rather complex situation that surrounds a call centre call. The audience design taxonomy ranks audience roles via the nature of their presence in the interaction and their resulting influence over the speaker. For everyday conversations,

the most influential audience member-type is the *addressee* (Bell 1984: 159), i.e. the subject directly addressed by the speaker. *Auditors* are those who are not directly addressed but are ratified participants of the conversation. *Overhearers* are non-ratified participants of whom the speaker is aware, and *eavesdroppers* are non-ratified audience members of whom the speaker is unaware. In the call centre, alongside contact with the addressee on the other end of the phone, there is also the constant threat of potential overhearers, i.e. members of management listening in to their calls remotely. As Cameron (2000a: 99) points out, surveillance practices in call centres not only allow the management to monitor general performance, ‘managers and supervisors also monitor the operator’s *linguistic* performance’. In this way, a study of call centre speech must take some account of the role played by audience during calls. It is reasonable to assume that there may be some tension between the influence of addressees (i.e. customers at the local level) and overhearers (i.e. management) and that patterns of stylistic variation may be attributable to this.

However, although it is acknowledged that audience is an important consideration for a study of call centre speech, there are practical difficulties with the data which prevent examination of the addressee’s speech. Part of the confidentiality agreement surrounding the calls analysed in this study stipulates that in addition to ensuring all personal information is anonymised, the data for the customers in general is not to be made a point of interest. No sociolinguistic data (e.g. age, regionality, ethnicity, etc.) was made available to me and therefore aside from making broad guesses about the customers, it would be difficult to gain any meaningful information about them that could be correlated with agents’ linguistic behaviour. But even if these difficulties were to be overcome, it is difficult to reconcile the Audience Design model (even in

its updated formulation (Bell, 2001)) with the ‘third wave’ approach to style which is taken by the current research, and the idea that stylistic construction is not confined to a single dimension, where individual variables index identities, but is instead a process of *bricolage* (Eckert 1996, 2004). Although it is very reasonable to argue that a speaker’s identity is closely tied to his/her relationships with other individuals, there are too many constraints imposed on this by Audience Design which, as Eckert (2004: 3) points out, ‘is a serious limitation that does not allow for creativity and change’.

Cameron’s (2000a, 2000b) study of styling in call centres demonstrates that third wave approaches to style provide a more suitable framework with which to understand the complex stylistic practices which take place in these types of working environments. As discussed above, this approach requires the analyst to begin by looking at wider styles and investigate the linguistic resources which contribute towards them, and the meaning attributed to these resources at the local level rather than attempting to isolate individual variables and attempt to link them to social categories. An important ethnographic construct which underpins this approach is the Community of Practice, and so this construct will be explored in more detail as part of the methodological considerations for this thesis in chapter 2. It will also be explored in chapter 4, where the process of learning in the call centre is looked at in detail, as well as the way in which individuals integrate into a new community of practice when they gain employment there.

In his most recent discussion of style, Coupland (2007: 178) suggests that ‘approaching styling as a social practice has allowed us to see a much wider range of social meanings, designs and consequences than structural stylistics could’. This

highlights that within sociolinguistics we have now moved away from traditional structural models which attempt to classify individuals according to broad social categories and then correlate their membership of these categories with the use of individual linguistic variables. Stylistic practice is now viewed as a much more fluid and complex process, with not individual variables, but whole *styles* (made up of collections of variables) being associated with wider categories relating to the identity of speakers'.

It is therefore this conception of style, and the use of ethnographic methodologies which enable access to local stylistic practices which will underpin this current research.

#### **1. 4 Analysing Telephone Interaction**

The methodological approach to analysing the data for this study is grounded in conversation analysis, and in particular, a type of conversation analysis that looks at the interactional content alongside prosodic patterns rather than treating them as separate. This is an approach which has only relatively recently been developed, most notably by Couper-Kuhlen (2001) and the York group (see for example: French and Local (1983); Local (1996, 2003, 2007); Curl et al. (2004); Local & Walker (2005). In order to understand the reasoning behind this methodology, and the advantages it has for studying call centre speech, it will be useful to look briefly at the origins of this method and some of its defining analytical features.

Conversation analysis (CA) has its origins in the sociological work of Goffman (1955, 1983) and Garfinkel (1967), and was formulated as a linguistic paradigm by Sacks (1972) and Schegloff (1968). Conversation analysis (more latterly referred to as talk-



in-interaction) examines the practices of interactional participants, focusing on the local sequential actions of speakers rather than on external frameworks or abstract ideas or about human behaviour. This is one of the characterisations of CA which distinguishes it from other approaches to analysing language: a general scepticism of traditional ideas about language use and human social conduct which so often form the framework for other studies of language. Another element which characterises CA is the importance placed upon the turn-taking mechanism of conversation. Each turn must be considered in relation to the preceding turn as well as the turn which follows, in order to understand how participants co-construct the conversation and how the talk functions generally. Thus, CA maintains a rigorously empirical approach to analysing speech data which requires the following:

- That the analysis is grounded in the observable behaviour of participants
- That the analysis is sequential in nature

These features are also adhered to within a more recent formulation of the CA approach which is pioneered by the York group (see for example: French and Local (1983); Local (1996, 2003, 2007) Curl et al. (2004); Local & Walker (2005). 'The phonetics of talk-in-interaction' or 'interactional phonetics' is a CA-based methodology which, in addition to the analytical constraints outlined above, seeks to 'conduct phonetic and interactional analysis in parallel and not serially' (Local and Walker, 2005: 121). This is echoed by Couper-Kuhlen and Selting's (1996) suggestion that to combine the fields of CA and prosodic study (where prosody is not limited to pitch configurations alone) into a single field of interactional prosody would be highly advantageous.

Interactional phonetics implies that the phonetic detail for analysis alongside the interactional detail should consist of general phonetic parameters/ clusters of phonetic features (e.g., pitch, tempo, loudness, voice quality) rather than a single feature. For example, Local and Walker (2005: 126) identify a number of systematically deployed phonetic features which are linked to 'holding' tokens of standalone 'so' in American English, including: they are noticeably louder than the same speaker's preceding speech; they are noticeably higher in pitch than the same speaker's preceding speech; have final glottal closure which may be preceded by a short period of final creaky voice. In this way they demonstrate correspondence between certain clusters of phonetic features and interactional behaviour.

As interactional phonetic methodology concentrates on locating a range of fine-grained, phonetic features alongside an interactional event, it requires a relatively high quality of data in order to do this, which is why there were some difficulties in carrying out accurate phonetic (either auditory and acoustic) analyses on the British Gas corpus. In addition to high levels of ambient noise from the call centre, and the potential acoustic effects of the telephone on the speech signal, the recording samples themselves have been compressed by the call centre to only 1 bit of information (presumably due to storage constraints). However, as will be shown in Chapter 6, it is still possible to carry out a limited analysis of some features, and tie them closely to the interactional section with which they correspond. Essentially, this approach was taken despite the difficulties with the data quality because it became clear from a very early stage that what the agents were doing phonetically was deeply ingrained in the

interaction itself, and therefore to treat them as independent of one another would potentially remove any insight into the agents' behaviour.

#### **1.4.1 The Structure of Telephone Openings**

Early proponents of CA were interested in naturally occurring conversations or 'everyday' talk, where previously this type of data was considered disordered and unworthy of linguistic scrutiny. Schegloff's (1968) first publication on CA states that 'the raw data of everyday conversational interaction can be subjected to rigorous analysis', and therefore much of the early corpus of CA work is concerned with this type of interaction. Schegloff (1968: 24) argues that this type of speech data occurs naturally in telephone conversation, stating that 'what people do on the telephone is talk. Conversations on the telephone are, accordingly, natural materials for investigators working in this area [conversation analysis], not because of any special interest in the telephone, but because they are instances of conversational interaction'.

As telephone speech represents the type of interaction interesting to conversation analysts and provides an endless source of data, much of Schegloff's work (1968, 1979, 1986, 2002), centres around a corpus of telephone calls by American speakers. Indeed, there has been a considerable amount of investigation of telephone speech (both institutional and everyday) since Schegloff's (1968) analysis of American telephone call openings, including by: Zimmerman (1984); Schegloff (1986, 1979, 2002); Firth (1995). Couper-Kuhlen (2001, 2004); Mazeland (2004); Curl et al. (2004); Local and Walker (2005). Some of this work has a particular interest in the presence of the telephone in the interaction. However, much work in the CA tradition (such as that carried out by the York group) makes use of telephone

speech for the same methodological reasons favoured by Schegloff rather than any specific interest in the telephone itself. Schegloff's enduring 'template' (Hopper 1992) for telephone openings (outlined below) has been adopted by many of the studies of telephone calls which follow it and is used here as the frame for analysing the call centre calls examined in Chapter 5.

Schegloff (1986: 114) claims that telephone openings have a distinctive shape and tend to appear rather routine - almost automatic - because they tend to follow a set formula, with speakers appearing to be 'just going through the motions'. This sense of routineness is underlined by the remarkable degree of uniformity in openings across all 450 calls he examined, and as he (1986: 114) explains, 'there are few other places in ordinary conversation where one can fairly easily locate strings of 8-10 nearly identical turns in four (or more) entirely different conversations with different participants'. He goes on to suggest that this routine has rather more significance than it may appear, and that it functions as what he refers to as 'an achievement out of structured sets of alternative courses or directions which the talk and the interaction can take' (1986: 114). In other words, he argues that the apparently mundane, perfunctory nature of call openings disguises an important interactional event which potentially determines the course of the following conversation.

It can be assumed that both participants in a domestic telephone conversation each have their own aims for that conversation (to a greater or lesser extent), including topic choice, interests and 'business to be done' (1986: 116) which Schegloff terms 'talkables/ tellables'. However, before these talkables can be approached, the

participants must negotiate their way through a series of four or so sequences which he found to be virtually standard to each call.

The basic opening structure which Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986) identified can be broken down into four component parts:

**1. Summons/ answer**, i.e. the mechanical ring of the telephone, prompting an answerer to lift the receiver and give a response which indicates that communication can proceed. In response to the summons, the answer part (T1) of the adjacency pair can take several forms, usually 'hello' or a variant of this depending on the authority of the answerer and their certainty of the caller's identity. 'Hello' is also important as serving as a 'voice sample for recognition by those who might recognize it' (Schegloff 1986: 23).

**2. Identification/ recognition**, i.e. the participants self-identify and/or recognise the other party.

**3. Greetings**, where one or both participants greet the other. Schegloff (1986: 126) notes that if the caller recognises the person who answers from the voice sample in the first sequence then they will demonstrate this recognition (or lack of it) in the following turn (T2). This can be achieved in a variety of ways which will determine the next turn also: 'this may be done by a great variety of forms, from a minimal greeting term, to a highly idiosyncratic recipient-designed utterance, to the inclusion of an address term for the person whom the caller believes they have recognised' These sequences are therefore more overtly concerned with speaker identification

than the preceding summons/answer sequence. Schegloff found that almost without exception, any utterance in T2 will be linked in some way to the caller's recognition or non-recognition of the answerer.

4) **Howareyou?** This fourth sequence is sometimes the general reason for the call, but also it can be a lead into the 'reason for the call'. Sacks (1975: 68-9) argues that 'howareyou' can in some interactional contexts function as a greeting, rather than an enquiry after the well-being of the addressee. However, Schegloff (1986: 129) found that this does not occur in the telephone conversations from his corpus, where 'howareyou' directly addresses the 'current state of recipient' and therefore demands a relevant answer for the next turn. In addition to this he also notes that this answer can be one of three types: positive (e.g. 'terrific'); negative (e.g. 'awful'); or neutral (e.g. O.K.).

Once this series of adjacency pairs has been acted out, Schegloff argues the next point is the most likely placing for 'the anchor' or 'first topic' of the call. In many situations this anchor is raised by the caller as the initiator of the call and can be thought of as 'the reason for the call'. However, there are numerous places over the four sequences where this anchor can be effected and a shift in the direction of the call can occur:

'getting to the anchor position involves collaborative action by the two parties to coordinate their way through the canonical order of sequences ... each of which is the vehicle for accomplishing distinctive other types of interactional work. In the course of taking up those jobs through those

sequences, there are ways in which the first topic can ‘come up’ or be designedly raised before the anchor position.’ (Schegloff 1986: 116-7).

As the data for this present study are telephone openings, Schegloff’s (1968) template will prove useful in locating and defining the sequence of interactional events which occur in the British Gas corpus. Once the sequence has been outlined, it will then be possible to analyse the phonetic features which accompany each move. However, it is necessary to allow for a slightly different opening structure in the call centre data. The main consideration for this is that call centre calls are made within a formal, institutional setting and have a specific goal orientation. The data in chapter 5 demonstrate the way in which these factors cause the opening structure to deviate somewhat from the structure above. Further considerations relating to talk which occurs in an institutional setting are explored in more detail below.

#### **1.4.2 Institutional Talk**

From the 1970s onwards, CA began to turn its attention to more formal (institutional ) interactional settings, which is what prompted Schegloff (1987) to offer the term ‘talk-in-interaction’ as a more accurate description of this approach to linguistic analysis. Many studies of work place interaction (including workplace telephone talk) have been carried out using the microanalytical approach of talk-in-interaction, for example: Atkinson and Maxwell (1979); Zimmerman (1984); Button (1987); Heritage and Greatbatch (1991); Mazeland (2004), Nevile (2004); Baker et al. (2005). Drew and Heritage (1992) note that institutional interactions involve at least one participant who is ‘representing’ an institution of some type, and that these interactions are task-related with certain goals on the part of at least one of the participants related to the

nature of the particular institution. They define five further areas which tend to be characteristically different in workplace talk to everyday talk, and for this reason are major “foci of research in institutional talk” (1992: 28). These are:

- *lexical choice*
- *turn taking*
- *sequential organisation*
- *overall structure*
- *social relations*

Most importantly, Drew and Heritage (1992: 50) argue that institutionality of an interaction is neither defined nor bound by physical setting, and so although, for example, baker’s shop interactions mostly take place within a baker’s shop, it is possible to remove them from this setting and for them to retain their institutionality (my example). If at least one of the participants takes on a professional identity, it is this which makes the interactions institutional in essence. As Cameron (2000a: 55) points out, “the ‘institutional’ nature of talk is not usually something given in advance, but something accomplished by participants in the course of talking”. However, it is here where call centre interactions can be slightly differentiated from other types of institutional talk. Essentially, Cameron (2000a: 56) argues that call centres are a type of workplace where management “*do* define the kinds of talk produced within them to a greater extent than the CA formulation suggests”, and their institutional setting *does* appear have an effect on the speech of workers as a result. The data from this present study provide further evidence to show that this is the case in the British Gas call centre, at least for some features of the agents’ speech.



However, the extent to which managerial control extends to prosodic features is revealed to be rather more complex, perhaps as a result of the fact that 'tone of voice' appears to be a rather more difficult concept for the management to pin down and prescribe explicitly than other linguistic features (e.g. lexis).

In her most recent comment on language practices in call centres, Cameron (2008: 144) highlights that 'talk-in-interaction is irreducibly a locally-managed, 'bottom-up' phenomenon, whose detailed organisation results from the local, moment-by-moment actions of participants rather than being determined in advance by any overarching set of norms or structures'. However, as Cameron (2008: 144) goes on to argue, this is somewhat at odds with the idea that call centre agents may not be in full control of their speech during calls due to the process of styling explained in section 1.3.1 above. Cameron (2008: 144) notes the spread of a 'top-down' type of talk where 'talk is designed to a large extent not by the people actually doing the talking, but by managers and consultants intent on controlling and standardising institutional interactions'. As a result Cameron (2008: 145) argues that this type of talk is potentially problematic for the micro-analytic approach taken by conversation analysts, suggesting that when talk is designed from the top down, an approach which refuses to look beyond the interactional data for full explication, 'will often be insufficient on its own to account for the manner in which the interaction unfolds'. If managerial control does affect the speech behaviour of workers involved in top-down talk, it is likely that most of that control will extend to parties not directly involved at the local interactional level and thus above the micro-analytical radar.

Cameron (2008: 154) is not, however, suggesting that this type of talk requires a completely different analytical approach, but rather an acknowledgement of the

possibility that everything necessary for insightful analysis is not necessarily contained within the data. Indeed, Cameron (2008: 152) goes on to point out that the CA emphasis on joint negotiation of the order of institutional routines remains as pertinent for top-down talk as it does for other types of talk. Cameron (2008: 152) refers to research on routine interactions by Leidner (1993) whose research revealed that the non-institutional participant may well orient to the routine nature of an interaction by using routinised behaviour him/herself. Cameron (2008; 152) argues that 'in call centre interaction it is typical for callers to display their understanding of the routinised nature of the call, and some may display quite detailed knowledge of the prescribed sequence of moves. Evidence for this is also provided by the British Gas data, and is discussed in Chapter 5.

Conversation analysis (specifically the approach motivated by interactional phonetics) provides a useful analytical structure for this study, in terms of what one might expect for telephone calls, and how to approach them. However, there are constraints (as Cameron (2008) points out) relating to the additional factors surrounding call centre calls. The ethnographic findings from this present study indicate that there is some degree of managerial input into the speech of workers, as well as additional non-local constraints from the training process which are not overtly referred to in the course of the interactions. The data also indicate that there appear to be practical constraints associated with making high numbers of repetitive calls throughout the working day. CA's rigorous methodology of looking only at information contained within the data does not allow for these special considerations. However, by using a CA approach which is informed by additional data from an ethnographic investigation, this method appears very suitable for the study of call centre speech.

## 1.5 Telephone Talk: Some Additional Considerations

There has already been substantial research into conversations held over the telephone by conversation analysts, such as the work by Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986)<sup>8</sup>, and others mentioned in section 1.4.1 above, as well as studies of telephone calls from and to institutions: Zimmerman (1984); Firth (1995), and analysis of the intonation patterns of telephone workers during business calls: House and Youd (1991); Liberman & McLemore (1992). There is also some research which is specifically about styling and the effect of managerial control and working conditions on the speech of call centre agents (Cameron 2000a, 2000b), discussed in section 1.3.1 above

The most obvious difference between face-to-face interaction and telephone speech is the absence of a visual channel in the latter. It might be reasonably assumed that where speakers are unable to see to one another during conversation, they need to do extra work in order to manage the conversation successfully. However, research carried out by both conversation analysts (e.g. Schegloff 1968; 1974) and psycholinguists (e.g. Cook and Lalljee 1992) suggests that despite the lack of visual stimulus, telephone conversations are remarkably similar to face-to-face interactions in many ways, most notably in the way the conversation is structured and locally managed by participants. Schegloff (1979: 24) notes that from a talk-in-interaction perspective, telephone conversation 'shows few differences from conversation in other settings and media', and that 'the talk people do on the telephone is not fundamentally different from the other talk they do'. He adds that speakers even tend to employ the same facial expressions, postures, and body movements as they would

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<sup>8</sup> Schegloff's (1968, 1979, 1986) work on telephone conversational openings is considered in more detail in Chapter 3.

during face-to-face encounters.

In their study of telephone interaction, Cook and Lalljee (1992: 213) hypothesise that a lack of visual stimuli will result in speakers compensating verbally – or as they refer to it, using “verbal substitutes for visual signals”. They suggest that speakers could use a number of different strategies for this, including a compensatory increase in back-channelling (i.e. the use of minimal responses/ positive feedback in order to encourage continued talk during conversation), an increase in interruptions and pauses, and an overall altering of the structure with longer utterances and less frequent speaker-change. However, the results of their study confirm that in reality speakers do not compensate in this way, and that the influence the telephone has upon the structure and management of the conversation is minimal. They conclude (1992: 213) by saying: “there was ... little evidence of ‘breakdown’ of communication, nor any change in its form” in their data.

However, although telephone conversations may be managed and structured in the same way as other interactions, this does not necessarily mean that they are similar in other linguistic respects. A study by Dorris, Gentry and Kelley (1971) found that one aspect of verbal communication that *was* affected by the presence of the telephone was ‘formality’, where in general the telephone prompted an increase in formality by speakers. They argue (1971: 401) that this may be because face-to-face interaction produces “more emphasis on the human and reciprocal processes of interpersonal communication”. In his Cardiff study, Coupland (1980) also found that the telephone seemed to have an effect on the speech of his informant in terms of formality, with his results indicating that a change from face-to-face interaction to telephone contact

prompted a style-shift by his speaker, with her tending to adopt a more formal ('standard') style during telephone conversations. This indicates that although the telephone might have no effect on the way in which speakers locally manage their interactions, it does appear to have at least some influence over their *stylistic* performance.

A related issue which has not been investigated in great detail, but which is relevant to this present study, is the effect of the non-visual channel on the prosodic performance of speakers. Where attitude cannot be displayed via facial expression, it might be reasonable to hypothesise that speakers compensate via prosodic resources.

Indeed, Cook and Lalljee (1992) comment that the one thing that did appear to be affected by the telephone in their data was 'tone-of-voice', but they do not investigate this further, claiming that it is not possible to measure it reliably.

Another of the possible effects of using a telephone on prosodic style is an increase of mean F0 due to speakers talking more loudly than they might during non-telephone interaction owing to the Lombard Effect (Lombard 1911). The Lombard Effect is where a noisy environment prompts a speaker to increase his/her level of vocal effort and speak more loudly, and has been employed in experimental research e.g. Koster (2002); Jessen et al (2005) where there is a need to get the subjects to increase their normal vocal effort. The Lombard Effect has been found to prompt not only an increase in the amplitude level in decibels of the subjects' speech but also an increase in F0 (plus other reported effects such as vowel-lengthening). Using a telephone in a noisy call centre where there may be a relatively high degree of background noise is therefore likely to cause a similar rise in pitch as call centre

agents attempt to be heard (and hear their interlocutor) above the hundreds of other agents talking on the phone around them. However, although the call centre floor is a relatively noisy place due to all the telephone interaction which takes place there, the Lombard Effect may not operate as much as expected. Call centre agents do not take part in calls using a conventional telephone handset. Instead, they are equipped with a headset that consists of over-the-ear headphones and a microphone positioned close to their mouth. Used together, they may well block out much background noise as well as amplify the agent's voice, and so reduce the need for an increase in vocal effort. Thus, while it seems likely that the conditions of talking in the call centre might lead to agents showing the Lombard Effect to a certain degree (leading to a potential increase of F0), it is not possible to know to what extent the Effect does actually operate for these speakers. It would certainly be interesting to investigate experimentally the contribution of the Lombard Effect on F0, amplitude and other longer domain phonetic properties, which result specifically from the conditions experienced by call centre agents as they work on the floor.

In Cameron's (2000a, 2000b) examination of call centres discussed in section 1.3.1 she finds that the prescriptive measures taken by management almost certainly bring the non-visual status of the interaction into the forefront of workers' consciousness whilst at work, and prompt them to adapt their intonational patterns to conform to a prescribed performance (if one exists). In other words, if the interactions were *not* being conducted over the telephone, less attention might be paid by management to

the workers' prosodic performance, and indeed it appears that call centre work is a profession<sup>9</sup> which highlights prosody as an area for focus.

As part of my own research for this study I asked call centre agents whether or not they had a 'telephone voice'<sup>10</sup>. Almost everyone answered that yes, they spoke differently when they were using the telephone to when they were talking off-call. When I asked them how their 'telephone voice' was different from their normal voice, responses included 'less slang', 'more polite', and in a few cases, 'more neutral' or 'less Glasgow'. Although prosody was not explicitly mentioned (indeed it would probably require linguistic insight to do so), being polite entails a whole set of linguistic features, including prosodic ones. If the telephone is directly linked to politeness and/or an increase in formality (in business contexts this appears to be the case), it is reasonable to assume that using it may well affect one's prosodic style.

## **1.6 Other Considerations**

Much of this present study is concerned with looking at external (social) factors which contribute to local ways of speaking, and these are brought into focus in chapters 2, 3 and 4. However, this does not mean that internal (linguistic) factors must be ignored altogether. The possible effect of the telephone on prosodic style has already been discussed in section 1.5 above, but there are other aspects of call centre work which must also be considered as having a potential influence on a speaker's prosodic style. This present section therefore considers some of the practicalities of

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<sup>9</sup> There are many other professions where talk (and in particular, persuasive, prescribed or 'groomed' talk) is central to the business activity and therefore where intonation would also be of interest. For example: public announcing, commentary, etc.

<sup>10</sup> This was done via interviews and via a survey of 150 workers. Further information on both can be found in chapter 2.

the call environment, referred to collectively in section 1.1 above as ‘call centre constraints’, and examines the possible linguistic effects these may have.

Cameron (2000a, 2000b) refers to call centres as ‘communication factories’ because although in many respects they look and feel like a white-collar, office environment, they tend to apply the same logic and strict routines as a factory production line<sup>11</sup>.

One of the defining features of call centre calls is that they are highly repetitive and routinised and this is indeed the case in the sales calls analysed in this study. Agents make hundreds of identical calls a week, in quick succession, with the automated dialling system often giving them only seconds between one call and the next. This is something which distinguishes them quite dramatically from other types of talk including other conversations over the telephone, and it may well have an effect on the behaviour (linguistic and otherwise) of agents during calls.

There is a range of intonation contours in English which are associated specifically with stereotyped or ‘stylized’ utterances, sometimes referred to as ‘calling’ or ‘vocative’ intonation. According to Ladd (1978: 530), the main characteristic of stylized intonation is a stepping down from one level pitch to another, as well as other features such as ‘chanting voice quality, prolonged syllables, and fixed pitch intervals’. Toivonen (2005: 1) describes stylization as a type of intonation contour that accompanies utterances where “what is communicated is in some way a predictable or routine (ritualistic message)” and that stylized intonation tends to be located in domestic situations “where the message is part of people’s everyday

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<sup>11</sup> Cameron also points out (2000b: 193) that we can find similar repetitious behaviour in other white collar industries (such as a supermarket checkout), but it could be argued that although some elements of the production line may exist elsewhere, call centres are unique in the full package of demands (some of them linguistic) that they place on their workers.



activities". This idea of stylized intonation being associated with routine or even boring utterances is reinforced by Roach (1991: 140), and also by Brazil (1997:136) who suggest that stylization accompanies "certain language formulae which accompany oft-repeated business". It is therefore reasonable to assume that in some types of (scripted) call centre interactions, where speakers repeat the same small set of utterances a large number of times a day, parts of these utterances may well show stylized intonation patterns. In their research on intonational patterns in business calls (where the institutional participants are required to answer incoming calls in restaurants and similar businesses), Lieberman and McLemore (1992: 82) found that about half of the textual units analysed carried a stylised intonational pattern which they argue is in part a response to the implied distance between participants during a telephone call, and in part because 'the textual form of the response is highly regular and conventionalised, and the content of the response is also known and predictable, for the most part'. The data analysed in this present study do not reveal such extreme patterns of stylisation. However, as the results in Chapter 6 indicate, some of the intonational contours identified do have a stylised flavour which may be explained via the same reasons given by Liberman and McLemore (1992) for their data.

The general effect of the script on the speaking style of call centre agents must also be taken into consideration here. We can obviously distinguish between 'spontaneous' and 'read' speaking styles, but within the read category there are further distinctions. Wichmann (2000: 20) argues that read speech differs according to how much it has been rehearsed, where 'a fluent monologue can be completely unrehearsed, while an apparently spontaneous response of a politician to an interviewer's question may in fact be well rehearsed and often repeated'.

So where does call centre speech fit in? In some respects we might label it as 'rehearsed read speech', but this is assuming that call centre agents actively read from the script during interactions, which they almost certainly do not. It may be more accurate to assign call centre speech to a newly defined stylistic category, such as 'routine prescribed performance'<sup>12</sup>. Section 2.1 returns to this issue, and examines the potential effect of stylistic context on Glaswegian.

### **1.7 Research Questions & Outline for this Study**

This present chapter has outlined some important theoretical considerations for the study and reviewed the main linguistic work done so far on call centres. The qualitative research and analysis in chapters 2 and 3 provides a framework for specific research questions, and data with which to interpret local linguistic practices. I begin by providing a linguistic contextualisation of the study, looking at both the immediate area of Uddingston, where the call centre is situated, as well as the wider geographical context of Glasgow and the west of Scotland, paying particular attention to intonation. I then go on to justify my motivations for taking an ethnographic approach to the fieldwork, including an explication of the Community of Practice model. I follow this with a detailed ethnography of the call centre, situating the community both geographically and organisationally. I focus in on the main area of my analysis, the outbound call operation known as NTB (National Telebusiness). In order to further contextualise my analysis in later chapters, I describe various local practices in NTB, including the layout of the physical environment, daily routines, and recruitment and training processes.

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<sup>12</sup> Other speaking situations which might be assigned to this category might be, for example, the priest in his confessional, air traffic controllers, train ticket collectors, public announcers.

Chapter 3 provides an account of my fieldwork in the call centre. I explain the various forms of data collected and how I went about collecting them, as well as the methodological issues I encountered along the way. I end with a comment on the ethical and legal issues associated with the live call data central to the main analysis; the consideration of which has shaped this study from beginning to end.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ethnographic construct of the community of practice, as it is via this framework we can better understand the process of learning in the call centre. I review this model and the related concepts of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger 1991). I then go on to consider the two stages of learning in the call centre: classroom training and ‘nesting’ and examine the role they both play in agents’ first few months of employment.

In chapter 5 an analysis of the structure of the opening sequence of the calls is provided, as well as examination of the ways in which they are locally managed by both the agent and the customer. I consider the specific constraints surrounding these interactions, and find that they are goal-oriented, highly predictable and domain-specific. I also demonstrate that there are certain implicit rules within this particular frame of talk (oriented to by participants) which distinguish it from other, non-business interactions.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from a qualitative analysis of the calls of eight call centre workers. I look at the prosodic changes in their speech which occur over the

first three months of employment in a telesales department and attempt to make some general observations about their intonation (and other prosodic, lexical and syntactical features), both as individuals and as a group. I consider my findings within the framework of my ethnography, looking to local practices to account for their linguistic behaviour, as well as paying heed to some of the practical constraints of the call centre environment which may also play a role in shaping their emerging prosodic style.

Chapter 7 draws together the various strands of this thesis and presents some general conclusions about its findings, returning to the wider sociolinguistic concept of style in doing so. Finally, further possibilities for linguistic research in this area are suggested.

## CHAPTER 2: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

### 2.1 Locating the Informants Linguistically

The call centre is located in Uddingston in the Central Belt of Scotland (2.5.1 below). Uddingston has never been a specific focus in any previous study of accent. In geographical terms, it is located in North East Lanarkshire as well as being part of Greater Glasgow. This is the conurbation surrounding Glasgow city which has gradually swallowed up more and more independent towns and villages on its outskirts as the city expanded during the latter half of the twentieth century. On dialect maps (for example see Grant 1913) it is usually included in the area referred to as 'Mid-Scots', or more specifically, 'West Mid Scots'. West Mid Scots is further divided up by Johnston (1997: 441), who differentiates the following groups:

- (1) Glaswegian itself, spoken in Rutherglen, Clydebank, Paisley and Renfrew as well as in the city;
- (2) A closely allied east Lanarkshire type (Motherwell, Hamilton, Wishaw, Strathaven, Airdrie, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, Denny). Uddingston is located in this group;
- (3) A more conservative Clyde mouth type, near the Highland line (Greenock, Gourock, Rothesay, Dumbarton, probably Campbeltown);
- (4) An Ayrshire type ( Kilmarnock, Irvine, Prestwick, Ayr);  
The transition dialects from South Mid A in Lanarkshire (Lanark, Carnwath, Carstairs, Leadhills) and South Mid B in Ayrshire (Maybole, Barrhead).

He notes that the West Mid Scots group has more uniformity than most other dialect groups, and that the difference between groups (1) and (2) is only very slight.

Johnston (1997: 437) also puts forward a revision of Grant's more simple classification according to traditional north/south, east/west divides by suggesting that dialect areas can be classified according to 'spheres of influence'. The Central Belt sphere of influence, which also roughly coincides with 'Mid-Scots', is dominated in the east by Edinburgh and in the west (where Uddingston is located) by Glasgow. Johnston's concept of a sphere of influence is relevant here as he uses it to predict the features found in each dialect based on the dominant local influence. As he suggests (1997: 437), "the relative linguistic distance to a Central Belt inner core<sup>13</sup> would be reflected in the number of speakers possessing such Glasgow-based or amplified innovations as /t/-Glottalling and /r/-Vocalisation". He argues that due to improvements in travel and progress in communication, a form of dialect levelling is taking place in that there is a "spread of forms from the centres as rural people come into first-hand contact with city residents, speaking forms of Urban Scots that carry connotations of modernity and a measure of 'street-smarts', though not overt prestige" (ibid.). This is a situation which directly applies to Uddingston, which is certainly influenced linguistically by Glasgow.

In the initial stages of the call centre study I surveyed 75 of the staff (all of whom came from the Greater Glasgow area, including Uddingston) and asked them how they would classify their accent. Over half (53 participants) referred to their accent as 'Glaswegian', with the majority of the remainder identifying themselves in more broad terms as 'Scottish'. Other responses included 'central Scottish' and 'west of Scotland'. Only two participants said that they spoke with a 'local' accent and none said they had an Uddingston accent. Therefore, in terms of self-evaluation,

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<sup>13</sup> Johnston (1997: 436) considers each Scottish dialect to be at some point between the core and the periphery of several 'influence zones', with 'inner core' dialects found within the 'actual focal area of the sphere'.

Glasgow is certainly an important influence for the participants of this study at least when conversing with a linguistic outsider.

For the reasons outlined here, my evaluation of the speech of the informants for this study is based upon what one would expect for Glasgow speakers (and speakers from the surrounding area, i.e. Uddingston).

## 2.2 Specific Considerations for this Study: Intonation

As this study focuses on the prosodic behaviour of the informants, it is important to first outline what we should expect from speakers in this part of the UK in terms of their intonational patterns.

Cruttenden (1986; 1994; 1997) groups Glasgow together with places like Belfast, Derry, Birmingham, Newcastle and Liverpool into what he refers to as the ‘Urban North British’ (UNB) dialect group, which all have “an extensive use of rising tones” (1986: 139). He identifies three main tones found in Glasgow (and also Belfast) English which are as follows (Cruttenden 1994 and reiterated in Mayo 1996:11):

1. **low rise:** has low pitch on the nucleus which rises to mid-range and maintains this for the rest of the intonational phrase. Cruttenden suggests that this configuration is the standard tone for declaratives, interrogatives<sup>14</sup>, and tag interrogatives<sup>15</sup>.
2. **high rise:** this tone begins at a similar point to the low rise, in the speaker’s low to mid range on the nuclear accent of the phrase; however, it

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<sup>14</sup> Of the type beginning with a ‘wh-’ word (in comparison to yes-no interrogatives)

<sup>15</sup> ‘It’s a nice day, *isn’t it?*’, or ‘It’s a nice day, *eh?*’ (examples from Mayo 2002:11)

is different in that the point to where the pitch rises and stays is high in the speaker's tessitura. This tone is mainly used for yes/no questions.

3. **rise fall:** this tone rises from a low point on the main accent, right to the very top of the speaker's pitch range and then falls gradually back down over the remaining utterance. This contrasts with RP where the fall is abrupt rather than gradual. Cruttenden notes that this type of tone is used by the speaker to make a contrast or to show reservation.

More recent work on Glaswegian intonation suggests that in fact the typical Glasgow contour is not a simple rise as Cruttenden suggests, but a form of complex rising tone. Ladd (1996) labels the characteristic Glasgow tone as a rise-fall, although he revisits this in later work (Mayo, Aylett & Ladd 1997) and labels it as a rise-plateau-slump. It has also been suggested (e.g. Samuels 1972; McClure 1980) that there is little difference between statements and yes/no questions in Western Scottish English which Cruttenden (forthcoming: 3) suggests is likely to refer to the possible absence of a regular distinction between fall and rise in Glasgow. However, he goes on to add that it "seems likely that other features (e.g. higher/lower rises) may be used instead" (in forthcoming: 3).

Cruttenden (forthcoming) has also carried out a small study of stylistic variation in Glasgow intonation, looking at the speech of a Glaswegian in two different styles of speech: reading and conversation. He concludes that the speaker uses different intonational systems for each mode of speaking (forthcoming: 18). He argues that her conversational speaking style is consistent with the system described for Glasgow above, which has a low frequency of falls and a high frequency of low rising/ rising-



slumping tonic patterns. However, in the reading mode, he found that falls and low rises accounted for the majority of the tones (forthcoming: 9) which he argues is more consistent with the intonational system of RP. This leads him to suggest a possible case of intonational diglossia.

So what should we expect for the speakers of this study? If they behave in a way consistent with previous research on Glasgow intonation, we would expect them to use a high frequency of rise and rise-slump patterns, and very few falling nuclear tones. However, Cruttenden's latest work on the potential stylistic constraints of tone types in Glasgow speech indicates that the stylistic context of the interactions must also be taken into account. If we consider that the call centre informants are reading from a script (or perhaps 'performing a learned script' is better), this may well affect their intonational system in some way.

Although Cruttenden's study provides tentative evidence that an RP-like system is adopted by a middle class speaker when reading, we cannot assume that even if this is the case for middle-class Glasgow speakers, that it will be also the case for the more working-class speakers examined in this present study. In order to accurately assess whether there are any signs of Cruttenden's intonational diglossia in this present study, data would need to be taken from different stylistic contexts. Although this was the original intention of the study, the data set for the group of agents eventually analysed did not extend to other contexts.

## 2.3 Communities of Practice

The ethnographic construct of a community of practice (CofP) has become an established and important model in quantitative sociolinguistics for understanding the social meaning of linguistic variation and is central to the so-called 'third wave' variation theory, set out by Eckert (2005) which is discussed in chapter 1 above. It came originally from work by Lave and Wenger (1991) which examined how individuals learn in the workplace (and in the social world). It was first adopted as a sociolinguistic model by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), in part as a proposed remedy to perceived shortfalls in previous sociolinguistic conceptualisations of community, such as Labov's (1972: 120-121) notion of the speech community. The speech community, Labov (*ibid.*) argues, 'is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much so as by participation in a set of shared norms'. He suggests that in this way speech communities are delimited by participants having a set of shared evaluative linguistic norms which are reflected in systematic and uniform patterns of linguistic variation. This he demonstrates via his own findings of regular patterns of sociolinguistic stratification of linguistic variables in New York City. However, this idea of universal consensus in a speech community is problematic in that it paints an unrealistic picture of a situation where speakers all evaluate linguistic and social norms in the same way; something which is not consistent with the way in which heterogeneous societies operate (e.g. Martha's Vineyard (Labov 1972); Belfast (Milroy 1980)). Most importantly, it does not account for the co-constructive nature of social meaning and language. The community of practice model, on the other hand, allows for the existence of conflict within social groups and views language primarily as a social practice rather a linguistic one.

In their 1992 paper, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet explained the CofP as ‘an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour’. It can be further defined by three main (essential) criteria (Wenger 1998: 73-83):

- **Mutual engagement:** a group cannot be classified as a CofP unless those involved engage with one another by ‘coming together’.
- **A jointly negotiated enterprise:** this is the activity or purpose around which the mutual engagement centres.
- **A shared repertoire:** this is the set of resources (linguistic and otherwise) for negotiating meaning which arise as a result of mutual engagement in a joint enterprise.

If all three of these criteria are fulfilled then an enterprise can be considered to be a CofP, regardless of the type of activity that is taking place and no matter how loosely it is defined or structured otherwise. The practices of the CofP which develop through mutual engagement will have an influence on the way in which its members behave, as well as define the CofP itself. It is possible for members to belong to more than one CofP and to have different degrees of integration or membership within each one.

Membership is flexible and changeable and depends entirely on individual participation in each CofP over time and at any given point in time. By participating in many different CofPs, the individual continually constructs his or her identity, and what is most crucial to this process of construction, as Eckert (e.g. 2000; 2005) suggests, is *stylistic practice*.

The way in which many recent quantitative studies of language have used the community of practice model, e.g., Moore (2003), is to carry out ethnographic fieldwork in order to identify individual communities of practice and correlate speaker membership of these communities with their use of individual linguistic variables. However, this is not an approach which is taken here (although at the end of this thesis it is suggested that identifying different communities of practice within the call centre (for example locating agents who are more or less motivated to sell or do well at their job) would be a useful future direction). For a qualitative study such as this, which focuses on the development of prosodic style in a workplace, the CofP provides a useful guiding framework for those aspects of the research which cover the practices in which local stylistic development is embedded. For this reason the CofP model forms part of the theoretical backdrop of this study, especially when examining the way in which new workers learn to become competent call centre agents. This is covered in further detail in Chapter 4.

## **2.4 Locating the Informants Socially**

Ethnography enables the fieldworker to form a better understanding of local communities that form the locus for linguistic variation. It provides access to people's everyday lives and the daily construction of meaning with which they engage, and the ability to pinpoint locally salient categories. As Saville-Troike (1989: 107) points out:

*“observed behaviour is now recognized as a manifestation of a deeper set of rules and codes, and the task of ethnography is seen as the discovery and explication of the rules for contextually appropriate behaviour in a community or group; in other words,*

*what the individual needs to know to be a functional member  
of the community”*

In a closed environment such as a call centre, the subjects are literally hidden from public view, and the only linguistic contact an outsider may have with them is via the telephone. In many respects, the contact we have as outsiders with call centre agents gives them a kind of ‘floating voice’ role – we never get to see what they look like, if they are wearing a uniform or not, what the view is like out of their window, or how many other people are working alongside them. These things all constitute the social world within which the call centre interactions are embedded and so to understand this type of speech we must first seek out and define it at the local level in the way community members experience it. In other words, in order to gain an understanding of the daily practices of this type of institution (or indeed any community of practice) it is necessary to study it from the inside via participant observation.

Researchers who are born into a community automatically have the currency of membership, but in communities where the fieldworker is not already an insider, part of their initial task is to develop a role whereby they can be accepted and trusted by community members, which is as close to being an insider as possible. Other sociolinguistic studies which have used the participant observation method, e.g. Milroy (1980), Cheshire (1982), Eckert (1989, 2000), all involved strategic planning on the part of the fieldworker to ensure community members were not put off by his or her presence, and that they could gain enough insight to be able to identify local categories and their role in social (and linguistic) practice. It was necessary in the present study to develop a strategy in this way in order to access the call centre. In order to do this I had to first obtain permission from a company who would be willing

to let me carry out my research. This process involved its own set of issues and obstacles, and is discussed at greater length in section 3.2 below.

Once my entry to the call centre had been officially sanctioned by the call centre, I then had to focus on developing the role I would take on once inside. Taking part in the training gave me an ideal 'way in' to the call centre, and proved to be methodologically advantageous for several reasons which are discussed below. My choice to take this approach was also motivated by the research questions for this study, specifically to gain a detailed understanding of the way in which new members are integrated into the communities of practice from their first day, and specifically how they take on a new, institutional persona. I felt that by following the same path as the participants themselves, I would get direct experiential and observational data on this process in order to inform my later analysis. A training situation is particularly advantageous for the researcher as participants are *expected* to ask questions, and are provided with a constant stream of information about the community by existing members such as the trainers, management and other employees.

## **2.5 The Call Centre: An Ethnography**

The following sections provide detailed information on the call centre community of practice. Much of this information is given out on the induction day to new employees in various ways: in print form as handouts; verbally by the trainer during formal training sessions; and also via the numerous anecdotes and stories told to new members of staff by existing community members, both in the classroom and out on the call centre floor. The rest is gleaned from a combination of formal interviews and informal conversations I had with both managers, staff, and the trainees themselves.

## 2.5.1 Uddingston

The call centre is located in at Uddingston in South Lanarkshire, about 7 miles south east of Glasgow city centre. It takes roughly ten minutes to get by train from Glasgow Central to Uddingston, which looks and feels very much like a small, independent village, rather than part of the vast suburban sprawl that constitutes Greater Glasgow.

Figure 2.1 – Location of Uddingston within Greater Glasgow area



In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the town sat alongside the former mining village of Flemington. The mine was an important provider of jobs in the local area. However, when the industry disappeared from the area in the late 1930s, Flemington was more or less abandoned, and all that remains of it today are the ruins of the former pit. Uddingston, however, was far more successful, mostly due to the existence

of the Tunnock's bakery and factory (established in 1890), famous internationally for their caramel wafers and teacakes. The area's economy has been additionally boosted in recent years as wasteland surrounding the town has been developed into the industrial estates which exist there now. British Gas is one of several companies (including Kwik-Fit which also has a large call centre operation on the outskirts of the village) which have taken advantage of the cheap rent and abundant workforce that the area has to offer.

### **2.5.2 Scottish Gas, British Gas & Centrica**

Scottish Gas (British Gas<sup>16</sup>) is part of the Centrica group, which was first established in February 1997 as a result of company restructuring and demerger (formerly British Gas plc). The company began its life as a gas supplier in the late 1940s as a direct result of the Gas Act 1948, which nationalised the UK gas industry (Williams 1981). Over the last ten years, the company has expanded its range of products and services considerably to include electricity supply, home security, plumbing, maintenance and various insurance services relating to energy products and appliances. Figures released to the national press in early 2007<sup>17</sup> by British Gas reported that the company currently had a total of 1.58 million gas and electricity customers. However, the company also reported a net loss of 200,000 customers since 2006 as a result of dramatic price increases.

In 1999, Centrica decided to close all of its British Gas Energy Centres due to what they referred to as "difficult high street trading conditions"<sup>18</sup>. This was an important

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<sup>16</sup> Although known internationally as British Gas, the company is referred to as Scottish Gas in Scotland and Nwy Prydain/ British Gas Wales in Wales.

<sup>17</sup> <http://news.independent.co.uk/business/news/article2542421.ece>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.centrica.co.uk/index.asp?pageid=16>



factor in driving the company towards using call centres, which are now a central part of the modern British Gas organisation, and are firmly established as the main method of contact with all customers. Despite recent trends in outsourcing call centres to other countries like India, British Gas has only UK call centres, several of which are in Scotland, including locations in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Uddingston itself, which is the main centre for Scotland. The call centres are a mixture of inbound and outbound operations and fulfil several roles in the business, including customer service, account maintenance, appointment booking, complaints, and sales.

### **2.5.3 Scottish Gas & The Uddingston Operation**

The Scottish Gas call centre in Uddingston opened in the late 1990s and consists of a large inbound call centre and a much smaller outbound telesales operation, known as National Telebusiness (NTB) which is the main focus of this study. The call centre as a whole is referred to within the company as an ASC (Area Service Centre), and is one of five around the UK. The inbound call centre runs from 7am to 9pm, although most workers leave the call centre at 5pm, at which point the call centre becomes mainly outbound with a new shift of part-time NTB evening staff. Murdoch House, where the call centre is housed, was originally an administrative centre which gradually developed into the large-scale call centre that it is today. As British Gas high-street outlets began to close, the focus moved to cheaper, remote forms of communication with customers. Along with the increased demand for the new products and services offered by the company, the need to provide customers with a means of getting in contact with the company over the phone grew considerably. This comment from one of the call centre managers and original members of staff illustrates how these changes affected company practice at the local level:

*“[I] started off in the FCMO, which is now no longer in existence, as an admin person stamping envelopes. It’s great. I did that job about four months but found it quite boring. Then we became a call centre that never answered the phones because you only answered it if you felt like it. You weren’t told to answer the phone, you were told it was admin, and there was something like a hundred and sixty thousand calls coming in and nobody answered the phone. Somebody said one day I think maybe we should start answering the phones... and so we became a mini call centre for inbound”*

Lorraine, NTB Training Manager (Feb 2006)

This account illustrates that the shift from administrative centre to call centre was not an abrupt one; nor was it a particularly natural progression for existing workers. Indeed, call centres are so prevalent today that it is easy to forget a time when it was not so easy to get in touch with businesses over the telephone. In the case of the Uddingston call centre, it seems that the development into a call centre was very much tied in to a gradual, and eventually wide scale role-change by the entire workforce.

The call centre continues to undergo structural changes every so often, reflecting a changing market, and the need to improve and update company practice. At the time my fieldwork was just beginning, the call centre was going through a process referred to as ‘Fusion’ which involved a significant restructuring of the whole inbound call centre. Until that point it had been divided up into various different sections, each of which dealt with a different area of service. The intention of Fusion was to combine or ‘fuse’ these separate areas into a ‘one-stop-shop’ for customers,

where each agent is able to carry out a number of different services without transferring the customer to another department.

#### **2.5.4 National Telebusiness (NTB)**

The outbound telesales department of the call centre, known as National Telebusiness (NTB) is the origin of the linguistic data for this study. It began in the late 1990s as a very small group of twenty-two agents (one of whom is now the head of NTB), and it now has over 300 staff. The operation is somewhat separate from the inbound section in that staff are employed by outside agencies rather than Scottish Gas itself, and work takes place more or less in opposition to the inbound day shift in terms of work hours. The staff body is divided up into about 14 different teams<sup>19</sup>, each run by a team manager, many of whom started off as sales agents themselves. Of the 14 teams, only one is full-time, operating from 12pm-8pm. The rest are part-time teams who work from 5pm – 8pm, with the exception of one ‘morning’ team who work from 9am – 12pm. The part-time hours that NTB offers results in a high proportion of younger, college-age staff, many of them working at NTB at the same time as attending further education institutions.

The target market for NTB is existing Scottish Gas customers, individuals who are already in receipt of another British Gas service and whose details are stored on a centrally-stored computer database. In this way, the agents are not required to carry out ‘cold calling’, a practice which involves telephoning people with whom the company has had no prior contact and without authorisation to use their telephone numbers.

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<sup>19</sup> This is dependent on staff numbers, which tend to fluctuate as a result of high staff turnover.

NTB agents were originally involved with telesales of just one British Gas product related to the insurance of central heating, but are now responsible for selling a wide range of products associated with the brand 'Homecare'. These products relate to the maintenance of central heating systems, electrical wiring, kitchen appliances, and plumbing and drain systems. Each team is usually assigned a single product to sell on a long-term basis. Often agents can be given the same product to sell for up to two years, although team productivity, customer demand, and introduction of new products sometimes require agents to be moved to a different product, something which can require re-training<sup>20</sup>.

### **2.5.5 Recruitment**

Recruitment of NTB staff involves several different groups of people from Centrica (at higher, central management level), British Gas (at the local, call centre level) and other external companies (including staff recruitment agencies). The recruitment strategy is revised regularly, and can be broken down into three interdependent stages:

#### 1). Central Planning at Centrica

Recruitment for the inbound and outbound operation tends to be run using yearly 'drives' which are initiated by Centrica Head Office. For the inbound operation, it is estimated how many staff they will require for the upcoming year; the general aim is to have all five Area Service Centres<sup>21</sup> fully staffed by "The Big Switch On", an affectionate term which refers to the beginning of winter when customers start using their central heating again after the

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<sup>20</sup> More often it simply involves a slight change in the script.

<sup>21</sup> Area Service Centres

summer. It is at this point when the call centres are at their busiest: dealing with a wide range of calls concerned with heating breakdown and repair. Recruitment for NTB is less seasonal, and tends to be implemented at more regular intervals to counteract a particularly high staff turnover<sup>22</sup>.

## 2) Local Advertising

This section is run by the recruitment and retention department in the Uddingston centre itself. Once Centrica has handed down a decision on staff numbers, the process of advertising for staff begins. Most staff are recruited via the local press, known collectively in the area as “the Lanarkshire five”, including the Bellshill Speaker, the Hamilton Advertiser, East Kilbride News, Wishaw Press, and the Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser. In addition to this, they also advertise with The Daily Record, a Scottish daily paper, and the Jobcentre.

## 3) External Consultancies

‘Search’ is an agency used by Scottish Gas during the recruitment process for inbound employees. Their role is to provide information on the workforce demographic to ensure the process is as effective as possible. The agency is also responsible for the initial screening of potential employees to ensure they fulfil basic literacy and numeracy requirements as well as displaying an ability to communicate over the telephone with the interviewer. If the applicant is successful he/she is booked in for a further telephone interview with more detailed questions relating to his/her personality and experience.

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<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately British Gas were not prepared to make figures relating to staff turnover available to me.

NTB also use two different recruitment agencies which, like Search, take care of the initial stages of recruitment. However, whereas inbound employees eventually become contracted to Scottish Gas, NTB employees remain contractually tied to the recruitment agency for the duration of their employment.

The final stage of the recruitment process is known as an “assessment centre” which consists of a role-play situation followed by a “competency-based interview”. The day is run jointly by the recruitment agency and the call centre to ensure that the person specification set out by Scottish Gas is met by the agency. The decision about whether to employ an individual is therefore jointly agreed before a start date is given out. The whole process is designed to select individuals who can demonstrate sales and communication skills rather than previous experience of call centre work. As one manager explained:

*“It’s easy to think that if someone’s worked on the phones before that they’ll be a good employee but we’re not necessarily looking for that; we’re looking for people with energy who can sell over the phone and that’s something which you can’t learn, it’s just part of your personality. It’s up to us to find people with that type of personality”*

Julie, recruitment manager (Nov. 2005)

In her own analysis of the recruitment process for the service industry, Cameron (2000b: 17) notes that the linguistic abilities of workers are now foregrounded as a specific *skill* by employers, where before they may have been more of a tagged-on afterthought, with person specifications giving guidelines as to the level of linguistic

and interpersonal ability (often referred to as 'people skills' or 'rapport building', i.e. the ability to enter into and sustain conversations which build relationships with customers that in turn might be used advantageously to sell a product or service) which must be demonstrated by applicants. The recruitment process for Scottish Gas has a similarly clear drive towards individuals who can display the ability to talk to and build rapport with customers, with other relevant skills such as IT literacy judged to be far less important as it is felt that employees can develop these peripheral skills during training.

As far as factors such as accent and other aspects of linguistic performance are concerned, at no point during this process are there any explicit guidelines or criteria laid out for the recruiters or interviewers which suggest that certain accents, voice qualities or linguistic backgrounds are favoured or, alternatively, would potentially prevent an individual from being given an interview or a job. However, it is not possible to say how far the individual preferences or prejudices of individuals at each stage of the recruitment process may be at work (which would probably be the case for any type of employment).

## 2.5.6 The Call Centre Layout

Figure 2.2: Interior of Uddingston Call Centre

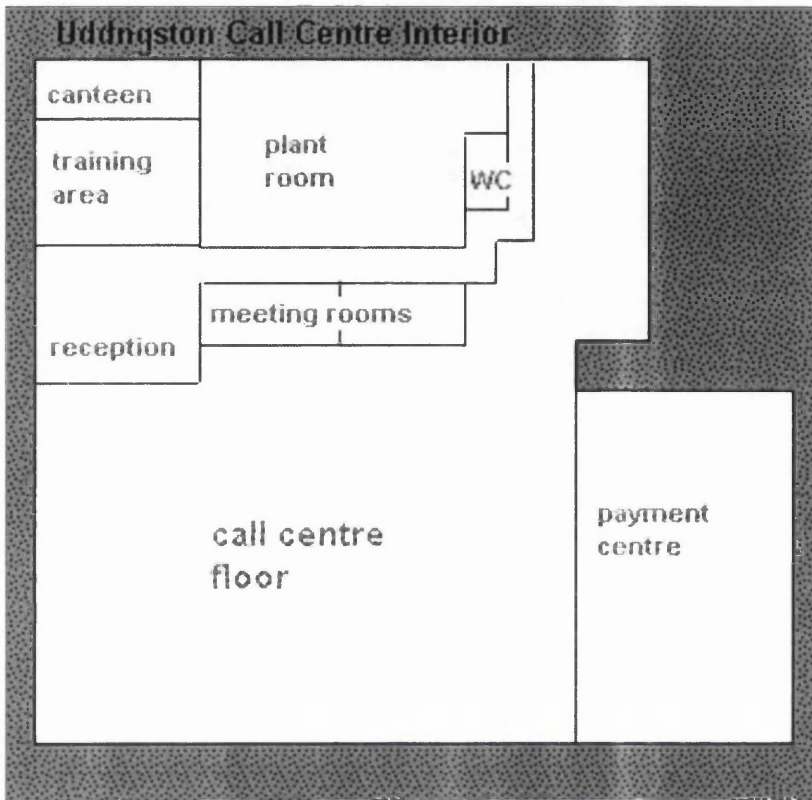


Figure 2.2 above is a sketch diagram of the call centre interior as it was in 2006. It has since been changed slightly, with a complete extension and refurbishment of the canteen. There are also additional externally placed Portakabins (used mostly for training) at the back of the call centre which are not included in the diagram. A cursory glance at Figure 2.2 shows that the call centre main floor dominates the building, with other offices occupying a much smaller space around the periphery. As the diagram suggests, the main floor is open plan with no dividing walls throughout, which means that the majority of the staff share the same space, regardless of position or department. The call centre manager and the other team managers are also located on the main floor. NTB team managers are seated together in one corner of the floor throughout the day and then move to be seated at the same bank of desks as their team when team members arrive at 5pm. Each team is seated in the same area each night



with each member having his/her own workstation, although this may be used by a different person during the day, and therefore desk drawers are shared and the desk usually clear of personal property. In this way each workstation is very similar to the rest, with a lack of individual expression via ornaments, cards or pictures, which are often found in other types of office workspace<sup>23</sup>.

Each workstation includes a PC and keyboard as well as a telephone. The telephone, often referred to in the industry as a 'Telset'<sup>24</sup>, after its manufacturer, looks a lot like a normal office-style telephone with a large key pad. However, unlike a regular telephone, there are ports on the side of the Telset for agents to attach their headsets. Headsets are another industry norm, used in order to free up the hands of the agent for other tasks such as inputting data into the computer. The headset resembles a pair of external Walkman headphones but with a microphone protruding from one side which sits just in front of the mouth. Agents are able to lift this away from the mouth during conversations he or she does not wish to be heard over the microphone. Agents are also able to mute the microphone completely by pressing a button on the Telset. Each agent is given his/her own headset for hygiene reasons when they first start work in the call centre, and tends to keep them on site in his/her allocated drawer.

Each desk is arranged to fit alongside several other workstations so that six or eight workers can be seated together. These banks of desks, or 'islands', are dotted at regular intervals across the main floor, dividing it up into a kind of grid of passageways through the desks along which people can pass in order to move from

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<sup>23</sup> This is not necessarily the case, however, for inbound workers, who often personalise their workstations with photos or ornaments.

<sup>24</sup> Telset equipment is widely used in the call centre industry.

one part of the call centre to another. Individuals are always seated physically close to the rest of their team. However, it would be theoretically possible for them to be seated anywhere in the call centre where there is a workstation. Overall, seating workers in a group is preferred for several practical reasons. This is mainly so that team managers know where each member is at any one time, although there are other, psychologically motivated reasons for this, including making the individual feel part of a small group in an otherwise large sea of people. Occasionally teams are required to move from their usual space to another section of the call centre, perhaps because a new team has been created. In this way, movement around the call centre is relatively fluid, resulting in workers feeling that they do not really have a fixed space which belongs to them for any more than short periods of time. However, in stark contrast to this, because workers are seated at their desks and attached to the telephone system for the duration of their shifts, they are rather restricted in terms of physical movement beyond the immediate workstation.

### **2.5.7 Taking Calls**

Work in NTB, as in many other call centres, can be classed as highly routine, repetitive and intensive, which can make long-term employment undesirable. The job tends to be favoured by students (with a larger number of workers who have worked for the company on a long-term basis located in the main inbound operation), and as a result, the call centre has a very high turnover of staff. However, the company only hires staff at sales-agent level and therefore there are often opportunities for employees to work towards promotion after a relatively short employment.

Agents must be able to operate the various computer systems which are required to carry out each transaction<sup>25</sup>. They are expected to keep off-call interaction to a minimum during working hours, restricting toilet breaks and conversations with others to those that are absolutely necessary, something which is characteristic of the call centre industry as a whole. Workers are expected to meet weekly targets<sup>26</sup>, and therefore by taking extended breaks they risk reducing the time available for them to make sales, which in turn affects their performance and the commission that they can make. This itself seems to provide enough incentive for workers to spend as much time on the phone as possible. Employees are watched over by their team manager in various ways, although the atmosphere within the call centre remains relaxed, and employees tend to maintain a good relationship with their team manager which often extends beyond the call centre, in part due to various social activities outside the work environment.

All calls in NTB are initiated via a predictive dialler, a system common to large outbound call centres. The system enables large numbers of customers to be contacted automatically without the need for agents to search for or dial the number themselves. Instead, they sit with their headsets on, awaiting the sound of a beep in their ear which indicates that a call has been successfully connected. At the same time, the customer's information flashes up on the agent's computer screen, giving them access to the customer's personal details<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> This is not a pre-requisite of the job; agents are trained in this at the beginning of their time at NTB.

<sup>26</sup> These targets vary depending on whether an agent is fully trained or not, and with which product they are involved in selling. There are also financial incentives associated with reaching these targets.

<sup>27</sup> For the sales calls examined in this study, the personal details the agents had access to were based on the information relating to a customer's existing central heating insurance contract. This includes full name, marital status, address, and further details pertaining to the contract agreement itself.

## 2.5.8 Management

The inbound and outbound operations in the call centre operate using a system common to many working environments which employ large volumes of staff by dividing the workforce up into departments and each department into more manageable teams of roughly 12 employees each. Each employee, as well as being placed in a team, is assigned a team manager, who is responsible for the performance of each individual and the team as a whole. As mentioned previously, it is quite common for team managers have worked their way up from being a lower level employee rather than coming in at a manager level from outside the company. NTB team managers are responsible for a number of things, but in general their main task is to ensure that their team meets their individual and team targets on a weekly basis. This can involve several different elements, most notably performing a role as staff-motivator, giving a weekly “buzz session” (a kind of pep-talk given for 10 minutes at 5pm on Mondays that can involve games and other devices to inspire the workers to sell more). This concept is defined by NTB as follows:

### Example 2.1 Buzz Sessions

#### **Buzz Sessions**

Are what we call daily 2way [sic] motivational huddles with your team and your manager. The benefits gained from having regular buzz sessions, 1) to review performance, 2) to share best practice, 3) to communicate business and social information, 4) to celebrate SUCCESS! 5) to learn from each other.<sup>28</sup>

Buzz sessions are often held away from the call centre floor in the soft seating areas outside the canteen. I asked a few of the staff what they felt about the buzz sessions and received rather mixed reactions. Some reported that they found them quite useful

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<sup>28</sup> This comes from the British Gas ‘Graduation Pack’ which is given to all employees after they have completed the first four weeks of classroom training.

as a motivational exercise. However, several viewed them more negatively. One agent told me:

*“They’re OK but to be honest I sometimes get a bit annoyed because they’re wasting ten minutes of your time when you could be on call making sales. I don’t mind so much at the end of the week [sic], but when it gets to Friday and I’m still needing some sales it gets me raging”*

Lorna - NTB agent interview, May 2005

The managerial role in NTB also involves an element of creativity, designing incentives, competitions and rewards to boost team morale and increase productivity. Each manager is provided with a monthly budget of approximately £40 to help with this.

*“I know when and how to motivate them [the team]. You know there’s days where it’s very hard, especially if they come in and I’m saying to them, ‘right I don’t know what we’re doing today, just bear with me’, they don’t like that. My team’s really well organized, they know what they’re doing and so it’s just a case of spending time with them. If I’m not there and I’m not focusing on what has to be done that day then their motivation just goes, so it’s me being involved in what’s going on that motivates them more, along with the competitions I run. Just say, ‘well done, great’, make a big fuss of somebody that’s done well”*

Kelly - NTB team manager, Nov 2005

In the way that this manager explains, although one step up the ladder, team managers operate very much on the call centre floor, rather than distancing themselves from the rest of their team. They spend the majority of their shifts (from 12pm – 5pm) on administration, but when the staff arrive at 5pm managers are expected to stay with their team on the call centre floor. Team managers are also responsible for ensuring

each member of their team achieves the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These are a set of statistics which relate to an agent's general performance on the job, and are which are rewarded with weekly and monthly cash incentives. Examples of the main KPIs are: Average Handling Time (AHT)<sup>29</sup>, Sales volume, and Quality Assessment (QA). This final practice is elaborated upon in section 2.5.9 below.

### **2.5.9 Quality Assessment in NTB: Scripting, Surveillance & Codification**

Cameron (2000a) argues that the process of company 'branding' (i.e. creating a consistent corporate identity) in a call centre is tied together with corporate notions of 'quality'. As she explains (2000a: 100) 'in the approach known as "Total Quality Management" *quality* does not mean what it usually means in everyday usage, namely an especially high standard, but rather refers to the consistent achievement of a specified, measurable standard'. In NTB this is also part of daily practice, where managers regularly assess the performance of employees based on the notion of 'quality' using various measures including a paper script<sup>30</sup> which is reproduced below (any grammatical or spelling errors have been left in):

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<sup>29</sup> This is the amount of time an agent takes to make a call, including the off-call time known as 'wrap-up', which is where agents deal with administrative tasks relating to the last call.

<sup>30</sup> As opposed to an on-screen electronic script.

## Example 2.2: NTB Script

### Suggested script for new NTB employees (4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2005):

Hi can I speak to mr/mrs/miss/ms ..... Its ..... calling from British gas, its just a quick call about your three star agreement you have with us, do you have a moment?

Its actually just a quick call to let you know that we are offering to extend and improve the agreement you have with us at the moment to include your gas and electrical kitchen appliances against any sort of breakdowns. All the parts, labour and call out charges are free and you can use the service as often as you need to.

What appliances do you have in your kitchen at the moment?

*(take a note of the appliances, ask for ages and makes, ask if they have any other appliances in the garage or cellar etc., ask if they are in good working order and bought in the uk)*

What we are offering to do is protect all these appliances against breakdown so you will never pay for callout, parts and labour charges again, which as you know can be very expensive. Instead, like your 3 star, you would just call us out on your usual breakdown number and we would get someone out to repair it for you. So no matter how minor or major the job is, you would be able to use the service as many times as you need at no extra cost to yourself.

Also (use customers name) if your appliances were ever unrepairable we would give you a refund for up to 12 months cash back for that appliance, which is excellent value for money and gives you the freedom to spend this money on anything you choose.

Another great benefit of having this care is that it includes a service for all these appliances every 2 years to check they are working safely and efficiently just like your three star.

Because you are an existing customer we can care for them all for just £\_\_\_\_\_ a week, which works out at £\_\_\_\_\_ a month. Is that something you'd be interested in?

The use of scripting in NTB is way of ensuring a standard format for each call, and ensuring that the agents elicit and provide all the necessary information during each interaction. Some of this relates to legal considerations, such as the Data Protection Act 1998 (i.e. the agent must ensure he/she is speaking to the named customer at the

beginning of the call), and the Direct Debit Guarantee<sup>31</sup>, and some of it to the QA guidelines, e.g. Q1 in Example 2.2 above: ‘Agent has introduced himself and the company by name and the reason for calling’. Discussions with staff and managers revealed that the original script was originally written by a member of NTB staff in Uddingston. It was not possible to ascertain how long ago this was, who exactly was responsible for writing it, and what his/her role was in NTB, as no-one I encountered had knowledge of this. However, what became apparent was that successful NTB agents are allowed to draft new versions of the script in order to ‘pass on’ their techniques for high sales performance to other, less successful employees. This practice of disseminating ‘good sales chat’ to others is therefore one of the main roles of the script. This contrasts slightly with the idea that scripting entails *managerial* control over stylistic practice. The situation from NTB suggests that employees are:

1. Encouraged to add their own ‘flair’ to the basic script
2. If this ‘flair’ is successful (measured via sales), this employee may well be asked to draft a script based on his/her own speech during calls.
3. This new script is shared between other employees and constitutes the on-going stylistic construction with which community members are mutually engaged.

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<sup>31</sup> The Direct Debit Guarantee applies to all banks and building societies taking part in the direct debit scheme. It says that if there is a change in the amount to be paid or the payment date, the person receiving the payment (the originator) must notify the customer in advance. If the originator or the bank/building society makes an error, the customer is guaranteed a full and immediate refund of the amount paid. Customers can cancel a direct debit at any time by writing to their bank or building society.



Observations of workers on calls and discussions with employees during my time in the call centre also revealed that this practice of sharing sales techniques is not necessarily tied to the physical script itself. One employee explained the following:

*“if you’re sitting there not getting any sales, and you can hear someone else nearby making loads of sales, you start trying to hear what they’re saying so you can steal it. Everyone copies each other round here”*

Ross, NTB – Feb 05

It would appear then, that agents in NTB do have a certain level of control over their speech (although there is still input from management), and that they are able to style and restyle their personae through linguistic means (within certain limits defined by the call centre) in order to improve their sales performance. What is less clear is how much of an influence the script has on their stylistic performance (i.e., the fuzzy boundary between read and spontaneous speech), and at what point they stop reading from a piece of paper and start speaking from memory. One employee gave me his personal account of this:

*“I’ve kind of got something in my head that I would say all the time but at the same time you still need to adapt to what you’re saying for a customer. Whatever a customer’s going to say, you might have to say something different.”*

Mark NTB Feb 2005

It seems, therefore, that we need to conceptualise the NTB script as follows:

1. The physical script: a printed script which prescribes one side of a telephone sales call
2. The internal script: the learned script which may or may not deviate from the original in terms of structure and content, which is formulated in part through experience of real calls and is slightly different for each individual depending on a number of factors (including personal innovations and also 'copied' strategies).

The script and its practical role in the calls of NTB employees is discussed further in as part of the data analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 below.

As is the case for many call centres, all calls in NTB are recorded and saved electronically as .wav files so that managers can either listen in live, or at a later time. Each team manager must listen to a set quota of calls each month (three calls per agent per month) and provide written feedback for each individual to ensure they are meeting the prescribed criteria for each call. Managers are provided with a set of 'Quality Assessment' (QA) guidelines which they use as a checklist when listening back to the calls of their team members. An example of this document is provided here:

## Example 2.3: NTB Quality Assessment Guidelines for Managers

### OUTBOUND RETENTION QA GUIDELINES

#### VERIFY

Q1 Agent has introduced himself and the company by name and the reason for calling.

Q2 Agent asks to speak to the account holder, or if third party makes payment for the account.

Q3 Once DPA has been established. The agent must ask permission to speak about the contract at that time.

#### SOLVE

Q4 The agent responds to any issues that the customer has sympathetically, resolving problems that may include raising processes, tasks or raising a job in WMIS within the agents [sic] remit.

#### PREVENT

Q5 To ensure that all the information given to the customer was correct and any promises made by the agent was carried through.

Q6 A friendly approach and a timely apology offered if the customer shows any dissatisfaction whether it seems to be the fault of BG or not.

Q7 A wrap and note applied to all calls where the agent has spoken to either account holder or third payer [sic] and where any amendments have been made to the contract.

Q8 The Banner No. must be quoted when ever any changes have been made to the contract for auditing purposes.

Q9 Any call backs must be arranged with the account holder only.

#### PROMOTE

Q10 Promotes products in order where appropriate.

Q11 When making any changes to the amount the customer pays, the next payment date must be stated along with the amount and future dates and amounts.

Q12 The Direct Debit Guarantee must be quoted when adding additional products along with the cool-off script. And cool-off script quoted at renewal or crcd/dbcd payments. Time scales for confirmation/letters stated.

Q13 A closing statement used at the end of the call e.g. Thanks for your time

These guidelines are very similar in tone and content to a utility company's checklist examined by Cameron (2000a: 104):

- Quick response time
- Standard greeting
- Be polite and professional

- Use listening noises
- Take control
- Ask questions – don't demand information!
- Take notes
- Obtain reason for call
- Use customer's name
- Take appropriate action to diffuse anger
- Make the customer feel important
- Treat the customer as an individual
- Know our products and services – promote them!
- Summarise the call
- Offer your name and extension
- Thank the customer for calling and finish the call with goodbye
- ALWAYS USE THE STANDARD GREETING
- GOOD AFTERNOON/ MORNING,... SPEAKING, CAN I TAKE
- YOUR REFERENCE NUMBER?
- *NEVER SAY...HELLO!!!*

She found that some of the points on the utility company checklist related specifically to the telephone interaction itself, e.g. “use listening noises”, which does not appear on the NTB checklist. This reflects one general difference between outbound calls and inbound calls and the way in which the conversational floor is divided between agent and customer. For inbound calls (customer service-oriented calls) one would expect the customer to do quite a bit of the talking and the agent the listening, at least during the first part of the call where the customer establishes the reason for the call. However, in telesales calls, the roles are somewhat reversed, and it is very important for the agent to hold the conversational floor for as long as possible in order to make his/her sales pitch before the customer can decline to continue the call or hang up the telephone, rather like the idea of a door-to-door salesman ‘getting

his foot in the door'. For this reason, and as the data analysis reveals in Chapters 5 and 6, it is the customer who is more likely to be listening and giving minimal responses than the agent in NTB calls.

What NTB does have in common with Cameron's utility company call centre is that several points are concerned directly with the prescription of politeness and other interpersonal considerations. Points Q4 and Q6 are two of the main points in the NTB checklist which specifically prescribe attitudinal and/or emotional elements of the agent's behaviour (i.e. sympathy and friendliness). This fits in with Cameron's (2000b: 105) suggestion that agents are encouraged to pay attention to the customer's 'face-wants' i.e. an individual's desire to be accepted and not imposed upon by others (Brown & Levinson 1987). As she points out, these can be realised linguistically in several ways, including using politeness terms like 'please', 'thank you' and 'sorry', or addressing the customer by her/his name. Perhaps most importantly for this study, the NTB guidelines, and especially points Q4 and Q6, entail that the speaker use the appropriate linguistic and paralinguistic repertoires to convey the prescribed emotional content, and this is likely to include prosodic features such as 'tone of voice'. Although not explicitly referred to at any point in this example, as it is in some of the materials which Cameron (2000b) examines, the NTB checklist encourages agents to exhibit sympathetic and friendly behaviour, and we would expect 'tone of voice', and all that this implies phonetically, as a particular vehicle. However, as 'tone of voice' is not overtly prescribed, it is not clear from the QA guidelines what conclusions managers are expected to draw from this. Examination of training and 'nesting' in chapter 4 will throw further light on whether or not prosodic features are actually prescribed and controlled by the call centre management.

The data in this present study relate to the openings of NTB sales calls and, therefore, the most relevant section of the call coaching guidelines comes under the heading 'verify', the sequence which an agent must negotiate before the main sales pitch can go ahead. Much of the focus in the call opening relates to ensuring the correct customer is on the line and that the agent clearly identifies him/herself and the company in the very early stages of the call. This is reinforced by the content of the script, which tells the agent how to word the opening exchange in order to satisfy these criteria. The fact that the script and QA guidelines are mutually reinforcing in this way demonstrates a high level of managerial influence exerted over the interactions. This goes back to Cameron's (2000a, 2000b) discussion of stylistic practice in call centres in section 1.6, where she argues that this process of codification effectively gives the speaker diminished control over his/her stylistic behaviour during these interactions (2000a: 88). However, examining printed guidelines which state what managers should do in *theory* is not necessarily sufficient to show how they actually use them in *practice*. Although managers potentially have a high degree of control over the speech of workers, it does not follow that workers do not resist this control, nor that managers themselves follow the guidelines particularly stringently. The content of the NTB QA guidelines was created by a higher level member of management in the call centre, and they have then been distributed to every team manager in NTB. In this respect, the checklist is open to a certain amount of interpretation by each team manager. Whether or not – or how – they interpret certain points in terms of tone of voice is not so straightforward. I asked some of the managers to explain to me the main considerations of the QA exercise, and, among other things, whether they actively encouraged agents to adopt a particular tone of

voice during calls. Their responses provided the following, more locally accurate assessment of the QA guidelines as they are actually used in daily practice:

1. Managers see the QA feedback task as very routine;
2. The task is not viewed positively by all managers as some of them complain it involves lots of extra administration;
3. One manager reported that she knew the QA guidelines so well that that she no longer needed to refer to a copy;
4. The primary focus of the sessions with NTB team members seems to be on the sale, not on the 'service experience'.

When I asked managers and staff about whether tone of voice was ever explicitly referred to in buzz or coaching sessions, no individual reported that this was the case. However, many of the informants told me that there is often reference made to how cheerful a member of staff sounds and the level of 'pep' in an employee's voice. If employees are failing to meet targets, managers might suggest they 'try to sound a bit more upbeat' and 'make the product sound more enticing'.

These data suggest that analysis of the printed materials must be further informed by local knowledge gained during the ethnography. We can see from the managers' feedback that considerations about tone of voice do sometimes feature in the managerial codification practices, but that it is not particularly high on their QA agenda and nor is the concept of 'tone of voice' defined or explicitly prescribed. From these findings it also appears that strategies for selling in NTB are in some way tied to

prosodic style, and that certain 'bored' or 'uninspiring' tones of voice (subjectively identified by the manager) may be equated with poor sales technique.

### **2.5.10 Training & 'Nesting' in NTB**

The way in which new employees are trained is considered in depth in Chapter 4 below. However, a brief explanation of the basic training process will be useful here in order to fully contextualise the data discussed in Chapter 5.

By taking on the role of new trainee I was able to conduct much of the initial participant observation simply by attending training sessions. This was methodologically advantageous in that I was less obviously an outsider conducting research, and more 'one of the trainees'. The classroom training also gave me the opportunity to learn about and practise the various skills associated with work in NTB (apart from talking on the phone with customers), including how to use the computer and telephone systems, and all about the range of products and services available from British Gas and NTB.

All classroom sessions (including break-time) were recorded using an omnidirectional microphone and a Sony CD recorder which were placed at the front of the room behind the trainer. Both trainees and trainer were aware from the first day that they were being recorded and gave their written permission accordingly. I gave a short talk on the first day explaining that I was interested in call centres and I was studying for a university degree. To avoid the effects of the Observer's Paradox, I did not tell them that I was specifically interested in language, but that I was interested in call centre work. The main aim of obtaining recordings of the training session was



ethnographic rather than sociolinguistic; I used the data to supplement my field notes rather than as a source of speech data. As I was participating fully in the training myself it was often not possible to take written notes at the time and so making recordings enabled me to listen to the sessions again later and ensure all the relevant information was noted accurately.

NTB employees are trained for eight weeks in total. This is less time than inbound staff, who are trained for up to sixteen weeks. In NTB, the first four weeks are spent exclusively in a classroom under the supervision of an internal trainer. There is a dedicated training department in the call centre which forms part of 'recruitment and retention', and, as the name suggests, the employees who work there are responsible for processes such as recruitment, staff training (both new and existing employees) and also for ensuring that staff turnover rates are kept as low as possible. Employees of the recruitment and retention department do not make or receive calls in the call centre although many of them started their employment with British Gas on the call centre floor. The classroom training period is primarily intended to ensure that employees fill in legal paperwork, have a basic knowledge of the company products, and are able to use the bespoke computer packages which NTB workers use on a daily basis.

If trainees manage to fulfil all the requirements for the first stage of training they are then allowed to move on to the next stage which is known as 'nesting'. Employees are tested at each new stage of the classroom computer training and they cannot progress to the next stage until they pass. They are also formerly tested on Gas Emergency Procedure via a written exam which is a legal requirement for all British Gas employees).

'Nesting' is an on-the-job phase of training where trainees take live calls under the supervision of existing employees referred to as 'nesters'. There is roughly one nester to three or four trainees, and his/her main role is to answer questions, give help, and perhaps most importantly for this study, to provide a *linguistic model* that the new employees are told is the correct way to talk to customers during calls. The guidance from nesters is explicitly informed by the QA criteria (displayed in example 2.2 above), but aside from this, they are not provided with any formal or structured materials which show them how to be a nester. As this process of nesting forms the backdrop to the linguistic analysis in chapters 5 and 6, a further, more detailed description of this process is given in chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 3: THE FIELDWORK

### 3.1 Introduction

Perched on the edge of an industrial estate, next to some wasteland, a supermarket car park and the main road through Uddingston, is Murdoch House, the main call centre and regional reception for Scottish Gas in Scotland. From the outside the red-brick, one storey building looks deceptively small and rather unassuming, with a glass frontage and automatic doors through which a steady stream of people passes daily, most of whom are employed in the call centre behind. The actual working floor itself is not visible from the exterior: like many other call centres, what lies behind the secure doors is only accessible to outsiders via the telephone. My task as a researcher was to enter the building and gather both ethnographic and sociolinguistic data in order to illustrate accurately the local linguistic practices that take place within. Specifically, my aim was to understand was the way in which new members of staff are integrated into the local Community of Practice by following the same path I was to take.

This chapter has summarised my ethnographic fieldwork in the call centre from July 2003 to March 2006. The bulk of this was carried out using participant observation, and it took place in the first two years of the study. This began in earnest in February 2004, although I continued to revisit the call centre as often as possible right up until the summer of 2007. I conclude by discussing the lengthy process of securing first a call centre, and then access to data which I was permitted to analyse.

### 3.2 Finding a Call Centre

*“Most fieldworkers would probably agree that gaining access to most organisational settings is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work, and dumb luck”*

Van Maanen & Kolb (1985: 11)

My search for a call centre began at the beginning of 2004. Prior to this I conducted a pilot study on call centre speech as part of my MPhil (Orr, 2003) and as a result managed to make a couple of contacts in the industry. However, I decided against using the same call centre as before because this time my proposed ethnographic approach required me to start out as more or less unknown as a linguistic researcher by the participants<sup>32</sup>. However, this made my task more difficult, as many call centre companies I approached were unwilling to give me access to sensitive call data. Several companies who expressed an interest at first were put off by the level of access I required, usually due to concerns over Data Protection, although many of the call centres I encountered were more deterred by the idea of handing over confidential training documents and allowing unrestricted discussions with staff (who may or may not be loyal to the company) than they were in allowing me access to live calls. By the end of 2004 I was beginning to think that the whole project could not go ahead as I was still looking for a willing call centre to take part in my study.

The main difficulty with conducting linguistic research in call centres is that because they are closed-access environments, often centrally run by a larger parent

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the ethical and legal considerations of this research, see section 2.6 below.

company, it can be difficult to locate an individual within the organisation who both understands and sympathises with the research and has the correct authority to grant access to an outsider. For this reason it is not usually possible to gain access via the 'friend of a friend' approach which has been successful for other researchers in the past, for example Milroy (1980). This study of three urban working class communities in Belfast owed a great deal to her innovative, and now famous, fieldwork methods. She managed to gain access to discussions in the homes of informants by becoming acquainted with them through other, already trusted community members. This strategy is not so effective in the call centre situation because even if one forms links with an insider, it is very likely that he/she has a superior, and their superior has a superior too, and so on. This tends to leave the researcher with countless hurdles to overcome before legitimate access is granted. Bureaucracy, lack of a clear chain of command, and inherent suspicion of outsiders by organisations were all factors which threatened to halt my research on several occasions<sup>33</sup>. It soon became clear that just approaching call centres through low-level managers and staff was ineffective, and therefore a different strategy was required in order to find a call centre willing to give me the access I required. I composed a press release for the local print media in order to try to generate further interest in my study. One of the ways in which I could sell the research to higher-level management was by opening up the possibility of future media interest and publicity for the company involved. It had become clear that I was very unlikely to find a call centre which would allow me to conduct my research simply for the sake of researching, and therefore I had to provide some sort of incentive to encourage them to become involved. The story generated a reasonable

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<sup>33</sup> See section 2.6 for further details.

amount of interest in Scotland (especially in Glasgow) and led to several (rather inaccurate) articles about language and call centres.

In just a short space of time I was contacted by several companies who had read about my study in the papers. British Gas was one of these companies, and that is how our relationship began. Over the telephone their representative explained that an employee had brought in a press clipping to her manager which contained an article about my work and they were interested in becoming involved. Although I was past the first hurdle in gaining access to call centre data, I was at this point unaware that there were still many more up ahead.

### **3.3 Translating my Research**

One of the reasons it took me such a long time to find a call centre willing to give me access was because there were certain aspects of my intended study which they did not understand fully. Before my first encounter with British Gas, I had already had several meetings with representatives of different call centres in order to pitch my research to them. In the course of these meetings I would provide them with printed information about the project, including a copy of my MPhil thesis<sup>34</sup> and a short document outlining the methodology and intended outcomes of the work. However, it soon became apparent that this approach had failed in putting the information across in an accessible way, as one representative later admitted that she didn't read any of the material I had provided and nor had any of her colleagues. What they wanted was something non-academic and 'catchy' to pass on to their superiors. Therefore, before meeting with British Gas, I decided to plan a method of

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<sup>34</sup> I did not expect the representatives to be in any way interested in reading the thesis itself, but I felt that by giving them a copy, I was providing them with evidence of previous work with the opportunity to find further information on this should they so desire.

giving them all the information they needed in a quick and simple way which was as non-academic as possible. In other words, I had to 'translate' my research proposal into something appealing and marketable to a commercial audience. I addressed the following issues:

- Incentive: what can the company gain from the research in terms of publicity and applicable knowledge?
- Outlay: how can I minimise the intrusion my presence will make at the local level and ensure any costs of time and money are not passed on to the call centre?
- Risk: how can I assure them that my research is ethical and will adhere fully to data protection laws?

With these questions in mind I designed a short presentation which I was invited to give to the press officer, the call centre manager, and one of the lower-level managers. As part of the presentation I outlined my own main requirements in terms of the nature of the fieldwork (participant observation) and the level of access to data that I required. I gave a full explanation of the nature and specific purpose of the study from a sociolinguistic perspective as well as demonstrating how the research could fit in with Centrica's own agenda. As a result of the presentation I was granted permission by the call centre manager to carry out my research exactly as I had requested. At this stage, it appeared that the negotiation stages were over and that I could begin my fieldwork and data collection without further delay. However, although I did not realise it at the time, it would be almost two more years before I could secure access to the call data central to this study. What this delay did provide was an opportunity

for a methodologically advantageous extended period of participant observation where I could collect other linguistic and ethnographic data which was not legally or ethically problematic.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

The nature of the routinised, intensive work in the NTB call centre means that collecting certain types of data, especially interview data, is often difficult or even impossible<sup>35</sup>. However, spending as much time in the call centre as possible, as well as building relationships and negotiating with management did ensure that I was given sufficient access to employees 'off-call' in order to collect the data I required.

The bulk of my ethnographic fieldwork was carried out using long-term participant observation, the rationale for which is discussed in the opening section of this chapter. The first period of participant observation lasted for roughly three months, during which I visited the call centre on a daily basis and took part in new employee training sessions. This was a valuable stage in establishing myself in the call centre and forming relationships with the other staff at different levels of the hierarchy. It also allowed me to familiarise myself with daily routines and practices. This was followed by a further, less intense period where I visited in shorter bursts with breaks of up to two weeks between visits. This was sustained for over two years and it allowed me to build upon the relationships and information sources I had established in the first three months. The nature of my participant observation during this time after the training varied between visits. On some occasions, I would sit at a desk on the call centre floor or in the canteen and simply watch others at work or listen to snippets of

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<sup>35</sup> This is mostly due to the fact that NTB employees are 'tied' to their workstation for their entire shift (with the exception of toilet breaks).



conversations by those around me. At other times, I would be more active and ask questions or join discussions if this was possible. I also spent quite a lot of my time with my contact, Lynne, either talking explicitly about the call centre or simply observing her work. My observation of the nesting period, directly after classroom training was where I spent most time just sitting watching, rather than interacting with others or taking part in activities.

In addition to participant observation, I also elicited other forms of ethnographic data mainly via structured and casual interviews with management and staff. However, at the very beginning of the fieldwork I distributed a questionnaire to half of NTB (150 employees). It was used in order to gain various socioeconomic and sociolinguistic information about the participants, and through this I planned to select a smaller, homogeneous sample of speakers for the main linguistic investigation<sup>36</sup>. I also used the questionnaire to elicit informants' opinions on their jobs, their speech at work<sup>37</sup>, and call centre work in general. It was difficult initially to persuade workers to fill in the questionnaire, and therefore an incentive of £100 was offered as a first prize to employees who took part.

The ethnographic interview data<sup>38</sup> came from 20 (10 male, 10 female) NTB staff aged between 18 and 25 who had worked in the call centre for between 1 year and 18 months. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, and consisted of a 'general chat' which proved sufficient to inform my main ethnography and to familiarise

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<sup>36</sup> As it turned out, I did not end up analysing this particular data set, instead favouring call data taken from the nesting period, the reasons for which will become apparent in later sections.

<sup>37</sup> Normally this would be problematic in terms of the Observer's Paradox. In this case, however, call data are already recorded and therefore additional knowledge about the study does not affect the data.

<sup>38</sup> For this first study, I relied on the interview data to help 'fill in the gaps' about life in the call centre. I did not analyse it linguistically. However this may well be a useful approach in future work.

myself with some of the staff with whom I would otherwise not have been able to speak. In addition to these interviews, I interviewed various members of the recruitment, training and managerial teams. Although these interview data proved to be very useful in informing the main study, some of the most valuable insights into the community were obtained 'off-record' away from the tape recorder in places like the canteen, between calls, and the beginning and end of shifts where workers shared casual conversations, rather than in the formal setting of a recorded interview. In these cases, I became adept at memorising the information and writing it down in my field notes at the first available chance.

### **3.5 Talking to Workers**

As I have already described, there is an inherent problem in doing research in a call centre where the aim is to gather information about the local community by speaking directly to community members, and that is that those members spend a high proportion of their time on the telephone talking to customers. Any time which is not spent on the telephone is often taken up with 'wrap-up', where agents finish off inputting data or completing tasks associated with the last call they have taken. As NTB agents only work from 5pm until 8pm, they all usually arrive between 4.50pm and 5pm, and leave as soon as the end of the shift arrives. Because the NTB shift is so short, they are only permitted a 10 minute break, which gave me a rather short window of time to talk to them in the staff canteen. In terms of arranging interviews, I found that some of them were happy for the break, with several interviewees joking that "it gets me off the phone for a few minutes". However, there were many of them who were worried that it would prevent them from meeting their target that week. This tended to happen more towards the end of the week as the later it got, the less

time the agents had to achieve the required number of sales. For this reason I tried to schedule as many interviews at the beginning of the week as possible, although it did not alleviate the problem completely. One girl asked to leave halfway through the session as she was too concerned about her sales to continue talking to me.

When I did get the chance to speak to individuals, I was aware there was a potential sociolinguistic barrier between us in terms of my own accent and background. I have lived in Glasgow for nearly a decade, and as a result my accent has certainly been affected in several ways, most notably my use of intonation and lexis. However, I retain a fairly pronounced Southern English English accent. Ideally it might have been better to get someone else with a local accent to interview the agents, but in the spirit of the ethnography I was keen to speak to the agents personally, and decided that although my accent might have had some effect on the interviewees, I did not expect this to be far-reaching after spending a long period of time with them. I also found that by talking to the agents for a few minutes before starting the tape, this at least gave them some time to get 'used' to my accent. As most of my own friends are Glaswegian, I have a great deal of experience in casual conversation with this particular regional group, and I feel that over the years I have developed my own (often unconscious) strategies for reducing the most salient differences in accent. I was, therefore, not at all uncomfortable with talking with the interviewees.

In terms of my appearance, when I first began working at the call centre there was a smart dress policy which meant that workers were expected to come to work in traditional office wear – not as formal as a suit, but a smart shirt and tie with dress

trousers for men and the same for women minus the tie and with the option of a suitable skirt. There was no standard company uniform. I found this dress code to be an advantage at the very beginning of the research because I wore a suit to meet the managers which meant I did not stand out when visiting the call centre. When it came to working at the call centre, however, there was a change of dress code brought in as a trial (although it is still place over three years later) which meant that employees were able to dress casually, within certain limits.<sup>39</sup> This proved to be extremely beneficial to my fieldwork as I found it much more easy to portray a relaxed and approachable persona in casual dress. I felt that if the other trainees and agents saw me as 'one of them' (many of them were at university themselves) then they would be much more likely to trust me. In this way my role was more as a 'student' than a researcher, which would have been much more difficult to negotiate had I been wearing formal dress.

### **3.6. A Way In - Training**

By taking part in training sessions alongside new recruits I was able to develop a role which was less like a researcher and more like an insider. As well as learning about local practices in an overt, formal way (i.e. in the form of classroom training), I was also able to form relationships with the trainees themselves, which allowed me to integrate myself further into the local community and to develop knowledge which is not usually accessible to an outsider.

I attended two training sessions of 4 weeks each which ran consecutively. The first group (A) was of 12 new starts (plus myself), 11 of whom were male, with one

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<sup>39</sup> Employees were expected to use common sense and to continue to dress in a fashion appropriate to a working environment. Short skirts, football colours and other more 'controversial' attire is avoided.

female. There were originally 14 trainees, with 12 males and 2 females, but by day 2 of the training, one male and one female had dropped out. For the purposes of data protection, all of the informants' names from the training period have been changed.

Before the training my only contacts had been managerial, both at the call centre level, and above. Training was therefore a way of forming ties with lower level employees which I could build upon in subsequent months. I was aware from the start that gaining the trust of the other trainees would be dependent on my being able to reduce any major differences between us and to be accepted as one of the group. This aspect of fieldwork relies a great deal on the personality and interpersonal skills of the researcher, and their ability to interact with individuals as potential friends and colleagues rather than as 'informants'. I therefore approached the training as 'authentically' as possible, focusing on the experience of being trained rather than carrying out research.

There were two important relationships which I formed during the first training session which were fundamental in allowing me to be accepted by the group as a whole<sup>40</sup>. Both of these are explained in more detail here:

### **Louisa**

Louisa was from the local area with a working class background and was 19 years old (I was 25 years old at the time). She had never had any experience of sales or of call centre work prior to her job at Scottish Gas. We immediately struck up a friendship as

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<sup>40</sup> Due to the ethical and legal difficulties with obtaining data (see section 2.6 below), I was unable to access live call data for these two informants, something which would have been methodologically advantageous had it been possible. However, these two contacts were invaluable in terms of my ethnography as a whole.

we were the only females in a group of eleven males, and therefore shared some common ground from the start. Louisa was a smoker and so I was able to spend time talking to her alone during the ten minute cigarette break she was given every evening. Louisa, being the youngest of the group and one of only two females, was rather intimidated at first, and was not really included in conversations by the rest of the group. My presence, however, provided her with an ally (and vice versa), and by the second week we had both gained the confidence to contribute to the informal exchanges which took place between the trainees in between sessions. By the end of the first week, Louisa and I had formed a tentative friendship which was further cemented by the end of the four weeks. Louisa didn't remain at the call centre past the sixth week of employment, as she reported that it was not what she had expected and selling was too difficult, but we managed to keep in touch for several months after she had ended her employment there as a result of a genuine friendship<sup>41</sup>.

## **Gary**

Gary was a twenty year-old working class male from Glasgow with no call centre experience before working for British Gas. He was a central member of the group<sup>42</sup>, although he only stayed for the first four weeks of training as he lived in Glasgow and wanted to get a job closer to home. However, through him I was able to form ties with the rest of the male trainees.

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<sup>41</sup> Louisa, like the rest of the trainees, was fully informed about my reasons for being in the call centre at the beginning of training, and indeed she sometimes asked me about university and my studies (although in a general way rather than expressing explicit interest in the actual research project) and therefore I was not solely motivated to become friends with her to win her trust.

<sup>42</sup> Gary was outspoken from the first day of training and often led group discussions. He was slightly older than many of the other trainees and he lived in a shared flat in the West of Glasgow, whereas many of the younger boys still lived at home, and this slight age gap may well have contributed to his dominance.

I found it more difficult to interact with the male trainees at first, not so much because of my status as a researcher, but because I am female, English and middle class, and integrating myself into a group of male working class Glaswegians was never going to be an easy task. Therefore, along with Louisa (who remained silent and seated alone on the first day), I was rather isolated at first and felt unable to contribute to their conversations. This was also because I lacked the shared knowledge which gave the other participants access to the daily talk which took place. Two of them, Dave and Roy, were friends already, and several others had attended the same school or college (although they were unknown to each other). This meant that most early conversations centred around mutual friends and shared interests relating mostly to the local area. At this stage, therefore, I was more of an observer than a participant. I used this time to listen for information that could enable me to become less of a peripheral member. That included noting how each individual interacted with the rest of the group: who dominated conversations and who was more passive. Gary quickly emerged as one of the more confident members; being quite outspoken he would usually be the first to initiate conversations at break times and in free spaces between training sessions. Luckily, Gary and I shared something in common in that unlike the other trainees who lived in and around Uddingston, we both lived in the West End of Glasgow, roughly 8 miles away from the call centre. I noticed that Gary took a bus home and although I started out taking the train, by switching to the bus I was able to talk to him alone for a few minutes while we waited for the bus. At first we sat in different places on the bus, but by the second week of training we sat together on the bus and talked, usually for the majority of the journey. This bond with Gary helped me to access conversations with the other males, at first with him nominating me as a speaker:

G: I was pure (.) greetin' wi laughter hahah=  
D: =I know man I was the same (.) have you seen Anchorman  
G: no I havenae but apparently it's funny too (.)  
Suzy's seen it (.) you said it was good [(\*\*)  
S: [yeah it's  
brilliant (.) you should go see it

In this way, Gary as a main participant was able to ratify my presence to the other males and to involve me in conversations of which I was previously an observer.

Towards the second half of the training, I was able to initiate conversations with the males easily, and began to form the type of friendships one tends to make in any workplace of this kind.

Louisa and Gary became genuine workmates for the time I knew them, and although I had initially been consciously aiming to talk to them at times when they were away from the group, and hence have a better chance of becoming less of a peripheral member, my skills as an individual trying to make friends with new colleagues were what I relied upon, and I just acted as myself rather than as a covert researcher trying to infiltrate a group for ulterior purposes. By the end of the four weeks I felt completely integrated into the group and fully accepted by the others, not as a researcher, but as a colleague (albeit a colleague with a role slightly different from their own).

My original research plan involved training and then following the trainees through nesting and into the wider call centre. Unfortunately this was not possible as a result of the legal issues which prevented me from accessing live calls for over a year after the training took place. By the time I had access and was able to carry out this stage of the data collection, all but one of the trainees had stopped working in the call centre.



### 3.7 Ethics & Legal Issues

The main ethical problem associated with the live call data analysed in Chapter 5 is that full informed consent can only be sought from the agent and not the customer.

Finding a way around this issue resulted in a protracted series of negotiations between my institution (the University of Glasgow) and the parent company of British Gas (Centrica). When the project was first pitched to British Gas, the then call centre manager at Uddingston agreed to take on the project providing I had ethical approval for the research from the University of Glasgow. However, it transpired that without customer consent, I risked causing problems for Centrica if a customer were to find out that his/her speech was being scrutinised without his/her prior permission.

Initially, other strategies were considered, such as seeking retrospective consent from customers. This was not possible because it entailed giving me access to the customer account database where all the contact details were stored, and this in itself was ethically and legally problematic. I also considered getting the agents to adapt their script so as to seek the customer's permission at the beginning of each call, but this too was impractical. Firstly, it would mean interfering with the content of the calls I was intending to analyse, and therefore removing some of their authenticity.

Secondly, on outbound sales calls this can disrupt the agents' normal sales spiel and potentially affect their attainment of targets.

Aside from abandoning the project altogether, the only option left was to draw up an agreement in which Centrica would give me access to live calls as long as I adhered to a set of terms and conditions, and that the University be prepared to accept legal responsibility should I contravene any of them. Several attempts had been made previously to reach a similar agreement whereby I would sign a standard

'confidentiality agreement' that ensured my research did not contravene Data Protection law. However, an agreement of this type would have been detrimental to the research and would have prevented me from publishing or disseminating the rights at all. The eventual contract was slightly different in that it meant that the research could go ahead relatively unperturbed. The main conditions for me gaining access to the data are as follows:

1. All personal and sensitive personal details are removed from the sound files at the call centre
2. Anonymous sound files can be analysed off-site but only in the secure conditions of the Phonetics Lab at the University of Glasgow.
3. All data must be returned to the call centre/ destroyed within 5 years

Had I been aware of the long delay this issue would cause at the beginning of the project, I doubt I would have continued. Although I officially started the project as a result of the legal negotiations outlined above in late 2004, I was not able to listen to or analyse calls until the end of 2006.

Call centres in general appear to be a rather difficult source of data in this way. Since my work in this area began I have had contact with two other researchers who have been unsuccessful in getting the same level of access to call centre speech for precisely the same reason as I have. One of the main reasons why I encountered so many difficulties with accessing the data for this study was that I was venturing into somewhat uncharted ethical and methodological territory. It was only through sheer determination, the efforts of several legal advisers from both the University of

Glasgow and Centrica, and the unquestioning support of my doctoral supervisor, that the project was not shelved altogether.

## **CHAPTER 4: Learning to be an NTB agent**

### **4.1 Doing, Learning, Being**

Those professions where distinctive ways of talking play a key role in daily business (e.g. call centres, public announcers, religious preachers, lawyers, radio DJs, commentators) seem also to be where vocal stereotypes and other distinctive ways of using language are most likely to develop. Systematic analyses of these types of talk (e.g. Crystal & Davy 1969) can allow linguists to describe these ways of talking and to differentiate them from other activity-related types of talk. The reasons for these professions seeming to be more prone to developing associated vocal stereotypes are not entirely clear. However, the idea that an individual uses his/ her voice like a linguistic uniform or toolkit inherent to a particular role appears important, as do the practical realities of the activity which may require a certain configuration of suprasegmental features in order to carry it out. For example, a horse racing commentator might be expected to use an increase in pitch, volume and tempo in order to generate excitement during a race.

If a certain occupation like call centre work has distinctive ways of speaking (which may or may not include distinctive vocal stereotypes), where does this style come from, why is it used for this activity, and how do new members go about learning it? Questions like these are central to this study. They require an approach grounded in ethnographic observation and interview (one which is outlined in Chapter 2 above), and a community-based theory of learning which can help us to understand the complex relationship between linguistic style and social practice. In order to satisfy this second consideration, the present chapter focuses on the training and nesting

processes first outlined in chapter 2, and attempts to understand their role in the construction of style in the call centre. To do this it is necessary to look to the Community of Practice model as a construct within a wider social theory of learning.

#### **4.2 Legitimate Peripheral Participation: Learning in the Community of Practice**

The Community of Practice (CofP) model was introduced briefly in chapter 1, and it has been used to inform many recent sociolinguistic (variationist) studies of style, for example Eckert (2000); Moore (2003). These studies seek to correlate linguistic variation with community of practice membership, looking at how community members combine variables to create distinctive ways of speaking. Eckert (e.g. 2000, 2003, 2004) uses the term *bricolage* to encapsulate the process by which style is constructed within the community of practice. She argues (2004) that speakers pick and choose existing variables from the sociolinguistic landscape and ‘tweak’ them (i.e. give them new meanings) so that they become part of their own construction of style. With her main focus on linguistic variation, Eckert looks directly to the local construction of styles in order to determine the role variation plays in this process. Her work in a Detroit high school (1989, 2000) does just this; via ethnographic fieldwork she uncovered an immediately obvious, partially class-related polarisation between two groups of students (the JOCKS and the BURNOUTS), and she found that the categories used to mediate this class divide within the high school depended heavily upon style (including language, dress, choice of activity, and so on). This and other sociolinguistic work which uses the Community of Practice model is valuable in showing us, as Eckert (2003: 10) puts, it that, ‘the social is embedded in language’, and that linguistic variation cannot be understood without reference to local practice.

This present research, however, is concerned with a rather specific form of variation, the way in which speakers learn a new (institutional) style. Therefore, at this point it is important to revisit the origins of the Community of Practice model in order to conceptualise it in a way which suits this present agenda. Essentially, the CofP will not be used in order to explain linguistic variation, but is rather part of the ‘theoretical furniture’ which will inform the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

The CofP model was borrowed into sociolinguistics (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992) from a theory originally outlined by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their work on apprenticeship and learning in the workplace, where they try to explain how people learn and co-construct their identities in the social world. The model is central to their theory of learning, which they locate within the processes of co-participation rather than within the minds of individuals. This approach rejects the structuralist view of learning which claims the existence of underlying, pre-existing structures (they do, however, accept that participation frameworks are structured, although this structuring is adaptive). Instead they focus on the collective and on participation, rather than the individual and internalisation. Most importantly, Lave and Wenger (1991) put forward a theory of ‘situated learning’ where learners do not learn by acquiring abstract structures, but by participating in CofPs where they perform expert roles. It is their increased access to and participation in these roles which Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) explain that legitimate peripheral participation encapsulates the idea ‘that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community’. Lave and Wenger (2001: 34) explain that ‘periphery’ does

not relate to the actual outskirts of a community, or that it is in anyway a negative term. Instead, Lave and Wenger (2001: 34) suggest the concept of periphality suggests that ‘there are multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and -inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community’. Essentially, this model allows us to understand how individuals new to a community become full participant members of a community of practice.

In order to exemplify LPP, Lave & Wenger (1991:65) focus on apprenticeship in five very different CofPs: midwives in Mexico; tailors in Liberia; butchers in US supermarkets; work-learning settings of US Navy quartermasters; and ‘nondrinking alcoholics’ from Alcoholics Anonymous<sup>43</sup>. In each study, despite many fundamental differences between each CofP, we can see the recurring concept of shift in participation from periphery to centre as both a symptom of and as a constitutive part of the learning process. The case study they examine which bears most similarity to the learning situation within the call centre is that of the supermarket butcher (taken from an earlier case-study by Becker 1972). The call centre and the supermarket are both modern working environments owned by large companies in a Western culture. In addition to this, the structure of the training in both workplaces is similar in that both apprenticeships consist of a form of didactic, classroom-style learning as well as on-the-job training. Essentially, the LPP model allows us to understand how individuals learn by engaging in the Community of Practice in different ways. Didactic approaches to training contrast strongly with active participation in the community, but examination of both forms is important in showing how new members learn to be NTB workers. These two modes of learning in the call centre

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<sup>43</sup> Lave & Wenger (1991: 65) note that this final CofP is not one usually described as a form of apprenticeship; however, they note that the learning in this final study was so similar to the other four that “it serves to highlight common features of the others”.

(classroom training and nesting) encapsulate the two contrasting ways in which knowledge is passed from 'old-timers' to new community members. Both of these modes are discussed in detail below.

### 4.3 Classroom Training in NTB

New recruits are trained in a classroom situation for four weeks, from 5pm – 8pm, Monday to Friday; a total of 60 hours. This contrasts with training for the inbound call centre which lasts for up to 260 hours (from 9am-5pm for eight weeks). NTB training is essentially a reduced version of the full inbound training<sup>44</sup>, and at the time I was participating in training, it was not necessarily particularly tailored to suit the telesales work with which NTB is involved<sup>45</sup>. For example, NTB recruits are trained to use two bespoke computer packages, known as Banner and Siebel. Banner is an older, MS DOS package, which is still partially in use by the inbound call centre, where much of the customer information has always been stored. However, at the end of the twentieth century, Banner began to be replaced by the newer, Windows-based system, Siebel. Discussions with trainees during the nesting period revealed that in fact they were rarely called upon to use Banner. Discussions with trainees during the nesting period revealed that they felt the training was not particularly reflective of the daily operation in NTB.

From a managerial perspective, the main role of classroom training is to ensure trainees have the *technical* knowledge necessary to carry out an inbound or outbound

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<sup>44</sup> As this was not a central focus for this study, the content of the inbound training is not explicitly laid out here, although it is very similar to much of that taught in NTB. In general, inbound training covers the same areas in greater detail (especially in terms of the computer packages) and with additional components which are not relevant for NTB work, i.e. that relate specifically to customer service-type activities, such as responding to complaints, or organising an appointment with an engineer.

<sup>45</sup> This was mostly because NTB employees had only recently begun to be formally trained by British Gas (beforehand their training was run within the NTB department on the call centre floor).



call. It is therefore rather general in nature (partly because the same sort of training is given to all employees, rather than just NTB workers) and does not pay particular attention to either the negotiation of the sale itself, or the knowledge or skills required to talk to customers during calls. The role of the trainers is to pass on chunks of abstract knowledge about the call centre within a didactic framework. The basic timetable and main content of the classroom training is as follows:

#### **Week 1:**

- Knowledge of local and global hierarchies within the company, the company history and related businesses (e.g. Transco);
- Signing of legal documents, including the Data Protection Act 1998, the Working Time Directive, and employment contracts;
- Training on Data Protection laws, health and safety at work, emergency procedures (including fire and bomb drills) and how to deal with a suspected gas escape.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Weeks 2-4**

- Knowledge of the bespoke computing packages, 'Siebel' and 'Banner'
- Knowledge of the range of British Gas products and services (including pricing and local terminology);

#### **Day 28**

- Sales training (although not specific telesales training).

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<sup>46</sup> Due to the nature of the business, gas escape procedures are taken very seriously. Agents must take a written test to confirm that they fully understand what to do in the event of a potential gas escape and how to spot the warning signs when on the phone to a customer.

Surprisingly<sup>47</sup>, the sales training is somewhat of an afterthought, taking place on the final evening of the classroom period, lasting for only a couple of hours. It is also noticeable that there is no telephone-related or specific linguistic training during this period whatsoever<sup>48</sup> for NTB employees, although this *is* included in the inbound training package<sup>49</sup>. At no stage (apart from in informal asides and anecdotes which will be discussed later) does the classroom schedule tackle the issue of talking to customers on the telephone. When I asked the trainers why the agents were not given any theoretical preparation for taking calls, they explained that it was better for the agents to be ‘dropped in at the deep end’ by having to take live calls in a ‘safe’ situation (i.e. nesting) where they are under supervision, by being expected to take live calls and to learn by experience. One trainer explained to me:

*‘You can’t teach someone how to be a call centre agent in a classroom. You can show them how to work the computer and tell them all about the products on offer, but they have to learn the rest of it themselves by having a go’*

British Gas trainer, Feb 2005

The classroom itself is set up to facilitate the computer and systems training which takes the majority of the training period (almost three of the four weeks). This can be seen below:

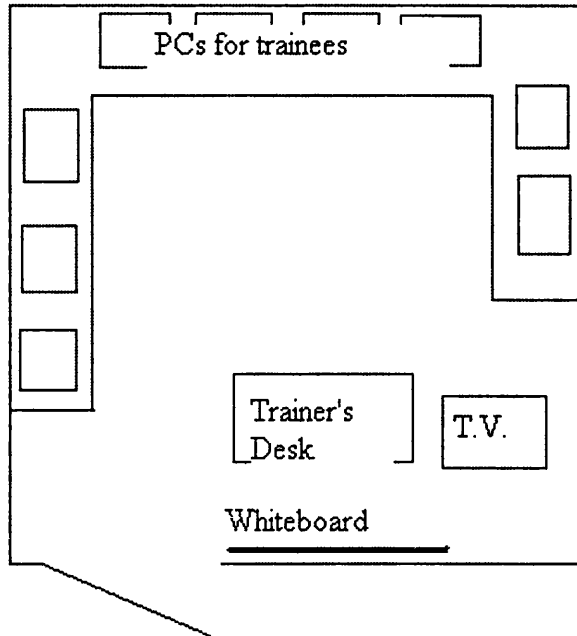
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<sup>47</sup> I had expected sales training to take up a significant portion of the four weeks classroom training, and was rather surprised when we were only given a 3 hour session on this right at the end of the training.

<sup>48</sup> When I trained as a telephone banking agent (inbound) I was given quite extensive training on how to sound and which words to avoid saying when talking to customers.

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps this is because it is felt that service calls require different training from sales calls, with less focus on the ‘voice’ and more on the ‘hard sell’.

**Figure 4.1: NTB Classroom Layout**



All training took place in this classroom, with the exception of two listening-in sessions (one on day one and another in the final week of training), where trainees were taken out on to call centre floor and seated next to an existing member of staff. The trainees were given a headset without a microphone and plugged into the agents' Telset. This allowed them to listen in without disturbing the calls. Before trainees were allowed out on the floor for the first time, the trainer gave a brief description of the concept of listening in:

*"...everyone's going to go through the same thing tonight so you're going to go out and you're going to sit with an agent carrying out a job or a similar job to what you're going to be expected to do once your training's completed. Then we'll come back after that and we'll do a wee wash up and you can tell us what you thought of your experience when you were out with the agent"*

Lorraine, Recruitment Manager Feb 2005

In this way, the listening in sessions were the only opportunity trainees had during the first four weeks to get 'hands-on' experience of the type of interaction in which they would eventually be involved. Once we returned to the training room, many of the trainees reported that the experience had made them nervous for various reasons, mostly because of the computer package with which they were at that point unfamiliar, but also because many of them found the idea of talking to 'real people' rather unnerving. These listening in sessions were important in providing a more concrete idea of how the training sessions related to the real life practices of the call centre. Had they not taken place, many of the abstract systems and processes about which the trainees were learning would have been rather obscure and without context. For example, when given the opportunity to listen-in, employees were able to see the interaction between the two different computer packages and the way in which each screen was related to a section of the script. It is also important to note that these sessions provided trainees with their first implicit lesson on how to speak on the telephone to customers. The expert agents who took part in the sessions tended to be selected because it was felt they would 'set a good example'.

During the classroom training, new recruits are highly restricted in their participation in the wider call centre community of practice. The training room itself is located on the periphery of the building, with the main call centre floor located towards the centre. In this way new community members literally move from the periphery of the building inwards as their training progresses. This is not necessarily just down to architecture: the layout of the call centre is designed in parallel to relative access available to outsiders. Those who do not work in the call centre are not allowed beyond a certain point in reception. Newcomers are allowed inside but they are

located in rooms which are outwith the main call centre floor. Essentially, the changing physical location of trainees can be seen as a move from periphery to centre, although their location within the community of practice is not necessarily a linear progression in the same way. As Lave & Wenger (1991: 36) point out, “the end point of centripetal participation is not the central core”. In other words, by becoming an expert member of a community one does not always end up at the same optimal end point, where one can no longer keep learning. They go on to point out (*ibid.*) that “complete participation would suggest a closed domain of knowledge or collective practice for which there might be measurable degrees of ‘acquisition’ by newcomers”. This is why they prefer to use the term ‘full participation’ for those members of a community who can be considered experts or ‘old-timers’.

Because trainees do not themselves have access to the call centre floor during the first four weeks of employment, most of the information about local practices that they receive during their first four weeks is relayed in the form of anecdotes and personal stories from existing staff, including the training staff themselves. This anecdotal material contrasts with the more formally defined materials which make up the majority of the pre-written training package. During the first week of training, different members of staff came to visit the classroom to discuss their own roles and experiences in the business, and also what trainees should expect upon beginning work. In this way, the idea of expert passing on information to apprentice was recurrent throughout the classroom stage. This contrasts with the individual engagement in daily tasks that comes in the later stage of nesting, although the close relationship between expert and apprentice continues.

#### 4.4 Nesting: Situated Learning in the CofP

Discussions with the other trainees towards the end of training showed that many of them felt trepidation about finally being allowed to take calls. At this point they were now fully trained in all technical aspects of the business. However they had not taken any calls themselves and did not really know what to expect, nor do they feel confident of their newly acquired skills. We<sup>50</sup> had been given a set of out-of-context, abstract information about working in NTB, but as we had not actually experienced it first hand, it was difficult to reconcile the mental image of NTB calls with the real-life activity of engaging in them. In order to assuage some of their anxiety (many of them expressed concern at the fast approaching first call), the trainer explained to them that they would not be expected to take any calls on the first day of nesting if they did not want to, and could simply listen-in to get the hang of the task. However, they were encouraged to at least attempt a call if they felt confident enough to do so.

Employees remain in the nesting area of the call centre (sometimes referred to as ‘the nursery’) for four weeks after the classroom period of training has ended. At this point they are no longer under the guidance of the trainers, but are instead placed under the supervision of a set of staff known as ‘nesters’. The nesters are all staff who have previously worked on the call centre floor themselves, and have applied to work as nesting staff, which they do on a full-time basis, often working with both inbound and outbound trainees. Each one works with several new staff at a time, usually about four at the beginning of nesting, and the numbers increase as time passes and staff become less dependent. Nesters are given assistance by other existing staff known as ‘support advisers’ who perform some aspects of the nester role relating to demonstrating calls

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<sup>50</sup> I use the third person plural here because this is based as much on my own feelings about the training process as those of the other trainees.

and giving general support and help when it is required. One nester explained his own role to me as follows:

*"I do the Q A which is quality assessment, go over all their calls, give them sales techniques show them how to work the system, stuff like that. As it goes along gradually more of the support advisers will go to other teams and then you'll have more people but also they'll be more advanced at that point and there'll be less work to do with each of them and less QA to do because there's more agents and things like that"*

Male Nester, April 2006

Nesters therefore, tend to spend the majority of their day walking between the trainees listening to their calls and, when required, demonstrating how calls 'should' be taken. The nesters are in turn managed by the nesting manager who controls the daily running of the entire nursery. Interviews with nesters revealed that their main duties are to assist employees with 'objection handling', call handling techniques and 'closing the sale'. In a sense, nesters behave very much like a mentor for the new employees, remaining on hand to give them help and advice throughout the four weeks they spend in the nursery. I asked one nester to explain to me the difference between training and nesting:

*"It's basically more hands-on. I mean obviously you learn how the systems work and stuff like that [in classroom training] but once you're out on the phones that's where you're really going to learn it more than just going through modules and stuff like that"*

Female Nester, April 2006

This suggests that staff recognise the differing functions of the two phases of training, with the content of the first half having little to do with the reality of making calls in NTB. For this reason, the roles of trainer and nester are slightly different. As already

mentioned above, the trainer's role is very much like that of a teacher or instructor. This extends to the physical environment in which they perform this role, which is set up very much like a classroom, away from the call centre floor. Most of the time is spent with trainers passing on information and with trainees listening. However, the nester carries out his/her form of training *in situ*, often sitting with only one trainee at a time, and providing continual engagement with and feedback on the individual's performance. The official role of nester as defined by the call centre is outlined in the following document (given to all trainees at the beginning of this phase of their training):



#### Example 4.1: NTB Printed Information on the Role of Nesters

##### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES – NESTERS**

- To ensure that graduates<sup>51</sup> are fully aware of what their role is to the business, and what KPIs they will be working towards achieving.
- To improve KPIs on a daily and weekly basis
- To hold daily Buzz sessions
- To carry out Quality assessing of calls
- To focus on improving sales
- To support staff with general queries
- To improve performance through 1:1 coaching and feedback
- To audit sales and work practices carried out on systems
- To provide factual information to assist feedback
- To share best practices
- To ensure the graduate folders are kept up to date and that evidence is documented
- To provide weekly reports to the dean and graduates outlining progress

This document illustrates the key role a nester plays in the apprenticeship of new staff. In comparison to the main call centre environment, the levels of codification and surveillance in nesting are extremely high. At this point the nester constantly checks and corrects the agents, and where they continue to make mistakes, the nester takes over and shows the agent how a call should be made.

Most of the points above are fairly self-explanatory, and outline a role which is a hybrid of trainer, adviser and manager. Most importantly, they are directly involved in

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<sup>51</sup> The name sometimes given to new trainees.

assessing the linguistic performance of new agents and the way in which this relates to their overall performance as a salesperson. I asked the nesters to explain the sort of advice they would give to new trainees, and one of them gave me his personal account:

*“I tell them to slow their speech down a lot more. We’ve got a lot of English customers and it’s quite hard the Glaswegian accent sometimes, it’s quite fast. That’s really it. Just generally you tell them to change the tone and the pace and things like that, to make it sound varied so you’re not sounding robotic and stuff”*

Male Nester March 2006

This suggests that where the printed script tells agents *what* to say, it is the nesters’ role to tell them *how* to say it. It is interesting that the nesters appear to single out prosodic factors as areas where correction is often required on their part, where the managers seem less prescriptive about this feature of agents’ performance, or at least less explicit about this prescription.

The nesters are also directly involved with the process of an agent ‘learning’ the script, which was discussed in section 2.5.9 above. They give the trainees the script on the first day and then spend time showing them how to use it ‘naturally’ in a real interaction. A great deal of focus is placed on the trainee not betraying to the customer that he/she is reading from a piece of paper:

*“You need to advise them a wee bit on how to do it. We give them a script for the first day or first couple of days just so they see how the should be structured and how they should flow. Then after a while I try and advise them to either move on to bullet points or move away from the script so*

*they're just talking to a customer instead. But obviously you need it there to give them a structure at the start"*

Female Nester March 2006

This reinforces the analytical need for an alternative (less concrete) conceptualisation of the script when considering its effect on the speech of new trainees. The nesting process is at the heart of where the transfer is first made from reading to recalling/performing, as well as being the locus for the initial stages of stylistic construction in the speech of NTB agents. It appears, as Cameron (2000a, 2000b) found in her studies of call centre speech, that the agent is not the only stylistic agent at work. She argues that it is the prescriptive checklists and managerial surveillance which is central to the process of styling in call centres. Although these things do also seem to play a role in NTB, it is the nesters and the nesting process in general which also appears to contribute to styling the NTB workers.

## CHAPTER 5: THE ANATOMY OF AN NTB CALL

### 5.1 The Data

The data for this section of the investigation come from a corpus of 224 outbound NTB calls made over a period of 3 months by 8 different agents. These 8 informants are the same group analysed in Chapter 6, who all underwent training together and sat in the same team for at least the first month of their employment in the call centre. They all originate from the Greater Glasgow area, and all except one (who was in her forties) were aged between 18 and 25. The data for this section, by comparison with the calls analysed in Chapter 6, are all taken from calls made least one month after employment had begun in the call centre, and the agent is considered a fully-fledged employee<sup>52</sup>.

### 5.2 Analysis

As outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the analysis proceeded with a 'bottom-up', CA-style transcription of all call openings, tying the interactional content to phonetic detail. Using the orthographic transcriptions, it was possible to segment each opening into a sequence of utterances (taking Schegloff's (1968) template as a starting point). These utterances are outlined in section 5.3 below.

Following the orthographic transcription, an auditory analysis of the intonation patterns over each of these utterances was carried out and the pitch contours were transcribed using the iconic system shown in appendix I. Praat version 4.4.32 for the Apple Macintosh was used to take pitch tracks in order to further illustrate the main auditory analysis. The pitch tracks were corrected by hand in order to eliminate the

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<sup>52</sup> This is reflected in several ways, including a physical move out of the nesting area, as well as the agents being expected to meet the same weekly targets as existing employees, which are slightly higher than those the trainees have to meet during nesting.

frequent pitch halving and doubling which occurred. Unfortunately the quality of the data was such that sometimes it was not possible to remove all artefacts. In addition, although the pitch contours generally correlate with the auditory analysis of pitch, there are a few instances where the two analyses appears to conflict. In these cases the auditory transcription was checked by a second analyst<sup>53</sup> to ensure accuracy. A script was run (see Appendix II) to remove all names of customers before the calls could be removed from the call centre for analysis in the speech lab as per the conditions of the legal agreement with British Gas to ensure customer confidentiality. Customer names and addresses were automatically hummed out by this script which meant that some utterances were not available for pitch analyses due to the interruption of the contour by the script.

The influence of the script and the conventionalised nature of business call openings in general suggests that the NTB openings will contain a high percentage of structurally and lexically similar material which is what makes the following analysis possible. In their research on unscripted business calls, Liberman and McLemore (1992: 68) argue that calls to commercial establishments such as restaurants or offices produce 'a response that is conventionalised in textual form and intonation'. As a result, Liberman and McLemore (1992) report that they were able to account for all but one of the 134 telephone calls analysed with a set of five classes of elements in a range of different sequences. Given the presence of the script in the NTB data, it is reasonable to expect an even smaller degree of textual variation (depending upon how closely the agent sticks to the script). The analysis that follows gives a finite characterisation of the openings of NTB calls, taking a similar approach to Schegloff

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<sup>53</sup> The second analyst was an experienced phonetician. They cross checked a random selection of transcriptions from the corpus using an auditory analysis. Where disagreement occurred, the token was rechecked by the first analyst.

(1986) in breaking them down into their component sequences, and aligning each of the agents' turns with its parallel move in the opening of the script.

### 5.3 The Structure of NTB Telephone Openings

Although Schegloff's template for call openings provides a useful starting point for analysis of NTB call openings, there are several notable differences in structure which necessarily result from the specific business-related nature of the call. Moreover, the use of a script by employees imposes standard information which must be given and elicited by an agent during the course of the opening<sup>54</sup>. As shown in section 2.5.9 above, this is also stipulated by the QA guidelines provided for managers, who must check to make sure the agent negotiates the required information at specific points in the opening interaction. The scripted opening provided to agents is reproduced here:

*Hi can I speak to mr/mrs/miss/ms [sic].....It's.....calling  
from British Gas, it's just a quick call about your three star agreement  
you have with us, do you have a moment?*

NTB script 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2005

For comparison with the calls themselves, it is useful to break this script down into smaller components which correspond with a single action as follows:

- A. Hi can I speak to Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms.....      **(greeting + named  
customer request)**

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<sup>54</sup> The order in which this information must be given/ retrieved is also prescribed, although there is some flexibility and the agents are allowed to rearrange certain elements as long as the content stays the same. Interaction with an un-scripted person necessarily leads to deviations from the script, although an interesting side-effect of using a script is that as well as controlling the speech of their employees, management are also often able to control what the customer says, to a certain extent.

B. It's.....calling from British Gas (agent identification)

C. It's just a quick call about your three star agreement you have with us  
(business-at-hand)

D. Do you have a moment? (hook)

We can see clear differences with Schegloff's (1986) sequence outlined above, most notably the lack of greetings and howareyou exchanges which are identified in the informal telephone calls which he examines. Although an NTB agent may use a greeting, i.e. *hi can I speak to...* this is not a stand alone greeting which operates as the first part of an adjacency pair; it is not oriented to by the participants as having the same function as a greeting made by two people who know one another (it is not an exchange of 'pleasantries'). In the same way, agents do not tend to use the 'howareyou' part of the sequence because 1) it is not scripted, and 2) again, this seems to be something reserved for talk between people who are already acquainted rather than between strangers during business calls. However, there is one agent in the corpus who *does* use 'howareyou' on some calls:

A = Agent

C = Caller

## Ex1

- 1 A:           hello can I speak to Mr HUM<sup>55</sup> please  
2 C:           er speaking  
3 A:           hi there sir it's David calling from British Gas  
4 C:           (.) oh yes  
5 A:           hiya how are you (0.3)  
6 C:           I'm fine  
7 A:           yep (0.4) just giving you a wee call regarding your  
              kitchen appliances you have covered with us

## Ex2

- 1 A:           hallo=  
2 C:           =hello  
3 A:           hello can I speak to Mr HUM please  
4 C:           speaking  
5 A:           hi there Sir it's David calling from British Gas  
(0.9)  
6 C:           pardon  
(0.4)  
7 A:           it's David calling from British Gas  
(0.3)  
8 C:           ah  
9 A:           hiya (0.3) how are you  
(0.4)  
10 C:          all right

Both of these examples illustrate the difference in greetings and 'howareyou' utterances between NTB calls and the everyday calls that Schegloff (1986) examines. Essentially, if an agent does use a greeting, it does not form part of a wider exchange

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<sup>55</sup> HUM = 'hummed out' anonymised section of speech



of greetings. The same applies to 'howareyou' utterances. In his data, Schegloff (1986: 130) outlines this part of the opening as follows:

*'The 'howareyou' sequence is ordinarily an exchange sequence, that is, after a first such inquiry is answered and the sequence elaborated and/or closed, a reciprocal inquiry by the recipient of the first is relevant, yielding an exchange of 'howareyou' inquiries and sequences.'*

In these two calls above, we can see that although the agent's interlocutor gives a response which states 'how s/he is', the exchange does not continue after this point with a reciprocal 'howareyou'. The examples also indicate that the 'howareyou' turn is not expected within this particular frame of talk (i.e. a business call) as this turn results in the customer hesitating before responding. The fact that this individual agent only does this on three of his calls, and no other agents in the corpus use a 'howareyou', further indicates that it is not a usual component of these NTB calls. This agent may well be using it here as an attempt (and not a particularly successful one) to build a 'rapport' with the customer by attempting to reduce the formality of the interaction.

The following is a breakdown of NTB call openings which occur *if the named customer answers the phone*<sup>56</sup>. Each action (scripted part A,B,C,D outlined on p.127-128 above) and the customer's corresponding turn are discussed in detail.

### **1. Summons/ answer**

All calls begin with the summons/ answer sequence identified by Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986) as a direct result of the telephone-mediated interaction. After the

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<sup>56</sup> If the named customer does not answer, this makes the interaction somewhat more complex. If he/she is available to speak, the agent, after an initial negotiation with the answerer, can then go on to speak to the required person, and the conversation begins again from the summons point (this time the summons is not the ring of the telephone, but the vocative given by the answerer). If the customer is not available, the call is usually terminated early. This latter variety of outcome is not analysed here.

telephone's mechanical ring, the first speaker is always the answerer, and this usually involves 'hello'. However, the ACD system can cause a short delay of a few seconds between this initial response by the answerer and the agent's first turn<sup>57</sup> which can lead to problematic silences:

Ex2

1 C:           hello (1.0) anyone there  
(0.5)  
2 A:           .hhhhh hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM

## 2. Identification request / customer identification (scripted part A)

Before the agent makes his/her request to speak to the customer he/she responds to the answerer's initial channel opener (given in line 1 of the examples) giving an initial 'token' greeting: 'hi there'; 'hi'; 'hiya'; 'hello' or 'hello there', as shown in the examples below.

Ex3

(1 C:           hello  
2 A:           (.) hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM

Ex4

(1 C:           hello  
(0.5)  
2 A:           hello can I speak to a Mr HUM

Ex5

1 C:           hello  
2 A:           .hhhhh hello there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

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<sup>57</sup> This is usually because the agent sometimes does not get connected to the call until after the summons/ answer sequence has taken place. This indicates the importance of this first sequence in prompting the customer to begin talking.

Ex6

1 C:           hello  
(.)  
2 A:           hi there could I speak to a Mr HUM please=

We can see in all of these examples (and indeed it is what happens on all but one or two calls in the corpus) that the agent's first move is to request to speak to the named customer<sup>58</sup>. This is scripted, and relates to the Data Protection Act 1998, preventing employees from discussing customer accounts with anyone except the named customer. As a result of the anonymous nature of the call, there is no possibility of the agent recognising the customer through his/her initial voice sample in the way this occurred in Schegloff's data<sup>59</sup> (1986: 128), e.g.:

Ilse           : Hello:,  
Irene         : H'llo Ilse?  
Ilse           : Yes. Ire:ne.

Marty         : Hello?  
Charlie       : Hiya, Marty?  
Marty         : Hi Charlie.

Dina          : Hello?  
Bernie        : H'llo, Dina?  
Dina          : hhhHi!

---

<sup>58</sup> In these calls, identification and recognition have different implications for the agent and the answerer. For the agent, it is probable that the phone will be answered either by the named customer, or by a member of his/her family. If the named customer is available, the agent has a small amount of personal information on that customer, including his/her gender, their address, their marital status, and further information relating to their contract with British Gas. However, upon picking up the phone, the answerer is faced with a great deal more identification/ recognition work to do before the call can proceed.

<sup>59</sup> However, on one agent's call, he simply starts by saying, *hello Mrs HUM?* which seems to be an assumption on his part as the caller does sound female and that it is appropriate to refer to her as 'Mrs'. This is most likely to be an unscripted mistake (the agent never repeats it).

The second part of this sequence (the customer's response) is not always the same, depending on the level of 'gatekeeping' employed by the customer. Gatekeeping can be taken to mean the level of control that the answerer (the named customer<sup>60</sup>) exerts over the information given to the agent after his/her initial request, and indeed whether the call proceeds much further than this first sequence<sup>61</sup>.

a) *No gatekeeping*

In these cases, the customer can give the preferred response to the preceding turn and self-identify:

Ex 7

1 C:            [hello  
2 A:            [hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C:            yes you're speaking to me

The customer response can be a number of different alternatives with the same effect: *speaking; yes speaking; yes that's me; yes you're speaking to him/her*; and so on. In a few cases, the customer replies with a potentially ambiguous: *yes*, or *hello*, usually with a rising, interrogative intonation. This is usually oriented to by the agent as an elliptical response, meaning: *yes, that's me, please give me further information*. In these cases the agent proceeds in the same way as if identity has been confirmed as in the example below:

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<sup>60</sup> I make this distinction here because this is a slightly different form of gatekeeping from that which takes place if the answerer is *not* the named customer.

<sup>61</sup> This is related to Schegloff's (1986: 113) own definition of gatekeeping, where he explains, "One aspect of the compactness and density of openings is the multiplicity of jobs which regularly get done in them. One of these jobs is the 'gatekeeping' one, of working through in some coordinated spate of behavior whether or not some co-present persons are going to engage in a sustained episode of interaction on some incipient occasion or not; if so, of what sort, duration, etc. it will be; and how entry into the episode, or circumvention of it, will be managed on a moment-to-moment, action-to-action basis".

### Ex8

1 C: four five eight nine  
2 A: (.) hi there is a M- HUM there  
(0.4)  
3 C: yeah  
(0.5)  
4 A: hi there (.) it's Ross from British Gas have you got a  
minute to speak about your homecare agreement

However, in some of these cases the agent is still unsure of whether or not the named customer has answered, and seeks to confirm the answerer's identity:

### Ex 9

3 A: it's Anne calling from British Gas  
(8.3)  
4 C: hello  
5 A: (.) hi Mr HUM  
6 C: it is

In this next example, the agent's uncertainty is indicated by a hesitation and a further prompt from the customer before he begins his next turn in 4:

### Ex10

1. C: hello  
2 A: hi there (.) can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
(0.5)  
3 C: yup (0.5) right  
(0.3)  
4 A: hi there it's Ross from (0.6) British Gas

With the exception of these final examples where the customer response is ambiguous, this is the least problematic customer response for the agents as it allows them to continue immediately with the next scripted turn (self-identification). This can therefore be thought of as an absence of gatekeeping, because the customer is not preventing the agent from continuing with the scripted structure.

b) *Gatekeeping via request for agent self-identification*

In an alternative to a), the customer *can* use gatekeeping in this turn and avoid giving the preferred response; instead entering into his/her own request for the agent to self-identify first:

Ex11

1 C:           hello  
2 A:           can I (.) talk to a Mr: HUM please  
3 B:           can I ask who's calling

Ex12

1 A:           hi there can I speak to a: (.) Mr HUM please  
(0.2)  
2 C:           who's this

In some of these calls, a further gatekeeping turn takes place once the agent has identified him/herself, as in this next example (turn 4):

Ex13

1 A:           hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C:           who is it please  
3 A:           .hh it's Gail calling from British Gas  
(0.9)  
4 C:           can I ask what it's concerning

We can see that the customer takes further control of the conversation by this added level of gatekeeping. At this point, the agent still hasn't positively identified the customer, and cannot repeat the original request until after he has responded to the question in turn 4. In some of these cases, the answerer never actually confirms his/her identity explicitly:

Ex 14

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

(0.3)

2 C: who is it please

3 A: it's Gail calling from British Gas

4 C: from where

(0.2)

5 A: from British Gas

(0.5)

6 C: how can I help

In example 14 above, we can see that the answerer has employed a certain level of gatekeeping by the use of interrogatives. After turn 6 it might have been possible for Gail to ask the answerer again to confirm whether she was the named customer, but to do so at this stage in the opening may be interpreted as a face-threatening act, as the customer is implying her identity in turn 6. The following openings show instances where the agent does not rely on an ambiguous response as confirmation of identity:

Ex 15

1 C: good evening  
(3.5)

2 A: hello  
(0.8)

3 C: can I help you

4 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

5 C: who's calling

6 A: .hhh it's Anne from British Gas  
(0.4)

7 C: yes

8 A: (.) is this Mr HUM I'm speaking to

9 C: yes

Ex 16

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

3 C: who's speaking

4 A: it's Gail from British Gas  
(0.6)

5 C: yes  
(0.3)

6 A: is that yourself  
(0.8)

7 C: yes



In the two examples above, the agents are also employing gatekeeping (i.e. not divulging the nature of the call until the customer has identified him/herself<sup>62</sup>).

In a few calls from the NTB corpus, the customer takes neither option a) nor option b), but instead indicates immediate recognition of the caller as a sales agent. This recognition is based on the voice sample given in the last turn, as at this point the agent has not identified himself as a sales agent making a business call:<sup>63</sup>

Ex17

1 A:            hi good evening can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C:            er no I don't want a telemarketing call thanks

Although this level of gatekeeping was used by customers on a few calls, no call from the corpus was terminated early by the customer hanging up.

### 3. Agent identification (scripted part B)

The NTB scripted identification move is given as: “*it's..... calling from British Gas*” and as a result the majority of the calls in the NTB corpus involve the agent identifying him-/herself in the prescribed way, i.e. personal identification followed by institutional identification:

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<sup>62</sup> The gatekeeping by the agent is motivated by the call coaching guidelines which stipulate that the agent must identify the customer before discussing the account in order to adhere to Data Protection law.

<sup>63</sup> This provides evidence that something *other* than overt identification can indicate the type of call being made. The fact that the agent requests the customer using his/her formal title and surname rather than a first name (as would be usual during the opening of a call where the participants already know one another), is one reason why this recognition may occur. There may, however, be other features that define the caller as a call centre agent, for example his/her speaking style and the prosodic features of their first utterance.

### Ex 18

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hi Mr HUM my name's Linda and I'm calling from  
British Gas

### Ex19

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM  
(.)  
3 C: yep  
4 A: hi Sir it's Ryan with British Gas

### Ex20

1 C: hello  
2 A: (.) hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM  
3 C: that's right  
(0.3)  
4 A: hi there (.) it's Ross from British Gas

### Ex21

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi Mrs HUM it's Anne calling here from British Gas

In the calls above, the customer identifies him/herself without using any gatekeeping strategies, and as a result, the agent prefaces his/her identification turn with an informal greeting (*hi, hello, hi there, hello there, hiya* and very rarely, *good evening*). However, if gatekeeping strategies are used and the customer requests the caller to self-identify, as in examples 10 and 11 above, the agent misses off the greeting and

simply identifies him/herself. In other words, the agents tend to avoid greeting the customer until s/he has been positively identified.

The data also show that NTB agents always identify themselves using their first names, although they are not explicitly told to do so by the script or the QA guidelines.

These agent-identification sections of the call vary in other ways, namely in whether they are 'stand alone' moves, i.e. where the agent self-identifies and then relinquishes the floor, or if they are followed immediately by further additional sequences: 'business-at-hand' and 'hook' (see below). Where the identification sequence is a stand-alone move, the customer usually responds with a short answer: either a return greeting, or (more frequently); *yes*, *yeah* or other minimal responses like *uhuh* or *mhm* with a rising intonation, indicating that the agent must at this point give more information. Both types of response are shown below:

#### Ex22

1 C:           hello

(0.3)

2 A:           hello can I speak to a Miss HUM please

3 C:           speaking

4 A:           hi there Miss it's David calling from British Gas

(0.3)

5 C:           hiya

Ex23

1 C:           hello  
2 A:           hello can I speak to Mr HUM  
(.)  
3 C:           yep  
4 A:           hi Sir it's Ryan with British Gas  
5 C:           mhm

#### **4. Business-at-hand & hook (scripted parts C & D)**

After the participants have negotiated their way through the greeting and identification moves demonstrated above, the agent can then introduce the ‘business at hand’ and the ‘hook’. The business-at-hand is essentially a scripted utterance that gives a ‘flavour’ of what the call is about:

Ex24

1 A:           hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C:           speaking  
3 A:           hi it's just a quick call from British Gas this evening  
              .hhh regarding your kitchen appliance cover

The business-at-hand is not the actual *sales pitch* that comes a bit later at what Schegloff (1986: 116) would call the ‘anchor’ position. He describes this as “a base position ... for the introduction of 'first topic'”, and it is discussed in more detail below. The scripted utterance that I refer to as the ‘hook’ is essentially a request to enter into the main reason for the-call, i.e. the sales pitch itself. It is a crucial part of the call for the agent because at this point the customer has a viable opportunity to end the call.

## Ex25

4 C2<sup>64</sup>:       hello

5 A:           hello Mr HUM (0.5) hi there (.) I'm calling from British  
Gas .hhhhh er it's a quick call about the three star  
agreement you have for the boiler

(0.3)

6 C:           [oh yeah

7 A:           [is it ok to speak with you (0.2) for a moment

## Ex26

1 A:           hi there could I speak to Mrs HUM please

(.)

2 C:           speaking

3 A:           hi there Mrs HUM it's Gail calling from British Gas

4 C:           uhuh

5 A:           just a quick call regarding your Homecare agreement do  
you have a moment

## Ex27

1 A:           hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C:           yes (.) speaking

3 A:           hi Mr HUM it's Ryan here calling you from Scottish Gas

4 C:           oh right

5 A:           it's just a wee quick call about your Homecare agreement  
that you've got with us at the moment have you got a  
spare minute I promise I won't keep you long Mr HUM

This last example shows the agent orienting to the importance of this hook in allowing him to reach anchor position. Getting to give the sales pitch does not guarantee a

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<sup>64</sup> C2 = second answerer (i.e. the original answerer was not the named customer and had to retrieve C2; the named customer).

successful sale, but agents reported that they feel if they can reach the anchor position and keep the customer on the phone it greatly increases their chances of persuading the customer to buy the product. As one agent told me:

*“As soon as people twig on that you’re telesales it’s a challenge to keep them on the phone. No matter what good value you can offer them, they hardly ever want to know. It’s “no thanks, <pfff> (mimes phone being slammed down). But if you have the gift of the gab, and can be chatty and friendly as soon as they pick up, that’s when they’re more likely to let you sell to them”.*

Matthew (NTB agent Sept. 2005)

Essentially, this hook can be compared with the idea of a door-to-door salesman getting his foot in the door. Although the scripted version of the hook is ‘do you have a moment?’ there is a quite a lot of variation in what different agents actually say, and many of them use hedging and softening strategies in order to reduce the directness of their request and appeal to the customer’s negative face-wants. Example 27 above is a good example of this, where the agent plays down the imposition the call will place on his interlocutor.

In some calls, the agent does not use a hook at all, but instead the opening sequence ends after the business-at-hand has been given if the customer at this point grants permission for the call to continue:

Ex28

1 A: hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi Mrs HUM it’s Kerry-Ann calling from British  
Gas (.) it’s just a quick call regarding your  
kitchen appliances you have covered with us  
4 C: oh (.) right ok go on then

In calls which follow this structure the business-at-hand has fulfilled the function of the hook, i.e. stating the reason-for-the-call is interpreted by the answerer as an elliptical utterance which not only states why the agent is calling but also functions as a request for the call to continue.

On some calls, whether or not the agent provides the hook line at all is dependent on the customer's turn after the business-at-hand is given. In this way, the customer is able to put in place further gatekeeping, as shown in example 29 below:

Ex29

1 A:           hello could I speak to Mr HUM  
(1.8)  
2 C:           yeah speaking  
3 A:           hi Sir it's Anne at British Gas  
(0.7)  
4 C:           yeah  
5 A:           it's regarding your homecare agreement  
(0.5)  
7 C:           right  
6 A:           do you have a moment to speak

This example shows the customer delaying his permission for the call to continue by replying with minimal responses with rising intonation patterns that prompt the agent to provide more information and make the direct request (to which the customer can use as an opportunity to end the call).

There are also other motivations for the agents not to use the scripted hook, namely that it is a direct request: *do you have a moment?* By making such a request, the agent relinquishes the floor and in doing so provides a potential exit point for the other party. Before this point, if the customer wishes the call to end, he/she has to create the opportunity him/herself, either by interruption or by the means shown in example 17 above. Breaking the sequence in this way almost always leads to the call ending soon afterwards. The fact that most of the calls *do not* end in this way, i.e. the customer waits until he/she is asked directly if it is all right to proceed before he/she [the customer] attempts to end the call, illustrates how both parties orient towards the underlying canonical structure of the opening sequence in the same way as Schegloff (e.g. 1986) found with non-business telephone calls.

Depending on the individual context of the conversation and the individual agent, there is variation in the number and arrangement of turns once the agent has identified him-/herself. The three scripted elements (agent identification, business at hand, and hook) can be given within one single turn or the agent can break them up into separate turns, depending on whether the customer gives minimal responses and/or whether the agent pauses to indicate a transition relevance place (TRP)<sup>65</sup>. The following examples illustrate each of these possibilities.

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<sup>65</sup> A transition relevance place is a point in an interaction when a transition from one participant to another is possible. In their classic paper on turn-taking, Sacks et al. (1974: 708) note that: 'there are various unit-types with which a speaker may set out to construct a turn. Unit-types of English include sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions. Instances of the unit-types so usable allow a projection of the unit-type under way, and what, roughly, it will take for an instance of that unit-type to be completed [...] the first possible completion of a first such unit constitutes an initial transition-relevance place. Transfer of speakership is coordinated by reference to such transition-relevance places, which any unit-type instance will reach.'



**Ex 30: identification / business-at-hand / hook**

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM please  
2 B: speaking  
3 A: hi Miss HUM it's Daniel here calling you from British Gas  
4 B: oh right yeah  
5 A: hi it's just a wee quick call in regards to your Homecare  
agreement that you have with us at the moment  
6 B: uhuh  
7 A: have you got a spare moment  
8 B: yeah  
9 A: thank you

**Ex31: identification + business-at-hand / separate hook**

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
(0.2)  
2 C: yeah that's me  
3 A: (.) hi Mrs HUM it's Anne calling from British Gas (0.3)  
.hhh regarding your Homecare agreement  
(0.2)  
4 C: uhuh  
5 A: do you have a few moments for a quick call

**Ex 32: identification + business-at-hand + hook (one turn)**

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hi Mr HUM it's Nicola and I'm calling from British Gas  
(.) it's just a v- a quick call about your three star  
agreement that you have with us (.) do you have a moment  
just now

We can see that the main difference between these three extracts is the level of participation by the customer (in the form of minimal responses) in each. Based on this evidence, it appears that the customer's turns are more evidence of this second stage of gatekeeping: after each piece of information given by the agent, in some calls the customer gives a minimal response such as *mhm*, *uhuh*, *yeah*, and so on, prompting the agent to continue. In example 32, however, the customer uses silence in place of spoken feedback. By not responding to the pauses after each piece of information in turn 4, where the customer could interpret a turn relevance place and take the floor, she is also permitting the agent to continue.

The data discussed in this chapter demonstrate how the opening sequence of NTB calls is structured, how it is shaped by the script, which interactional features it shares with other telephone conversations, and which features are slightly different from them. The agents' contributions to the conversation tend to be highly influenced by the script, at least in terms of overall structure, although the conversations still proceed via the turn-taking mechanism described at the beginning of this chapter. The data also demonstrate how the answerer does or does not 'play along' and adopt routinised behaviour along with the agent, or employ gatekeeping strategies which force the agent to deviate from the scripted set of moves they have available. The data also provide evidence to suggest that both parties orient to an underlying interactional frame or 'way of doing things' which shapes the openings and differentiates these calls from other types of informal telephone conversations.

## **CHAPTER 6: A REAL TIME STUDY OF NTB CALLS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the detailed phonetic transcription of the call openings analysed for this study. After a brief overview of the data collection, I look first at how closely each agent follows the script in terms of the basic structure and individual lexemes used in the opening sections of calls. I also analyse if and how any prosodic (i.e. pitch, stress and tempo) changes were found to occur in the speech of the agents over the three months analysed. Where possible, I take a general look at other non-prosodic features such as the agents' use of different voice qualities, pause and in-breath to see if they too undergo any noticeable changes. I look at the data for each agent in turn, and then make some general observations at the end of this chapter.

### **6.2 Data Collection**

As all calls made in NTB are recorded and digitally stored as standard practice, there was no need for additional recording equipment. I was given access to the digital files (stored as .wav files on a network drive), and intended to open them directly into Praat in order to perform an acoustic analysis. However, it became apparent that the quality of the files was not sufficient for Praat's operating specifications. Praat requires a minimum of 4 bits per sample, and my samples were only 1 bit each and therefore overly compressed. This only became apparent when attempting to transfer them into Praat; at first they seemed to be ordinary .wav files, and the compression was not obvious upon listening to them. Presumably they are compressed to this extent to enable large volumes of calls each week to be stored without requiring a huge amount of storage space, yet still enabling them to function for their required

purpose in the call centre. As a result, an alternative approach was taken whereby each file was redigitized by playing it from beginning to end in the media player on the call centre PC directly into Praat via the input on my laptop. In addition to this making the data collection a longer and more difficult process than would be expected, this also raises questions about the suitability for the data to be analysed acoustically. As the results show, there is good agreement between the auditory and the acoustic analysis, with only a few instances of misalignment. However, the data are not of the standard required for auditory or acoustic analysis and ideally any future data collection would be carried out independently of the call centre's recording system.

### **6.3 Anonymisation**

British Gas would only allow me access to live call data (and allow me to remove it from the call centre) on the condition that I remove all customer names from the recordings. This was done via a Praat script written by Daniel Hirst which is attached as Appendix II. The script 'hummed' out all any section of the call selected, resulting in data which was complicit with the terms and conditions of the contract between British Gas (Centrica) and myself (the University of Glasgow). The agents' names were not removed, as I had full informed consent from these speakers to use their speech for the purposes of this study<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Their first names must be removed from print or replaced with pseudonyms and the sound files anonymised before this thesis can be available to readers other than the examiners and Professor MacMahon and Dr Stuart-Smith.

## 6.4 The Speech Corpus

The corpus for this study consists of 224 calls made by eight trainee NTB agents (4 male and 4 female). The division of the data between the agents at each of the four time intervals is as follows:

**Table 6.1: NTB Speech Corpus**

|           | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| GAIL      | 7     | 9              | 10            | 7              | 33    |
| ANNE      | 8     | 7              | 6             | 6              | 27    |
| KERRY-ANN | 9     | 6              | 8             |                | 23    |
| LINDA     | 7     | 7              | 8             | 6              | 28    |
| ROSS      | 13    | 7              |               |                | 20    |
| RYAN      | 9     | 6              | 5             | 9              | 29    |
| DANIEL    | 7     | 8              | 9             | 3              | 27    |
| DAVID     | 17    | 7              | 4             | 9              | 37    |
| Total     | 77    | 57             | 50            | 40             | 224   |

The uneven numbers of calls for each agent result from the practicalities of obtaining data from the call centre's digital file store. Although all calls are recorded, many of them cannot be opened because they are corrupted in some way. This means that although an agent might make 25 calls during the course of one evening, not necessarily all of these calls are available for replay at a later date. In addition to this, a large number of calls made in NTB do not get as far as the scripted opening, either because the customer is not available<sup>67</sup>, or because the answerer terminates the call early. The fact that so many files are corrupted did not appear to be problematic to

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<sup>67</sup> Agents are prevented by Data Protection laws in discussing the customer account with anyone other than persons named on the account and so where the customer is not available these calls are terminated before the agent begins using the script.

NTB. When I was first given access to the calls, my contact, Lynne, told me to expect many of them to be inaccessible. As so many calls are stored, the number of corrupted files does not impact on the monitoring process, where only a relatively small number of calls actually get retrospectively scrutinised.

It could be argued here that because Ross and Kerry-Ann did not remain employed by NTB for the duration of the data collection period that it was unwise to include them as subjects. The reason why they were included in the end was that I wanted to follow a group who had all gone through training together, and finding a group where one or more of the participants *did not* drop out before the end of training was impossible. This raises the question about whether this data can be said to be typical of the call centre, and if employees usually stay in a job for longer than this. I was not given access to staff turnover rates and therefore it is not possible to objectively judge whether or not these employees are typical in this way. However, based on my experience with several different groups it appears that at least one or two individuals drop out of each group during the first three months of employment.

## **6.5 Transcription & Analysis**

Annotated transcriptions were made for every call opening of the corpus in order to illustrate the corresponding intonation patterns over each scripted part B, C & D (as outlined in Chapter 4 above) at each time interval for each of the eight informants.

The key to the notational system I use for transcribing the agents' intonation is located at the beginning of this thesis on page 12. A copy of each call transcript is available in Appendix I.

There were some issues attached to the process of transcription which every analyst must tackle when trying to locate significant features of pitch. Referring to her own work on the Lancaster/IBM spoken corpus, Wichmann (1996: 172) points out:

*“the process of transcription selects certain items of information and ignores others in an attempt to isolate what is linguistically significant. This may as a result filter out some F0 information which is stylistically significant. This means that when investigating style, we must begin with the transcription but also be prepared to depart from it. Thus we may discover new patterns or features not captured by the transcription, such as the pitch of unstressed syllables, or the speaker’s use of pitch range, which are stylistically significant. In doing so we may also find new patterns which are linguistically significant and therefore should have been represented in the transcription”*

Although the notational system used on these data was adapted to more accurately represent the pitch patterns identified in the NTB data, there are many aspects of the data which are not adequately illustrated by the transcription (for example differences in gradient and depth of rise and fall) and therefore as Wichmann (1996: 172) explains above, interpretation of the speech in these calls must sometimes depart from the transcription so as not to leave out anything which might be linguistically important.

## **6.6 The Notational System**

The system used for analysing the intonation of the NTB call openings is based on Wells’ (2006) tonic stress mark system which is itself an updated version of O’Connor & Arnold’s (1961, 1973) iconic system. The decision to use this ‘British tradition’ of intonational analysis rather than autosegmental-metrical analyses like

ToBI (Silverman et al. 1992) and its Glaswegian adaptation GlaToBI (Mayo 1996) or IViE (Grabe et al. 2000) was taken because although autosegmental methods are widely accepted as being some of the most robust and successful ways of analysing prosody, this approach is difficult to reconcile with an interactional approach to analysis. Autosegmental analyses of intonation have been based primarily around the concept of an intonation group which are delimited by tone boundaries. However, interactional approaches to analysing prosody, e.g. Couper-Kuhlen (2001), raise the question of whether it is suitable to impose these boundaries on spontaneous conversation which does not necessarily fall into neat groups in this way. It has been pointed out that the traditional lexico-grammatical approach to transcribing intonation often forces analysts to fall back on syntax in order to help them decide where to place tone-boundaries. Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (1996: 15) argue that ‘such a procedure shows greater affinity with the analysis of a syntactic entity ‘S’ into units of constituent structure than with “integral melodic patterns”’. They note that this is especially problematic when dealing with factors such as pause. For example, it can often function as a floor holding device, where the utterance surrounding it is ‘melodically cohesive’ (i.e. one single tone group), but in terms of syntax, the pause may be thought of as dividing the segment up into two tone groups<sup>68</sup>. For this reason Couper-Kuhlen and Selting suggest (1996: 16) that “the conflict between phonetic and phonological criteria in tone-group analysis can be avoided if prosodic phrasing units are identified in an interactional perspective”.

The realisation that traditional grammatical units (word, sentence, clause, etc.) are not necessarily compatible with prosodic features of an utterance and that

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<sup>68</sup> Cruttenden (1986: 36) states that “the criterion most often mentioned in the demarcation of intonation groups is that of pause”.



therefore a prosodic phrase is not necessarily equivalent to a grammatical sentence has led researchers like Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (1996: 17) to theorise that it is more effective to consider the prosodic phrase as “a unit defined with respect to the utterance as a turn-constructional unit, a ‘phonetic chunk’ which speakers use to constitute and articulate turns-at-talk”. In this way more importance is placed on a strong link between prosodic structure and local conversational management, for example when participants of a conversation wish to hold the floor or project the end of their current turn. This means that although there may be some loose correspondence between interactional prosodic categories and traditional grammatical tone boundaries, it is just as likely that there may be none at all.

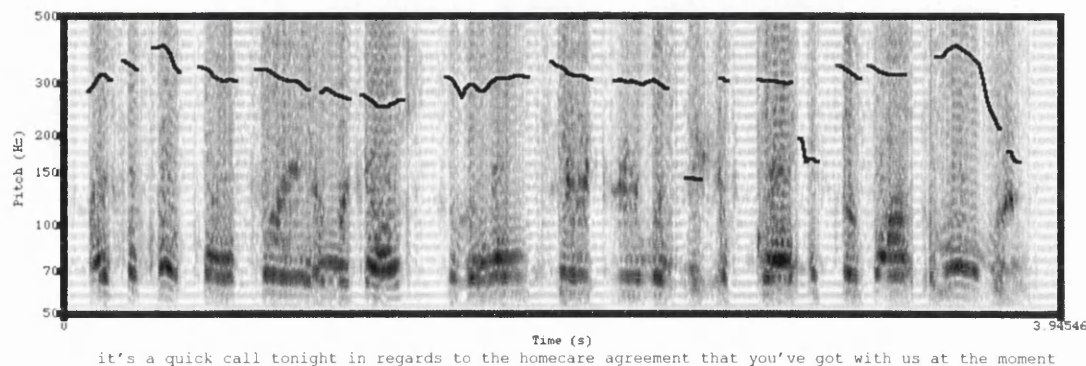
The tonetic approach requires the analyst to divide speech up into minor tone units<sup>69</sup> (also sometimes referred to as intonational phrases or tone groups) based on phonetic criteria such as pausing or rhythmical break, but with this division being constrained within viable syntactic conditions. However, it became clear during the early stages of analysis that there was a lack of acoustic signalling to indicate the end of a minor tone unit (although this was not so much the case for major tone boundaries as these tended to coincide with speaker change). Pickering, Williams and Knowles (1996: 65) explain that ‘the use of tone-unit boundary markers is in principle determined by the presence of such features as a period of silence, significant lengthening of a preceding segment in conjunction with pitch discontinuity, and perhaps also the absence of certain assimilatory effects’. What the NTB data show is that where these acoustic signals *are* present (frequently they are not), they are often greatly reduced (for

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<sup>69</sup> A minor tone unit is a prosodically defined unit of speech made up of one or more words which may contain some stressed/rhythmically prominent syllables, and some syllables which have pitch prominence. Syllables which have both are ‘accented’, and the final accented syllable is called the nuclear/ tonic syllable.

example, Kowal, Wiese & O'Connell (1983) suggest that the usual value accepted for a pause at a tone boundary is between 200 and 300 ms). The following extract taken from one of the female agent's calls shows a lack of pause between tone boundaries:

Gail 1707 call 1937<sup>70</sup>



In this typical call opening, we can see that the agent talks continuously and at an even tempo throughout with no pause or in-breath until the end of the utterance.

The task of dividing the speech up into tone units was, therefore, rather more challenging than originally anticipated and in actual fact intuition played a central role in this, as well as a reliance on syntactic information in order to locate the boundaries.

Once the boundaries of the minor tone groups were identified, all accented syllables were marked and the final one of these was labelled the 'nucleus'. If there were two or more accented syllables in a tone group, the first was labelled the 'onset'. The onset and all following syllables up to but not including the nucleus was labelled the 'head'. Any syllables that occurred before the head were labelled the 'prehead', and any syllables which followed the nucleus were labelled the 'tail'.

<sup>70</sup> The source of the faint horizontal bands in the spectrogram is difficult to pin down, but it is possible that this is an electronic noise introduced by the recording system or possibly the headset rather than background noise.

Once the tone unit was fully labelled, the relative<sup>71</sup> pitch height and movement of the nucleus was transcribed as well as the pitch patterns for the prehead, head and tail (if these were present). These tones were assigned on the basis of a detailed auditory analysis, as well as an impressionistic analysis of the F0 pitch contours displayed in Praat. In this way, the F0 trace was used only as a guide<sup>72</sup>; no actual acoustic measurements of pitch height were taken, and the transcription is therefore based entirely on perceptual categories assigned via the auditory analysis. Approximately ten percent of the measurements were then cross-checked by a second analyst for accuracy.

The approach to analysis of intonation can be summarised as follows:

1. Scripted parts B & C<sup>73</sup> were divided into minor tone groups.
2. The accented syllables were identified within each tone group.
3. Within each tone group the tone or direction of pitch movement on the nucleus was transcribed. Where relevant, pre- and post-nuclear patterns were also transcribed.

## 6.7 A Real Time Study

The method outlined above provided a set of annotated transcriptions which could then be compared with one another in order to highlight any instances of variation in the repertoire of each individual, both in the short-term, i.e. between individual calls

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<sup>71</sup> *High* and *low* were taken as relative values within an individual speaker's system, rather than as absolute values.

<sup>72</sup> The data were not always of a quality where it was possible to make accurate measurements in this way.

<sup>73</sup> Of the NTB script: agent identification and business-at-hand.

on a single day, and across the long-term, i.e. between different days taken at different intervals over several months. The selected time period for analysis was three months, with data samples taken at the following points in each agent’s employment:

1. First day of nesting
2. Final day of nesting (approximately one month later)
3. One month after the end of nesting (month two)
4. Two months after the end of nesting (month three)

I chose these intervals based on the idea that they represent important stages in a new agent’s employment in the NTB community. To ensure that this would be effective in highlighting prosodic variation in the agent’s speech, I listened in to some agents on their first few days in nesting and found that the most interesting data in this way seemed to originate from day 1 – even within the space of the first few calls. I took data from the end of nesting in order to compare the speech of agents at the beginning and the end of this process, and as nesting is a month long, I extended the analysis for two further months to see if changes occurred after the end of the nesting period.

### 6.7.1 GAIL

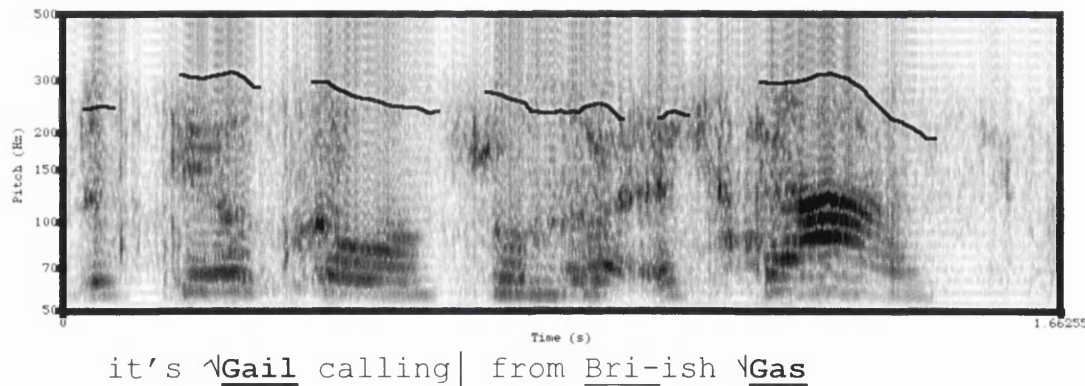
|      | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| GAIL | 7     | 9              | 10            | 7              | 33    |

**Gail: Scripted part B: *it’s ..... calling from British Gas***

In all but one of the 33 calls analysed for this speaker, Gail always uses the scripted greeting, *it's Gail calling from British Gas*, and therefore the lexical content of this utterance remains uniform over the first three months of taking live calls. However, despite this lexical uniformity, there are clear prosodic (i.e. pitch, tempo and rhythm) differences in this part of the spoken text which seem to correlate roughly with each of the four different time periods analysed.

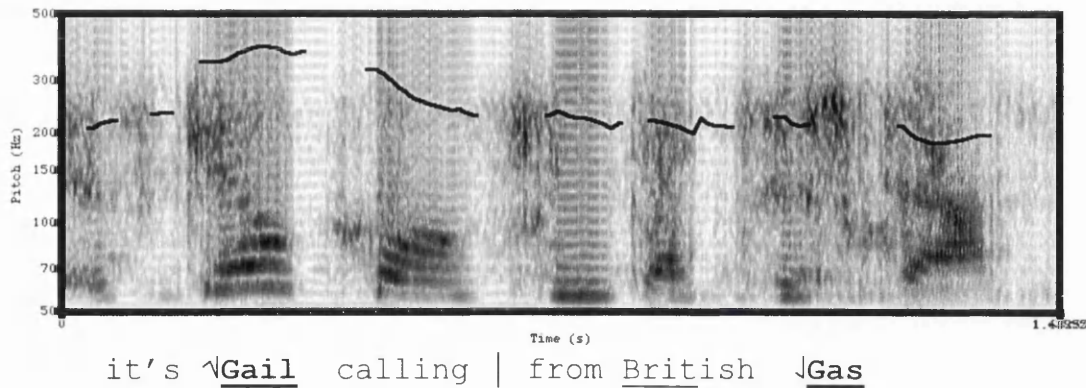
On day one, with the exception of the final call<sup>74</sup>, the tonicity (the location of the nucleus) and the tonality (the division of the spoken script into discrete tone units) of this utterance are the same in all calls, as is the rhythmical structure. However, there are differences in tone (the type of pitch movement on the nuclear syllable). The data reveal variation in the pitch and height of the nuclear tone over *Gas*. The pitch contours below illustrate this :

Day 1 Call 1842

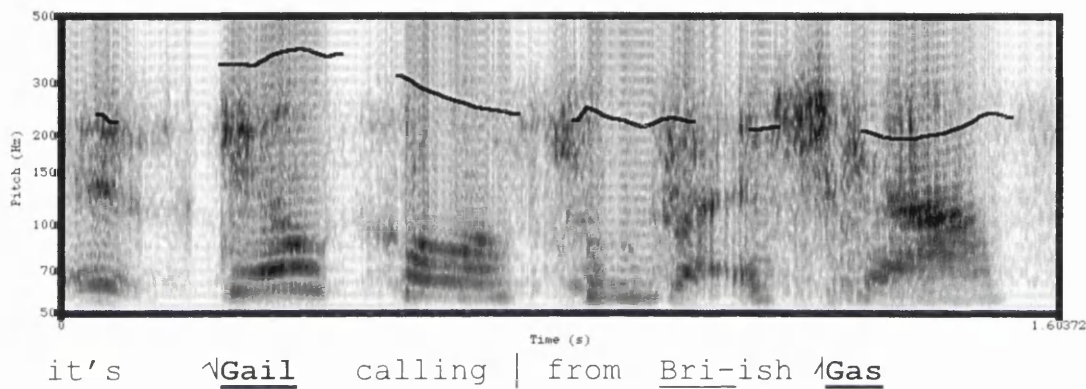


Day 1 1846

<sup>74</sup> In this call at 1932, she departs from the script saying, *my name's Gail and I'm calling from British Gas*.



Day 1 call 1850

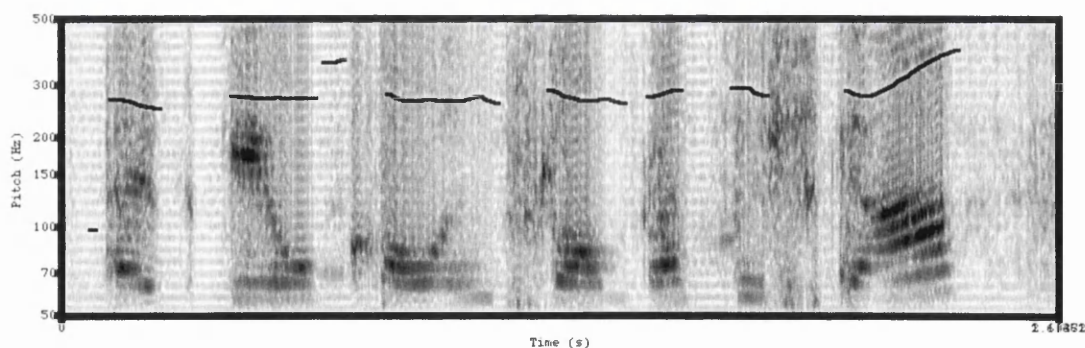


These pitch contours show that although the nuclear pattern on the first tone unit remains the same (a very high rise fall which sounds almost stylised), and that in general the shape of the F0 contours appears very similar across these calls, the pitch pattern over the nucleus of the second tone unit does vary over the three calls. This is not so clearly marked on the contour in 1846 and 1850, but listening to the data confirms that the former is a fall and the latter a rise (as represented by the diacritics shown).

An examination of the same section of the spoken text in the calls from the end of the nesting period show rhythmical and intonational differences which have taken place in the month since nesting began. Most noticeably, the degree of variation in both

nuclear tones between individual calls has all but disappeared, with the intonational pattern for this utterance now being remarkably uniform across all calls. In 8 out of the 9 calls<sup>75</sup> analysed, the final tonic syllable has a rising pattern which is a high rise except in one call at 1923 where it is closer to a mid-rise. There has also been a noticeable change in pattern over the first tone unit since day one, which is now much more level than previously. This is the same across all calls on this day, except one (1923). A comparison of the pitch contours between three different calls on this day can illustrate visually the degree of intonational similarity between them

End of nesting 1858

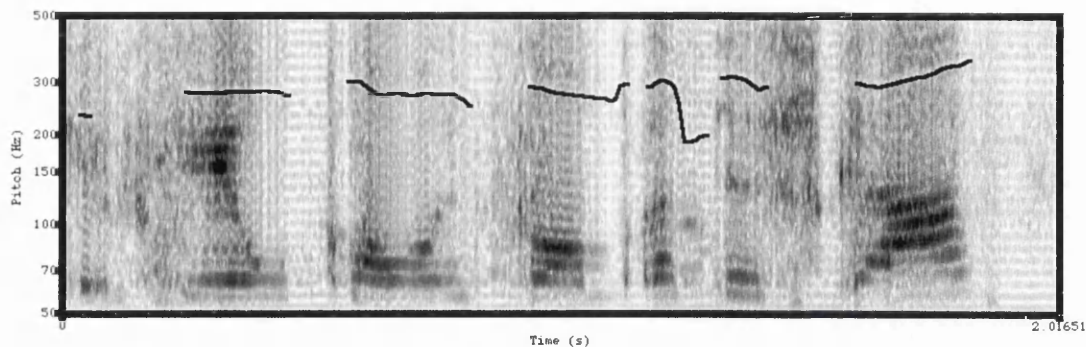


it's ↑Gail | →calling from British ↑Gas

End of nesting 1912

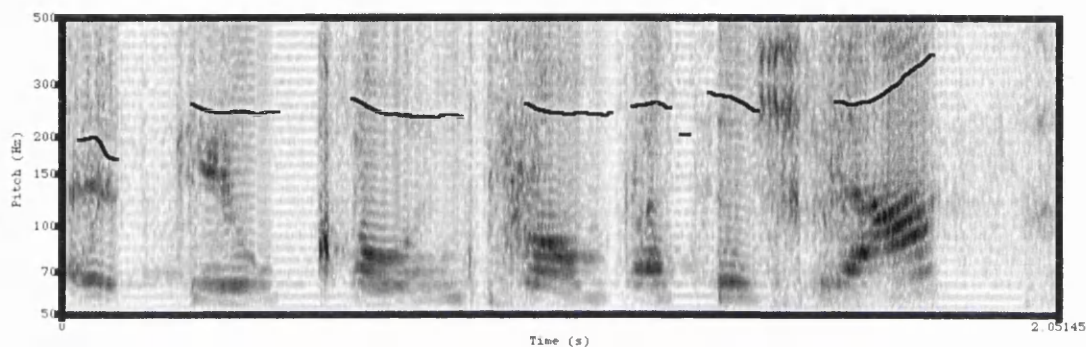
<sup>75</sup> On call 1942, in comparison with the other calls, she has a falling pattern on the tonic syllable, which can be explained by looking at the utterance in context. The script prescribes that the agent must introduce him/herself as soon as the customer has been positively identified. However, on this occasion, the call is structured slightly differently, and she does not introduce herself until nearer the end of the scripted opening at the end of her turn. This may well account for the (abnormal) falling pattern here.





it's ↑Gail | → calling from British ↑Gas

End of nesting 1946



it's ↑Gail | → calling from British ↑Gas

We can see that the rhythmical structure of this utterance has also changed since day one, from 3 accented syllables to 4. Having so many accented syllables in a tone unit gives a slightly staccato effect, and accompanied with the level head and final rising tonic pattern this makes this utterance sound very different from her intonational patterns on day one, and almost monotone.

There are also some paralinguistic differences between the two time periods, which may well be attributable to a shift from reading the script to using it more 'naturally' in interaction, i.e. moving away from a monologue to a set of conversational turns. On day one, Gail tends to go straight into the following tone unit (corresponding with the next part of the scripted opening) with either a very short pause or in-breath, or in



most of the calls, no pause at all. However, by the end of the nesting period, we can see that this first scripted utterance tends to constitute a single conversational turn, (usually answered with a minimal response from her interlocutor) before she gives the reason-for-the-call. Even if speaker change does not occur, there is still either a pause or a noisy in-breath before the next tone unit begins. These differences are illustrated in the extracts below:

Day 1 call 1846 (monologue)

3 A:           oh hi there it's Gail calling from  
                  British Gas it's just a quick call just  
                  about your three star agreement that you  
                  have with us at the moment

End of nesting call 1858 (pause followed by speaker change)

3 A:           it's Gail calling from British Gas

(0.9)

4 C:           yeah speaking

5 A:           hiya Mrs HUM it's just a quick call  
                  regarding your homecare agreement

End of nesting call 1933 (noisy in-breath)

3 A:           hiya it's Gail calling from British Gas .hhhhhh just a  
                  quick call um regarding your homecare ((fast)) agreement  
                  that you've got with us at the moment

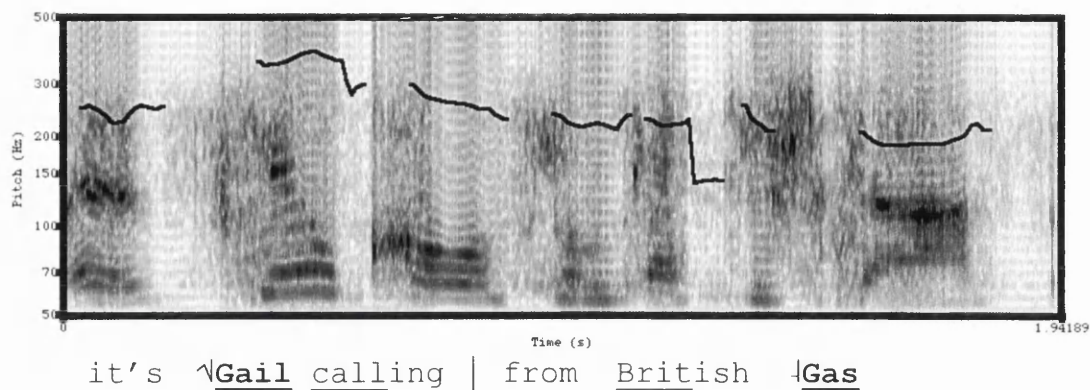
A comparison of the calls from the beginning and the end of nesting show some changes in Gail's realisation of this part of the call opening. First, they show the script has an immediate and sustained effect in determining the lexical content and overall structure of this utterance. It is only on one call on her first day where she deviates in any way from this, and she continues to follow the script in this way a month later

when the nesting period is complete. However, the data show that by the end of nesting, her prosodic patterns for this utterance have changed, and have also become much more uniform across individual calls than they were on day one.

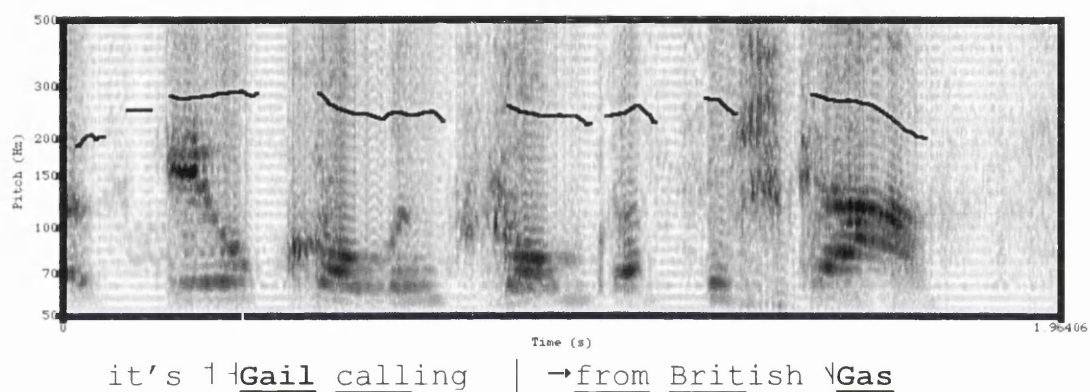
In other words, it appears that at this point in her employment, after a month of taking live calls, this scripted utterance has developed an associated intonational pattern which is quite different from the more spontaneous patterns she was using on day one. But what happens after this? If we examine this section of the opening in calls made one and two months after nesting has ended, we can see that rather than this associated pattern being fixed, in fact further changes occur.

The most noticeable development is that she is no longer always using the pitch pattern identified as being used over this section of the opening at the end of nesting. In fact, the calls analysed after a month of working in the main call centre show an increase in variation of tonic patterns on this utterance across calls (although not to the same degree as on day one). On some calls the nucleus has a rising tone (e.g. 1811) and sometimes a falling tone (e.g. 1833). Something which does appear to have continued from the end of nesting (and which contrasts with day one) is a general reduction in pitch range, which can be seen in the first tone unit of the following two calls. On the first day, *Gail calling* had a high rise-fall, which had quite a 'sing-song' melody, even at this early stage. However, two months later this has become more stylised, with steps down between syllables with relatively level pitch. Considering the repetitive and constrained nature of this task, it is not surprising that Gail's intonation becomes flatter and more monotonous over time.

Day 1 call 1818



1 month after nesting call 1833



By the second month of full employment, she is once again using a fairly uniform intonational pattern over this utterance across all calls. The pattern most common in the data is the same as that in call 1833 above including the stylised tone over *it's Gail calling*.

**Gail: Scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call about your three star agreement you, do you have a moment?***

The first three calls on day one of nesting show Gail becoming used to using the script. Although the content of these openings is essentially pre-determined, she still hesitates a few times. For example (hesitations are highlighted in bold):

Day 1 call 1818

it's just a quick **er** courtesy call **er** about your three  
star agreement

Day 1 call 1842

**er** it's just a quick call **um** regarding the **like** your  
three star agreement

After the first three calls these hesitations are no longer present which indicates an increase in familiarity with the script after she has put it into practice a few times.

In this way these very early calls show that she is (not unexpectedly) uncertain about what she is saying, and that it has not yet become a routine performance. At this point it is safe to assume that she is reading from the script and therefore she will, to some degree, be forced to look back and forth between the computer screen and the script on the desk in front of her. Perhaps as a result of this, she deviates from it slightly, hedging her 'business-at-hand' by saying an unscripted, *it's just a quick courtesy call* in the first two calls which she does not use again in any of the later calls.

The data also show clear differences in the lexical content of these sections between the beginning and end of nesting, and the following two months on the main call centre floor. On the first day she refers to the product as the scripted *your/the three star agreement*, but by the end of nesting she is consistently referring to it as *your/the homecare agreement*. She continues to refer to it in this way in the majority of calls from then on, although she does substitute *kitchen appliance care* for it a couple of times in the calls analysed two months after nesting has ended. On day one she uses the scripted *about (it's just a quick call about...)* but we can see that this changes by the end of nesting to the more formal *regarding*, and she also shifts from using *you have with us* to *that you've got with us*. The greatest number of changes in the lexical

content of scripted part C occur between the calls taken at the beginning and end of nesting. In other words, it seems that although Gail always relies on the script for the main structure and content of the openings on all days analysed, she relies more heavily on the script to inform/prescribe individual lexemes on day one. But by the end of nesting, the scripted *three star* agreement becomes unscripted *homecare agreement*, scripted *about* becomes unscripted *regarding* and scripted *you have with us* becomes unscripted *you've got with us*, indicating an decrease in the influence of the script, at least in terms of lexis. This influence is also lessened over time on scripted part D (the hook), where she starts out on day one using the scripted *do you have a moment*, but by the end of nesting she is producing a more mitigated (less direct), *is it okay to speak to you at the moment?* In later months, the data reveal that she has changed the hook section again to, *is it a convenient time? Just to go over the details with you*. She has shifted from a simple bald request relating to the customer's availability and/or willingness to proceed with the call to an approach where she asks a question and immediately follows it with a statement giving possible justification for continuing the call (i.e. a potentially more persuasive/ effective hook).

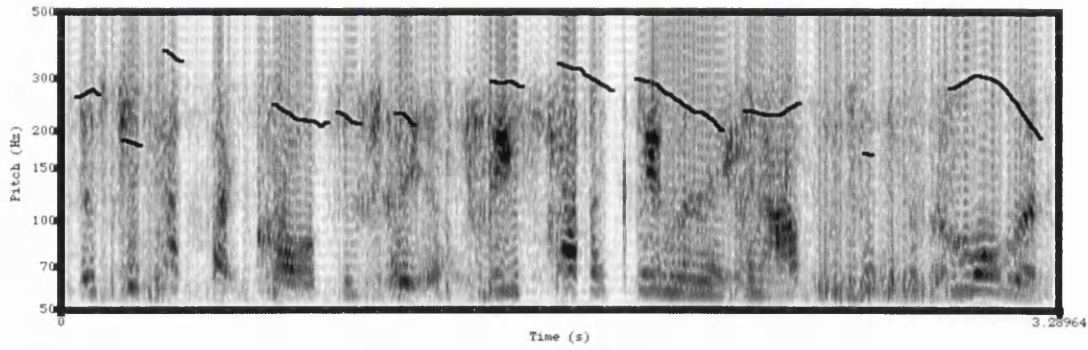
An examination of the intonation contours over these sections on day one shows that, as we might expect, there is quite a lot of variation over the first few calls, but towards the end of the day Gail has started using a very similar pattern for each call, which can be roughly schematised as follows:



it's just a quick call about your three star agreement that you have with us at the moment

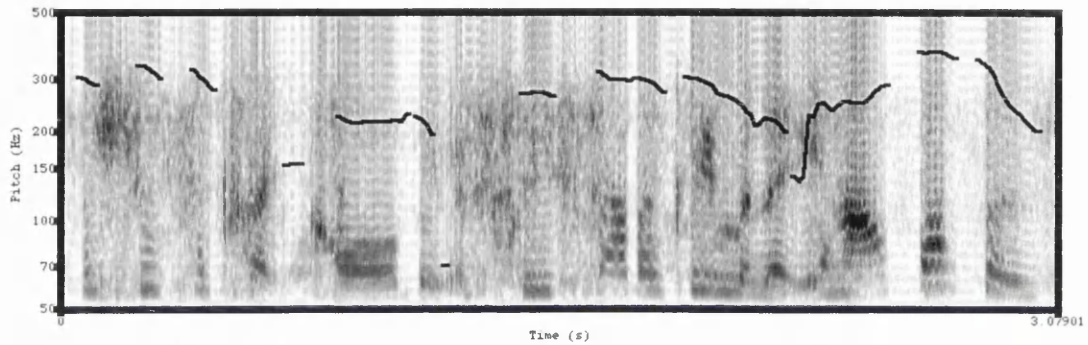
We can see this transcribed here:

Day 1 call 1846



|it's \jjust a quick dcall| just about your fthree star agreement|that you ^have with us at the moment|

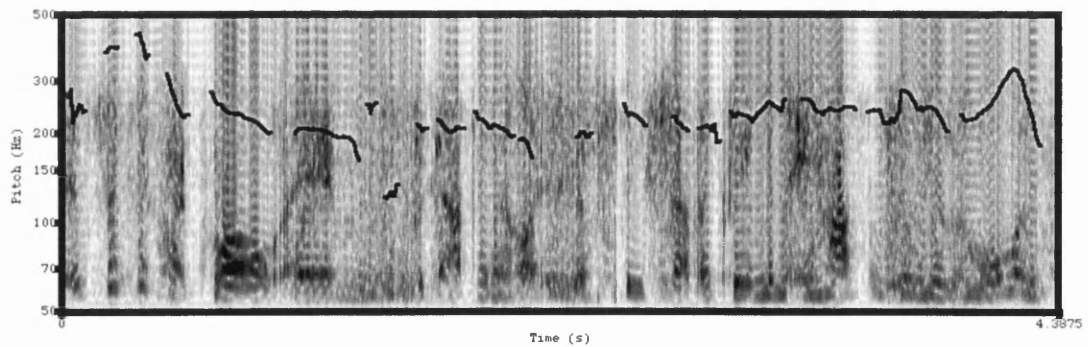
Day 1 call 1931



|it's \jjust a quick call (.)|about your fthree star agreement |that you ^have with us|

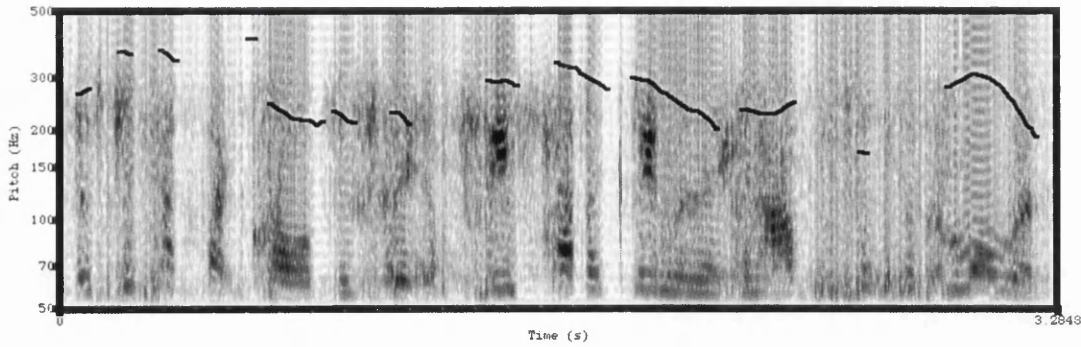
In Gail's early calls, there is a lack of a uniform pattern to the pitch contours used over the opening in different calls:

Day 1 call 1842



it's \jjust a quick vcall| um |re\garding the like|your ^three star a\greement|that you ^have with us at the  
 ^moment

Day 1 1846

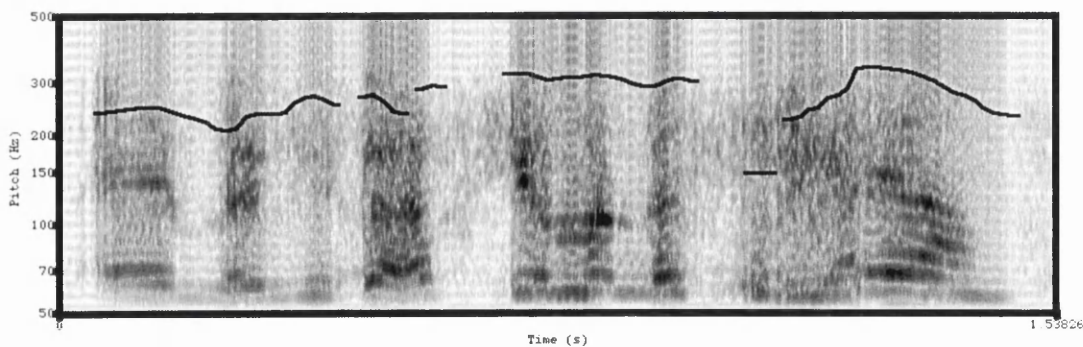


it's \jjust a quick \call| about your fthree star agreement|that you \have with us at the moment

The first few calls appear to indicate the *beginnings* of an intonational pattern which later calls on this day show is more routinely associated with this utterance. The most salient features of the pattern which develops on this day are the high falling head followed by then two successive (rise-)falling patterns, the latter of which has a more defined falling section (leading to the distinction in the notational system between a rise-slump (↑) and a rise-fall (↘). Examination of the calls at the end of nesting and in the following two months show that while Gail does not adopt this pattern on all calls, in general this can be identified as an intonational pattern routinely associated with this section of the call opening for this individual speaker.

As far as the hook is concerned, Gail only uses it on two calls on day 1, with differences in the tone over the tonic syllable:

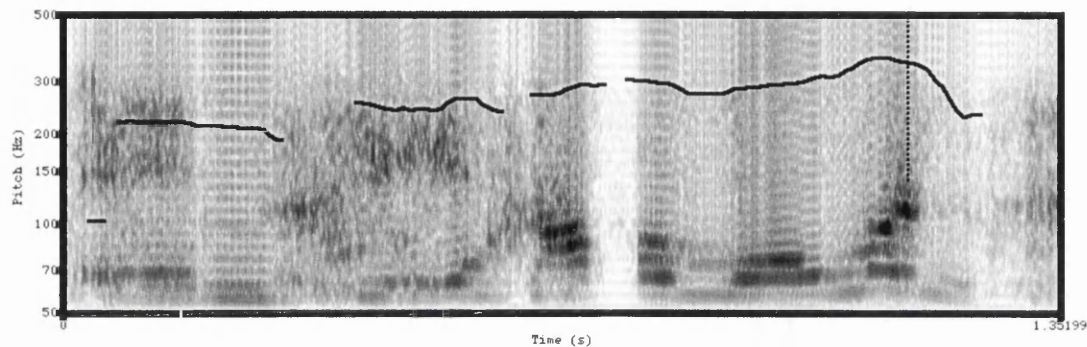
Day 1 call 1850



um |have you ↗got a few minutes to \spare



Day 1 call 1932

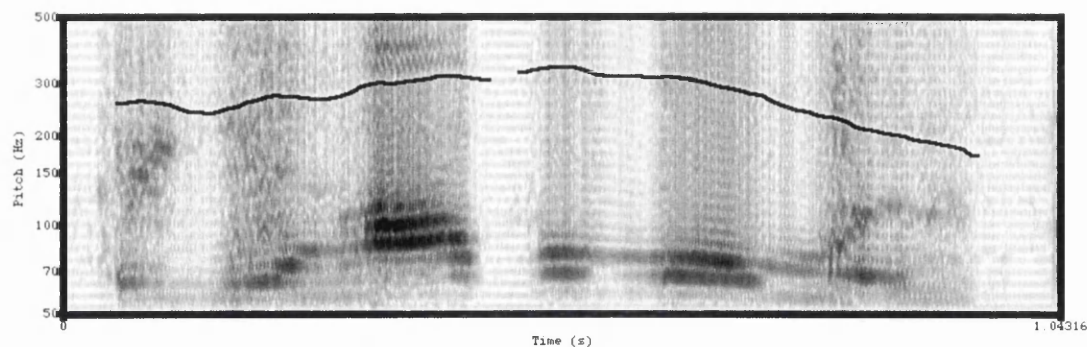


er do you → have a moment

The dotted line on the pitch contour of call 1932 above indicates where the voicing actually stops; this is a high rise tone (with a jump from one level pitch to a slightly higher one rather than a smooth rise) rather than a rise-fall.

By the end of nesting this pattern has also changed, and like the scripted utterance which comes directly before it (*your homecare agreement (that you've got with us)*), it has a distinctive rise-fall tone:

End of nesting call 1859



do you have a moment

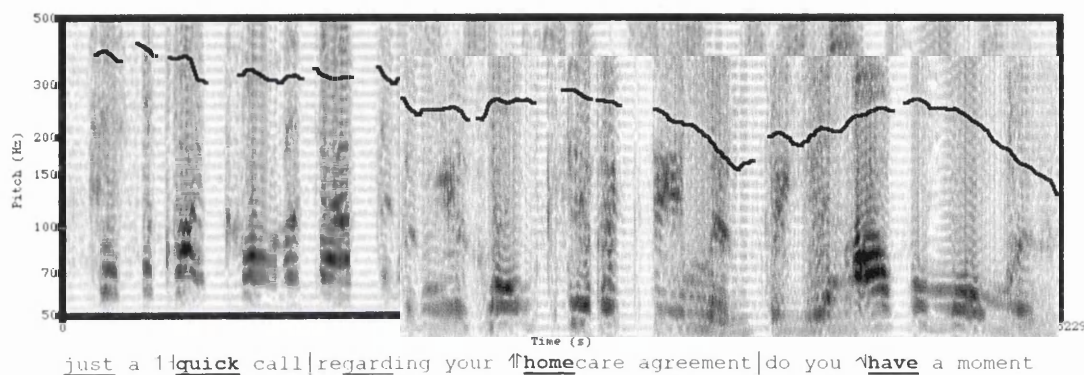
We can also see this utterance has marked tonicity (i.e. the nuclear accent is on the 'have' rather than the final lexical item) which has the effect of placing focus on this grammatical item. This is different from the neutral tonicity of this section on day 1.



Why she would do this is not particularly clear, but it also happens on the phrase *that you have with us at the moment*.

At this point, if we look at scripted parts C & D together, we can see the pattern which was emergent on day 1 has become much more established:

End of nesting call 1859



In her calls in the two months after nesting, Gail tends to retain this pattern, although her hook becomes longer and more lexically varied across calls. For example:

6 C: [yeah

7 A: [|it- it \\\is just a wee 1|quick call 3|in regards to the  
1|homecare agreement 4|that you've 1|got with us (0.4)  
|.hhhh is it a con 1|venient time (.)|\\\just to go over  
the 1|details |to make 1|sure (0.4) um|that 1|ev'rything is  
con 1|rect for you

As she has become more experienced on calls, it seems she has developed her hook so that it is more persuasive than the original scripted utterance, *do you have a moment?*

As her main task is to sell as many products as possible, it is not surprising that she does this. This is evidence to show that agents, while using the script as a basis for their openings, are not restricted from expanding upon it once they become more confident.

## Gail: summary

The live call data for each of Gail's scripted utterances reveal some broad lexical and prosodic patterns which correlate roughly with each stage of her employment.

Interestingly, by the end of nesting her call openings have developed more regular and predictable patterns; they are rhythmically, lexically, and intonationally more uniform than they were a month earlier. However, the analysis also reveals further changes which take place after nesting has ended when she begins work on the main call centre floor. As time passes, she appears to become more creative (i.e. making unscripted additions to her calls) and sometimes varies the patterns that had become so noticeably routine at the end of nesting. However, the data for the first three months of taking live calls demonstrate that the call openings retain a high level of predictability in terms of their syntactic, lexical and prosodic detail.

### 6.7.2 ANNE

|      | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| ANNE | 8     | 7              | 6             | 6              | 27    |

#### Anne: scripted part B: *it's ..... calling from British Gas*

On the first day of nesting, Anne varies this identification section very slightly between calls, (e.g.: *it's Anne from British Gas*; *it's Anne calling here from British Gas*; *it's Anne calling from British Gas*). Her intonation patterns over the latter two of these are quite difficult to ascertain due to the lack of pausing between potential tone units. Based upon the syntactic structure of the utterance, we might reasonably

assume that it is chunked into two tone units, with the idea of this being two separate (but related) pieces of information:

it's Anne calling | from British Gas

However, in the calls on the first day, the pitch movement over the first nuclear syllable is only a very slight rise, which gives the impression that the whole utterance is actually just one single tone unit with a stepping head. One might speculate that as she is placing little prosodic emphasis on her own name in this way, but a lot on the company name, she feels the latter is more important than the former.

The only calls on this day where this does not occur are at 1937 and 1945 where there is a mid rise on the first nucleus but then a slightly rising head and a low fall on the second tone unit, which gives the utterance a slightly sing-song, 'chanting' quality. In later calls this pattern tends to be used when the answerer asks her to confirm her identity but before she has confirmed the answerer's identity (i.e. whether he/she is the named customer). So, in a single call she may identify herself twice: once when the answerer asks who is calling, and then once again when it has been established that she is speaking to the named customer. We can see this in the following call:

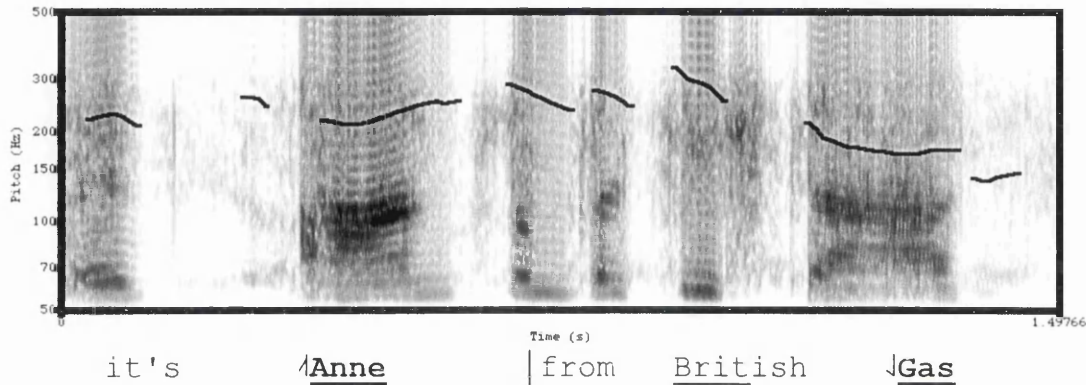
Day 1 call 1800

1 C:           hello  
2 A:           hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C:           who's calling  
4 A:           |it's Anne |from British Gas |  
(.)  
5 C:           how can I help

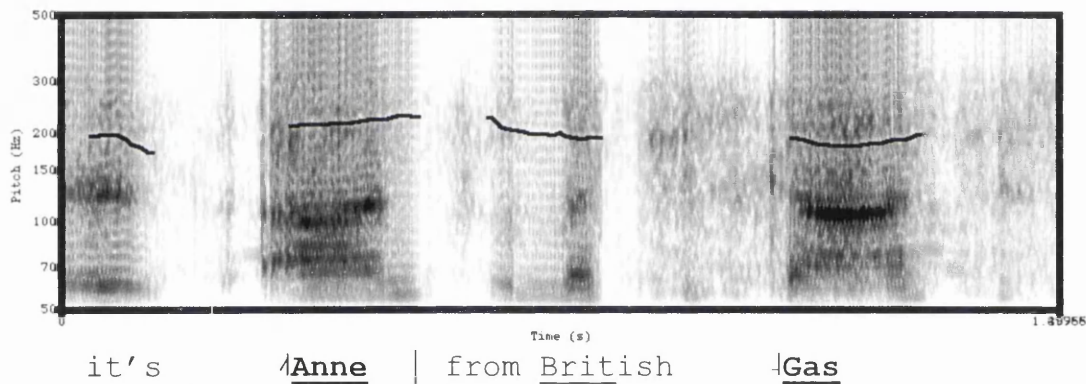
6 A: hi (.) hi Mrs HUM | it's ^Anne | from British ^Gas

The difference between these two patterns can be seen via pitch tracking:

Pre-customer ID (finality):

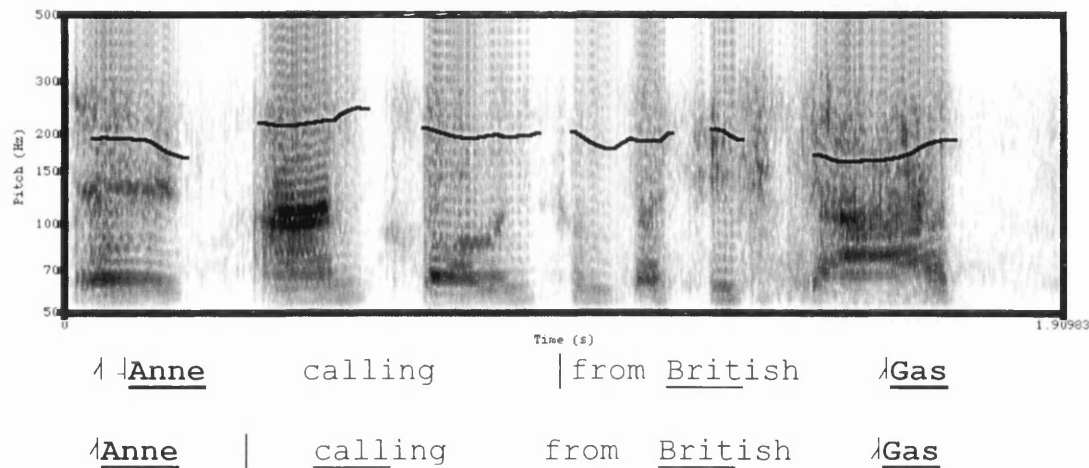


Post-customer ID (part of spiel)



The second of the two examples shows both nuclear tones are quite level; however, this is not the case for all calls on this day, with lexically similar utterances having a slightly steeper gradient (i.e. a more definite rise) on the tonic syllable *Gas*. There are also realizations of this utterance which are lexically slightly different, for example where she says *it's Anne calling from British Gas* or *it's Anne here from British Gas*. These utterances have a different pattern. For example:

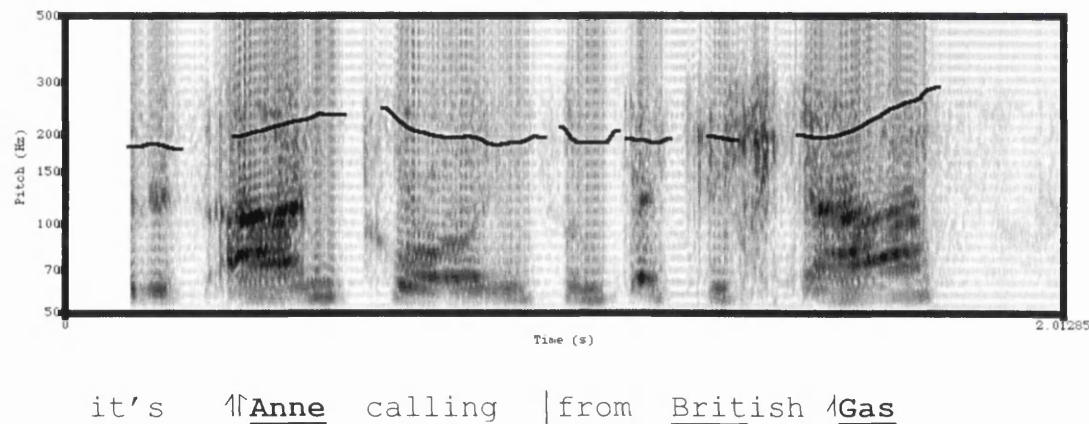
Day 1 call 1752



As already mentioned, due to the lack of pausing it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion about the chunking of these utterances. It is not clear whether *Anne calling* constitutes one tone unit, with a very slightly stylised pattern (although the rise on *Anne* makes this less so), or if *calling* belongs to the following tone unit.

By the end of nesting, although the intonational pattern has not changed radically in terms of general shape, there has been a rise in pitch across the whole utterance, and in addition to this, the rise fall on the first tonic syllable and the rise on the second now tend to have a steeper gradient, giving a clearer impression of two discrete tone units:

End of nesting call 1951



In the calls from the months after nesting has ended, Anne continues to use this pattern, which the data show was beginning to emerge as early as day one, and over the course of nesting it has become further established and routine.

**Anne: scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call about your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

There are several clear differences between Anne's realisation of this section of the script on first day in nesting and the way in which she delivers it a month later. On day one, her first few calls are quite varied in terms of both what she says, and also how much she says. She never follows the script exactly, even on the very early calls where she relies on it more than in later interactions. She misses out *it's just a quick call* that is scripted to preface the business-at-hand, and she refers to the product as *homecare agreement*, when the scripted line is actually *three star agreement*. Her choice of term is most likely influenced by listening to existing members of staff (including the nesters) taking calls. If they use the term *homecare agreement* on demonstration calls, she may decide to mimic them in their choice of lexis rather than to follow the script. In four of the calls on day one she adds an additional unscripted

phrase which appears to provide an additional explanation of the product to which she is referring. Instead of just saying *it's regarding your homecare agreement*, she continues by providing a definition of the product which goes beyond what she offers in later calls when asked for clarification about the nature of the call. For example:

Day 1 1752

6 A: .hh regarding your homecare agreement you've got with us  
7 C: ok regarding  
8 A: your homecare agreement you have (.) your  
heating coverage you have with us

Day 1 1841

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
3 C: er who's calling I'm in the middle of eating at the  
moment  
4 A: it's Anne here from British Gas regarding your  
homecare agreement your central heating cover|

This may be evidence to show that she is still not yet comfortable herself with the product, and/or her that she is conscious that this jargon may not be understood by the customer, and so she tries to simplify it. When established members of a community use occupational jargon, they may well be de-sensitised to the fact that new or non-members are not familiar with it. The fact that Anne is a new community member in these first calls and that she attempts to explain the jargon to a non-member suggests that she has not yet become desensitised to these new terms. In later calls she does not provide any definition of the product for the customers.

The early calls also show a variety of different intonational patterns over this section of the scripted opening, which are illustrated in the following extracts taken from the first three calls:

Day 1 call 1737

|>regarding your home^care agreement |you've →got  
with us just ^now .hhhhhh er |do you have a quick ^moment  
.hhhh |it's regarding your home^care agreement|that you ^have |with  
British ^Gas|do you have a few ^moments

Day 1 call 1751

|a^^bout your home ^care agreement .hh |\_that you currently ^have  
with us .hh |\_do you have a →few min- er |→moments for a quick ^call

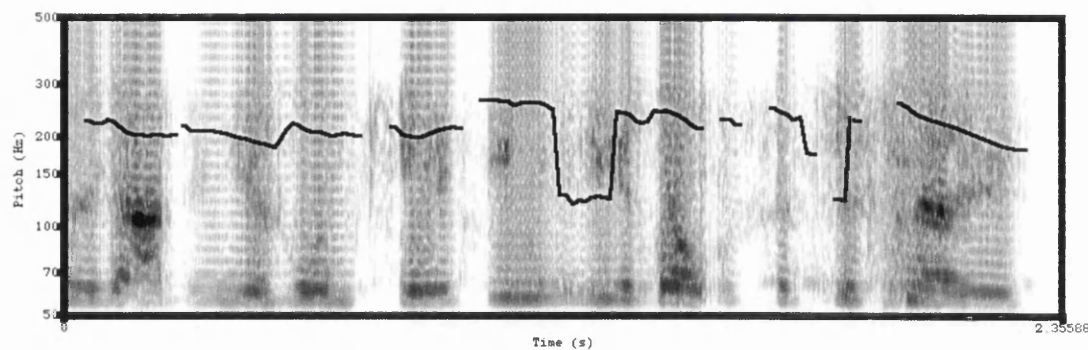
Day 1 call 1752

|.hh re→garding your homecare a^^greement you've got with us|  
|your home^care agreement you have (.)|your ^heating coverage you  
have with us (0.2) .hh |do you ^^have a few moments I could ^speak  
to  
you

The syntactic structure and lexical content of these early calls are slightly different in each, and so too are the accompanying intonational patterns. She uses a variety of different nuclear and pre-nuclear tunes, with both rising and falling pitch movements. If we look at what is arguably the focal point of each utterance (*your homecare agreement*), we can see clear differences in both tonicity and tone between the calls:



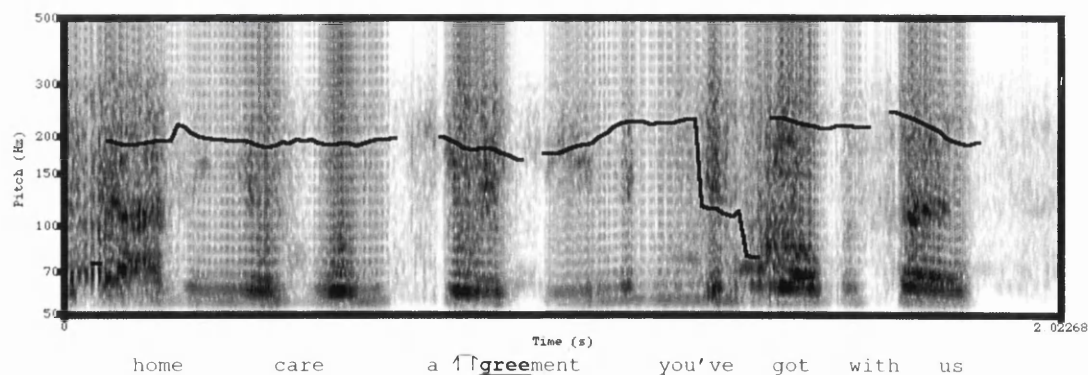
Day 1 call 1737<sup>76</sup>



home ↑care a greement | you've →got with us just ↓now

The pitch track shows that the rise section of this rise-plateau tone has a very shallow gradient, and is followed by a jump on the second syllable to a high pitch which remains level until the tone unit boundary. This appears to be followed by a second tone unit as there is a very slight jump down in pitch at the potential boundary site, so slight, in fact, that the second tone unit sounds like part of the tail of the preceding tone unit. On call 1752, the same utterance sounds more like one single tone unit:

Day 1 call 1752



home care a ↑greement you've got with us

This points to the idea that the *overall shape* (which she has heard being produced by existing staff) of these utterances is salient for Anne as a learner, but in these early calls where she is not yet in a linguistic routine, she varies the intonational means she

<sup>76</sup> Correction of this pitch track by hand was not possible. It sounds like background noise of some description causes the anomaly. This is also the case for 1752 below.

uses to produce these overall patterns in her own calls (e.g. an overall rise-plateau slump contour, but over one tone unit in one call, and two tone units in another).

There is similar variation in both the lexical content and the pitch patterns of the hook (scripted part D) in these first calls, and they all have neutral tonicity:

1737:do you have a quick moment

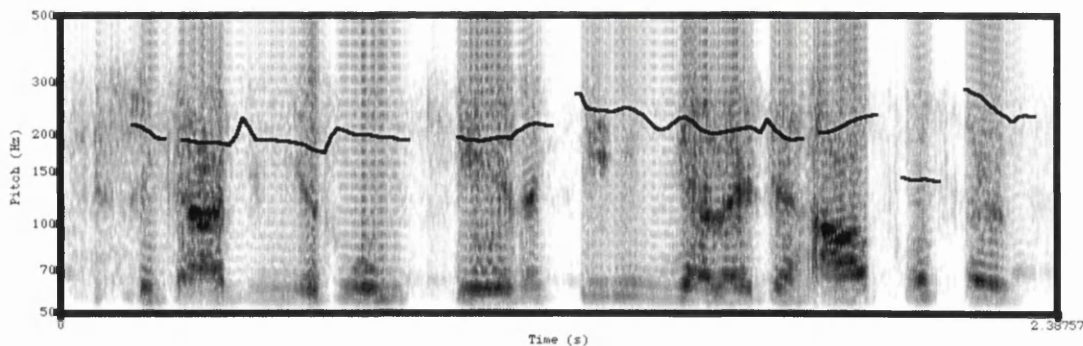
do you have a few moments

1751:do you have a few min- er | moments for a quick call

1752:do you have a few moments I could speak to you

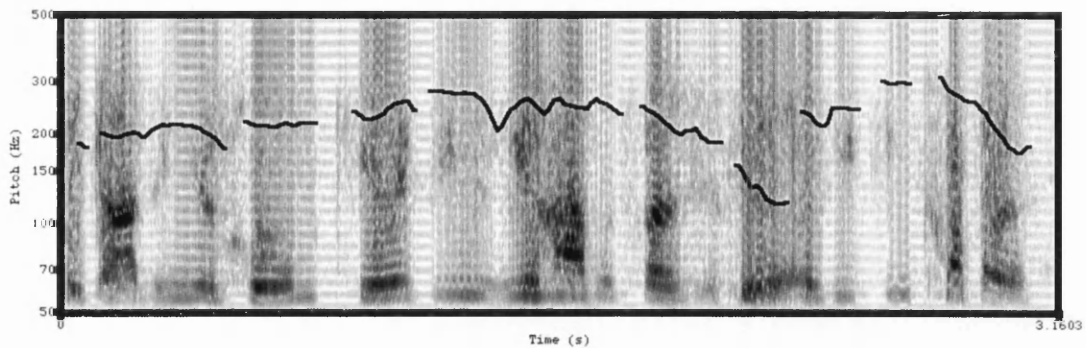
However, although the data show a great deal of variation in the first few calls, we can also see that she very quickly starts to get into what could be considered an ‘intonational routine’, whereby she uses the same intonational pattern on the same utterance across different calls. As the evening progresses, she starts to use a pattern which is made up of successive rising-falling tones (usually at least two) over this scripted section. We can see this in the transcripts from four consecutive calls made later in the evening:

Day 1 call 1800



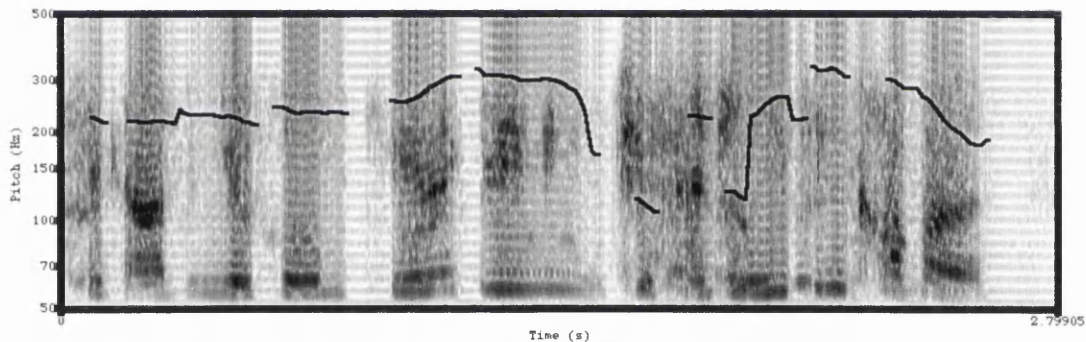
just regarding the home care agreement | y'already have with us

Day 1 call 1838



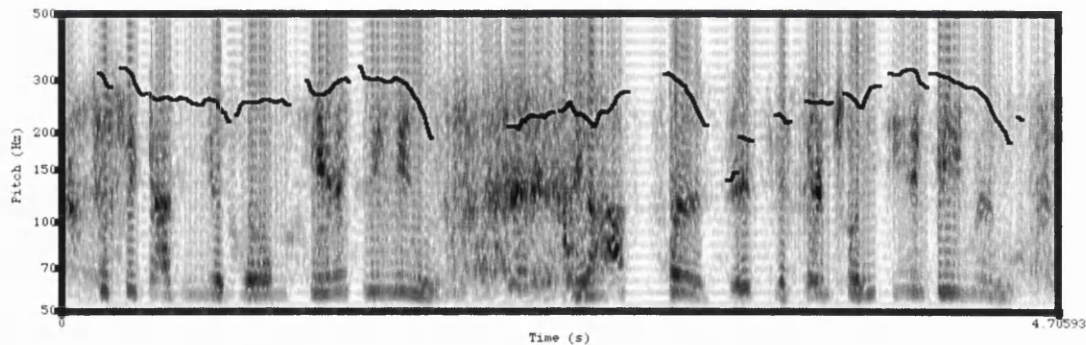
re<sup>↗</sup>garding the home <sup>↘</sup>care agreement you have with us | the central <sup>↘</sup>heating cover  
 re<sup>↗</sup>garding the home <sup>↗</sup>care agreement | you have with us | the central <sup>↘</sup>heating cover

Day 1 call 1841



re<sup>↗</sup>garding your home <sup>↗</sup>care agreement | your central <sup>↘</sup>heating cover

Day 1 call 1945



↘just regarding your home <sup>↘</sup>care agreement .hh you <sup>↘</sup>have with us (.) your central <sup>↘</sup>heating cover

Each of the contours above shows a prevalence of rise-fall patterns for this utterance on day 1. Again, in some cases the tone unit boundaries are more clear than others, which is why two different annotations have been given for call 1818.

By the end of the nesting period, the data show that Anne has further simplified the scripted section (lexically), and has also started to use the hook.

End of nesting call 1918

5 A: hi Mr HUM

6 C: it is

7 A: hi there|it's ↑Anne calling |from British ↓Gas  
|re→garding your home↓care agreement (0.2) .hhhhh  
|((fast)) d'y ↗have a few ↑moments |for a quick ↓call

End of nesting call 1927

4 A: .hhh hi Mr HUM |it's ↑Anne calling |from British ↓Gas|  
(0.2)

5 C: ok

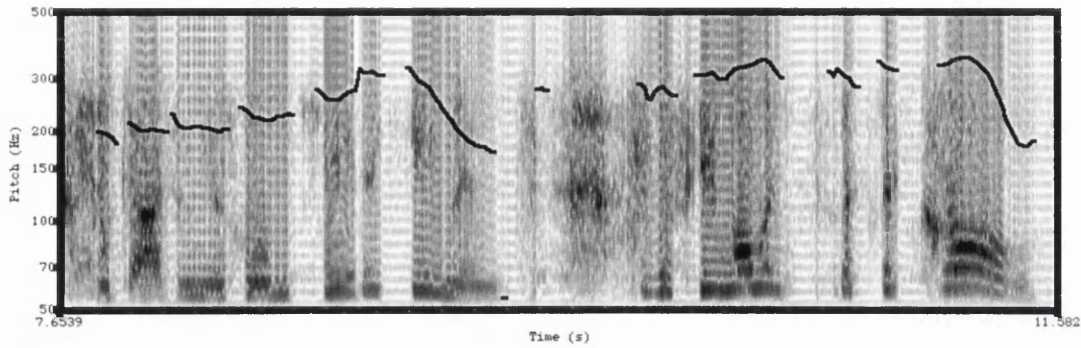
6 A: | re→garding your home↓care agreement

7 C: ok

8 A: |d'y ↗have a few ↑moments|for a quick ↓call|

The transcriptions also show that the successive rise-fall pattern identified on day one has changed slightly; now the utterance tends to have a rise fall in the first tone unit followed by rising or level head and a nuclear full fall on the second tone unit. We can see this in the pitch contour below:

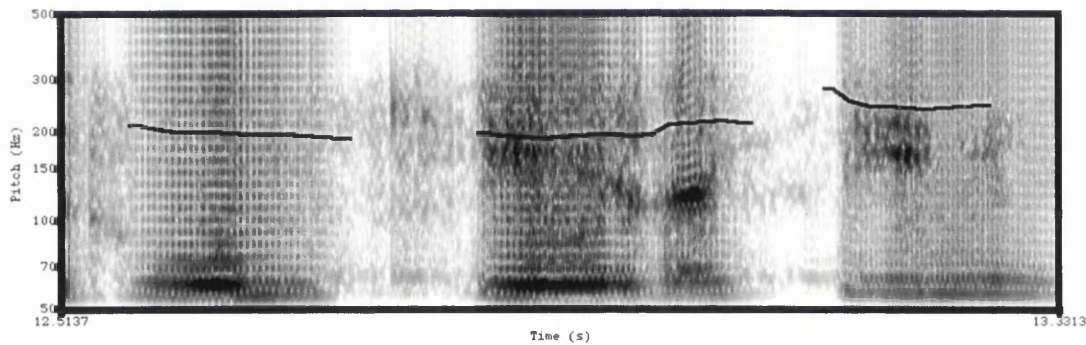
End of nesting call 1929



regarding your home care agreement (.) |d'you have a few moments |for a quick call

In the two months after nesting, Anne continues to use this pattern on her calls and something which remains consistent is the rise-fall pattern associated with *homecare agreement*. However, analysis of the nuclear tone on this utterance at each of the four time intervals indicates qualitative changes in this pattern over time:

Day 1 call 1800

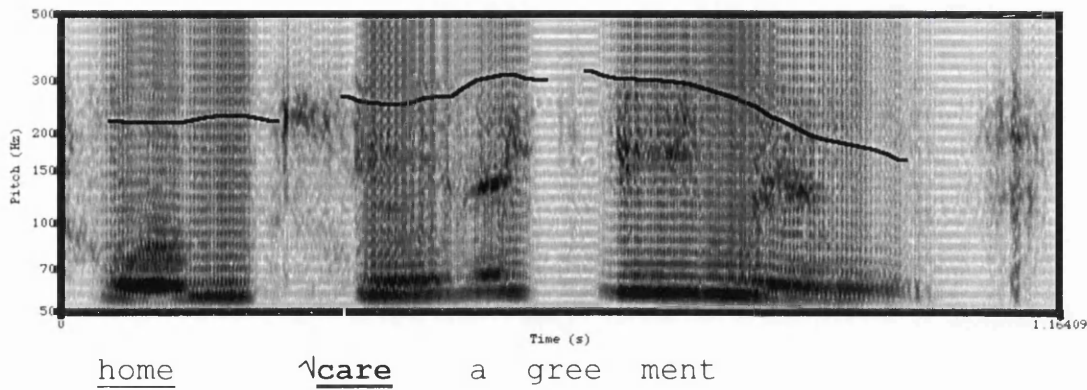


home      ↑care    a      gree ment

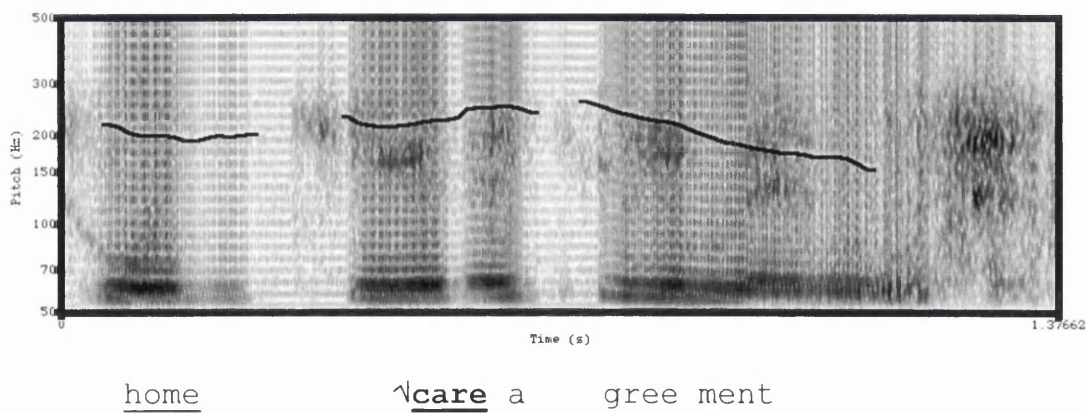
This pattern has been labelled a rise slump, although the rising section is very shallow.

End of nesting call 1950



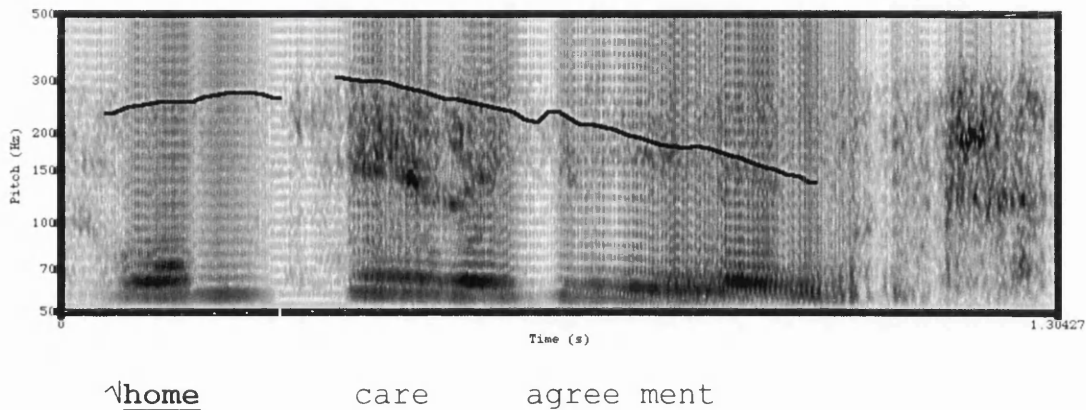


1 month later (1903)



The rise on this nucleus is also very shallow. However, it is still closer to the fall-rise tone than to a simple fall as the rising section is more strongly accented than the fall which follows.

2 months later 1940



In later calls, this is accompanied by a quite nasal voice quality which was not present at the beginning of nesting.

### Anne: summary

Overall, the call data for Anne over the three months from the first day of nesting show patterns of uniformity which correlate with her progression from nesting into the main call centre environment. This speaker was also identified as having subtle, qualitative changes in her realisation of one particular section of the scripted opening.

### 6.7.3 KERRY-ANN

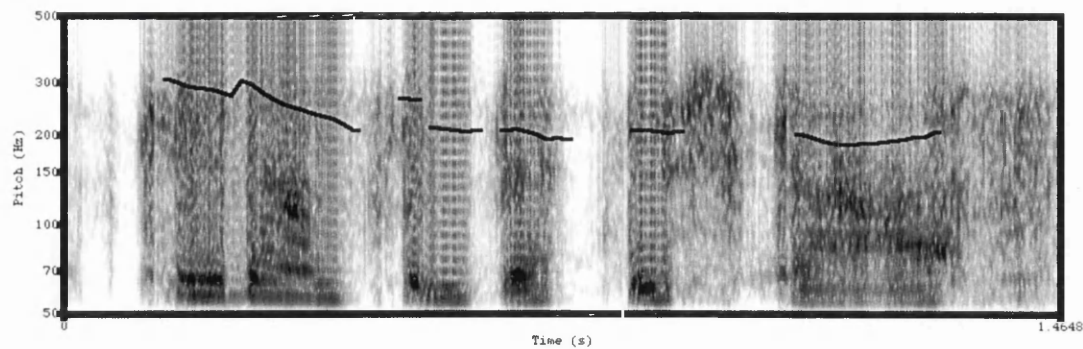
|           | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| KERRY-ANN | 9     | 6              | 8             |                | 23    |

### Kerry-Ann: scripted part B: *it's ..... calling from British Gas*

The identification sequence used by Kerry-Ann is syntactically and lexically identical on all calls on her first day, where she always says *it's Kerry-Ann from British Gas*.

The intonational patterns over this utterance are also very similar in different calls, with a typical pattern as follows:

Day 1 call 1823

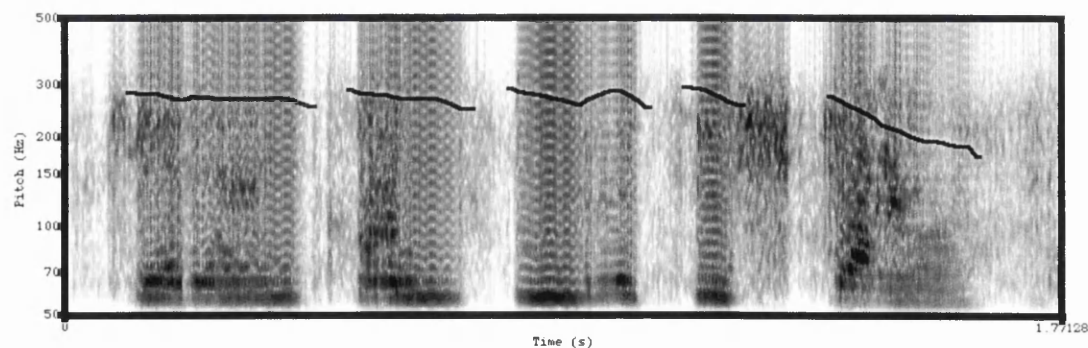


↓Kerry-Ann | from British ↓Gas

This gives an overall falling melody to the whole utterance. Her first call is the only exception to this, where she has a very shallow high rise on the nucleus of the second tone unit. By the next call it has been replaced by the lower, more level tone which she continues to use in the rest of the calls.

By the end of nesting, the intonational pattern used on this utterance has changed, with the two tone units apparently becoming one, and with a very level (near monotone) head followed by a final fall:

End of nesting call 1927



↓Kerry-Ann | →calling from British ↓Gas

Although this has been labelled as being chunked into two discrete tone units, there is no discernable pause to indicate a tone unit boundary, and as the tune over *Kerry-Ann* is level with the head and not perceptually louder or longer than the surrounding talk,

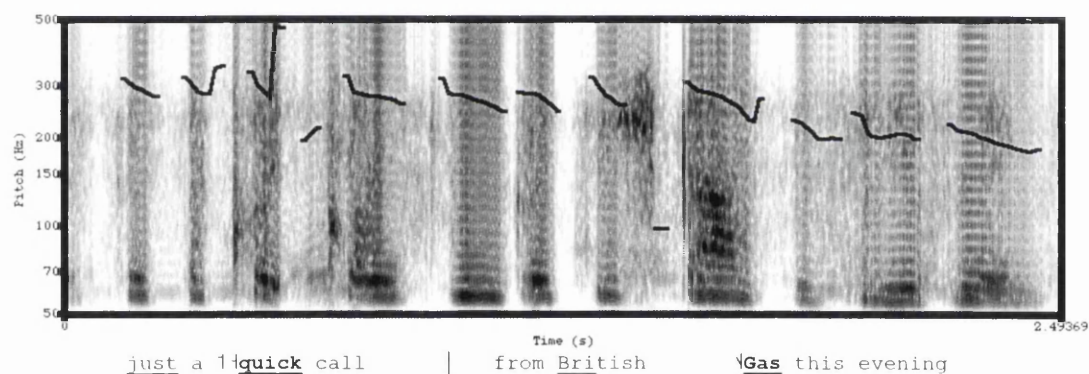


it could be argued that *Kerry-Ann* forms part of the level head of one single tone unit.

The second nuclear tone does have a falling component, but also levels out at low pitch which is why two possible annotations have been provided.

In the month after nesting, this agent restructured her scripted part B so as to leave out her name completely. The replacement section shown in the following example no longer has a completely level pitch; instead it has an overall stepping down level pattern with a slightly stylised contour on the first tone unit:

1 month later call 1859



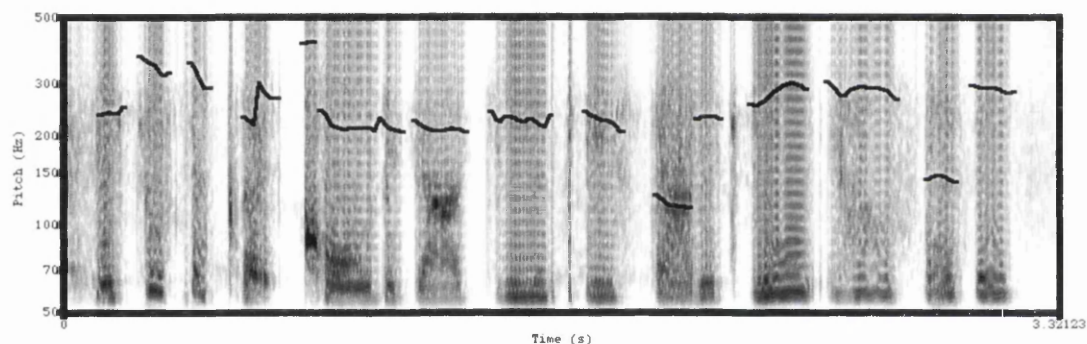
As this agent resigned before the end of the following month, no further data are available.

**Kerry-Ann: scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call regarding your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

In the same way as was the case for scripted part B, Kerry-Ann's early calls show very little variation, both in terms of their lexical content, and in their associated pitch patterns.

The call below shows the typical pitch pattern for this utterance at the beginning of nesting.

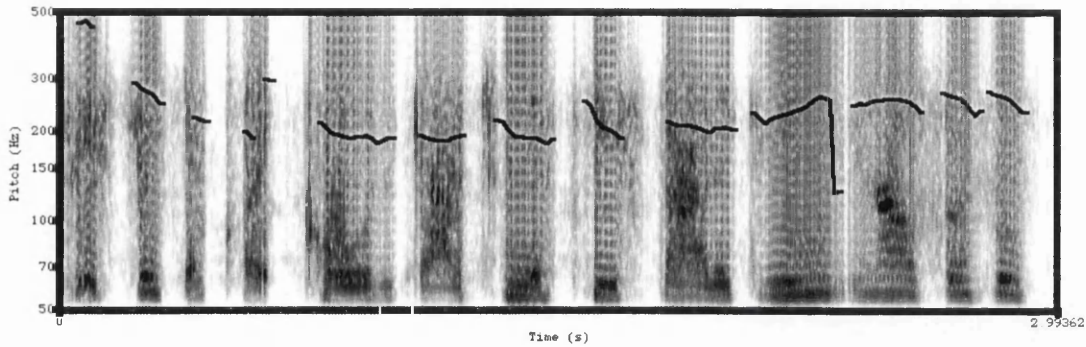
Day 1 call 1823



it's just a quick call | regarding your three star agreement you have with us

There are some qualitative differences between calls on this day, however. For example, in the following call Kerry-Ann uses the same pitch pattern in 1823 above, but the onset of the head on *just* is at a perceptually lower pitch, and this moves the pitch of the rest of the utterance down slightly:

Day 1 call 1843



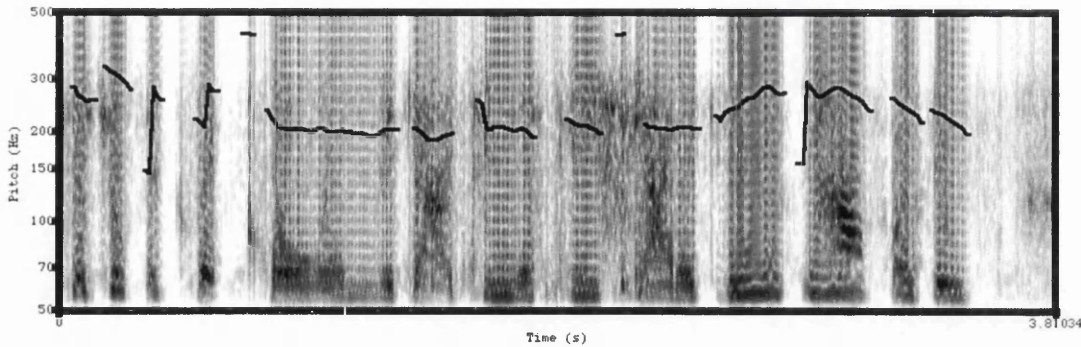
it's \just a quick \call | re→garding your three star a \greement you have with us

There is only one call on day on which she deviates from this pattern, where she gives some extra information about the product:

Day 1 call 1848

1 C:           hello  
 2 A:           hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
 3 C:           speaking  
 4 A:           hello | it's er \Kerry-Ann from British \Gas .hhh  
               |it's \just a quick \call (.) |re→garding your three  
               star a \greement you have with us .hh |er |you →know the  
               one |→that er will cover your \central heating boiler

As already seen in Anne's calls on the first day, this may be due to Anne's own self-conscious use of jargon, used when she tries to give an explanation of the term to her interlocutor. This call also has a slightly different pitch pattern over *three star agreement*. Where on the other calls she uses a rise plateau tone, on this call it has a rise-fall pattern:



it's \just a quick lcall | re-garding your three star a greement you have with us

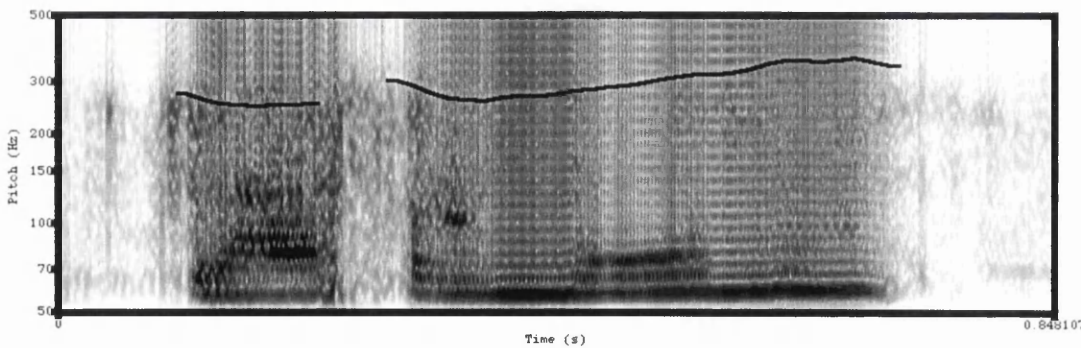
Labelling of the first tone unit of this utterance could perhaps be modified to take account of the pre-head pattern which is a jump up on *a* followed by a step back down:



it's just a quick lcall

The final section of the scripted opening, the hook, tends to have a high rising tone on day one, as illustrated in the following example:

Day 1 call 1848

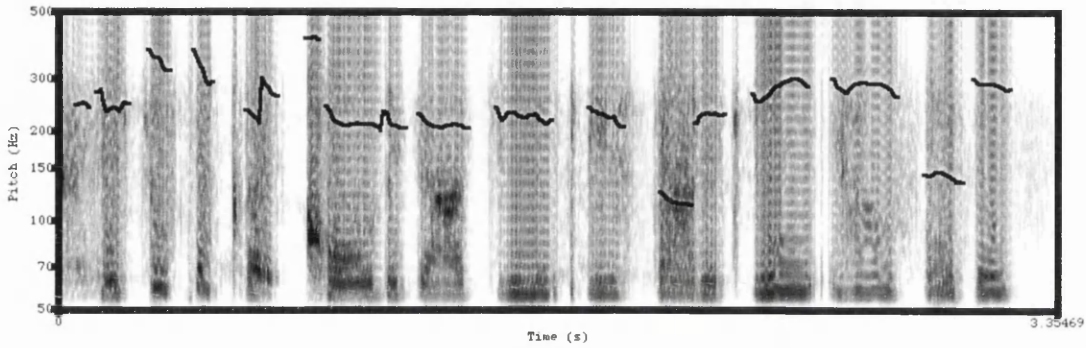


d' you have a lmoment

By the end of nesting, there has been a noticeable change in Kerry-Ann's intonation pattern over scripted parts C & D. Whereas before she was using final high rises and rise-plateaux, she is now adopting a pattern situated lower in her tessitura, with long,

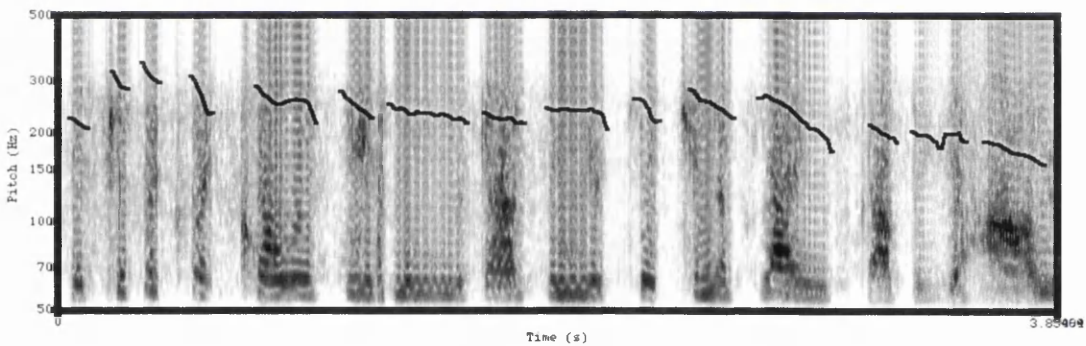
level heads followed by relatively low falls. On some calls where the hook is present, this is followed by a tone unit with a low rising nucleus. This is similar to the pattern she adopts at this stage on the scripted part B described above. We can see this change via pitch contours taken from calls at the beginning and end of nesting:

Day 1 call 1823



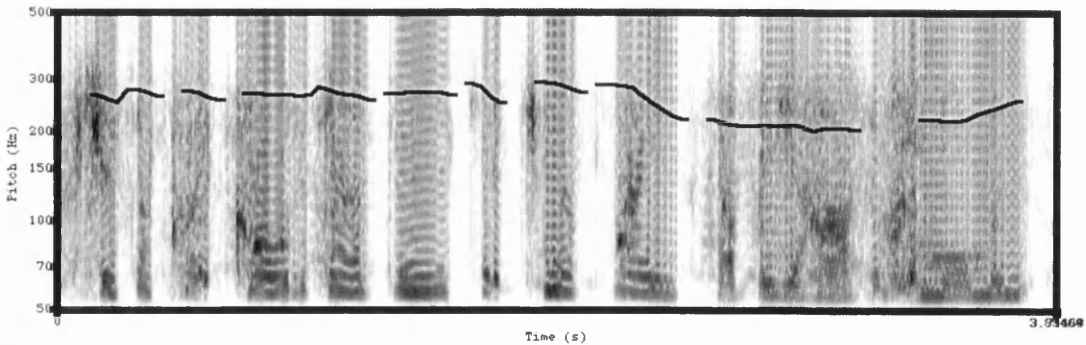
it's just a quick call | regarding your three star at greement you have with us

End of nesting 1927 (no hook)



it's just a quick call this evening | regarding the kitchen appliance cover you have

End of nesting call 1930 (including hook)



just a quick call | regarding the kitchen appliance cover | you have at the moment



Another noticeable prosodic change over the first month of employment for this agent is an overall drop in the pitch of her voice, where she uses the lower half of her tessitura much more than on day 1. There is also a change in her phonation. In earlier calls she tended to use quite a lot of whisper which is no longer present.

Calls analysed for this worker one month after nesting show that the distinctive prosodic patterns identified at the end of nesting are no longer being used. In many respects the patterns which she is using are closer to those used on the first day of nesting than at its finishing point. All of the calls analysed a month after nesting have a similar intonation pattern used on each of the scripted sections, shown in the example calls below:

1 month later call 1816

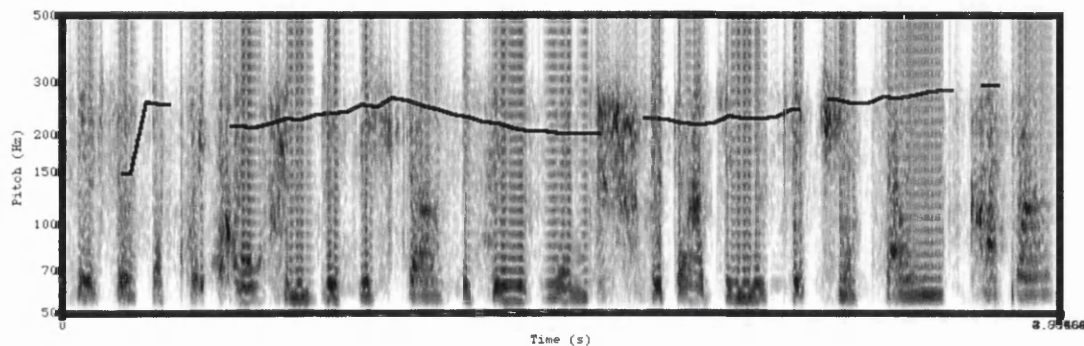
1 C:           hello  
2 A:           hello can I speak to Miss HUM please  
3 C:           speaking  
4 A:           .hh hi 1|it's \just a quick \call 2|from ^British \Gas  
                  this evening .hhhh 2|re^garding your kitchen a^ppliance  
                  cover you have|

1 month later call 1922

1 A:           hello can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C:           (.) speakin'  
3 A:           hi sir 1|it's \just a quick \call |from ^British \Gas  
                  this evening .hhhh |re^garding your kitchen  
                  a^ppliance cover

These calls show that the tone units lack the level tones which characterised them in the previous month. The pattern she is now adopting gives the openings a distinctive dynamic melody, as shown in the pitch contour below:

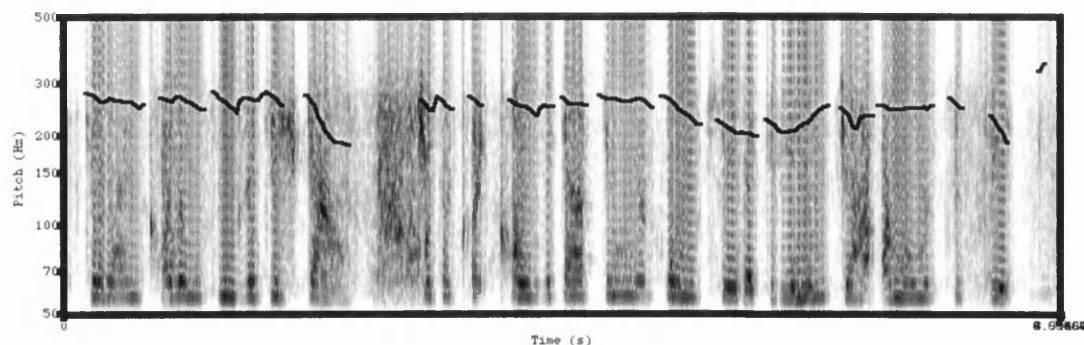
1 month later call 1855



it's \j\just a quick \call|from ^British \Gas this evening .hhhh |re^garding your kitchen  
a'ppliance cover

In these calls she is now using the whole range of her tessitura for the openings, which contrasts with her first calls, in which she tended to have a generally higher-pitched voice, and also with the end of nesting, in which her voice was noticeably lower in pitch and mostly restricted to the lower half of her pitch range. We can see a pattern of successive tone units with level heads and final nuclear falls (with what sounds like a low fall-rise on *homecare agreement* in the following pitch trace:

End of nesting call 1838



it's →Kerry Ann \calling from →British \Gas |it's →just a quick \call |re→garding  
your \homecare agreement | do you have a →moment to \speak)

Again, due to the alignment of the level nuclear tone in one tone unit with the level head of the following tone unit (e.g. *it's Kerry –Ann calling from British Gas*), there are no *prosodic* indications that these are separate tone units.

It appears that the nesting process may have been responsible in some way for this choice of pattern, as she does not use it much longer after nesting has ended.

### **Kerry-Ann: summary**

An analysis of Kerry-Ann's calls over the first three months of her employment with British Gas reveals several different stages of development in the intonational patterns she uses over the opening section of the calls. By the end of nesting these patterns have changed considerably, accompanied by a general drop and narrowing of pitch range, and a reduction in the whispery phonation which was present on the first day of nesting. A month after nesting has ended her intonation has changed once again, and it is now noticeably more 'up-and-down' with a lack of the level patterns and falls which characterised her openings at the previous time period.



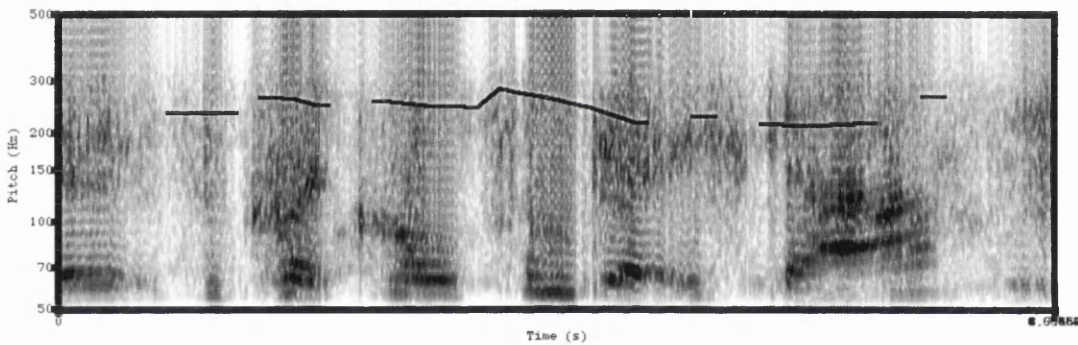
## 6.7.4 LINDA

|       | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|-------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| LINDA | 7     | 7              | 8             | 6              | 28    |

### Linda: scripted part B: *it's ..... calling from British Gas*

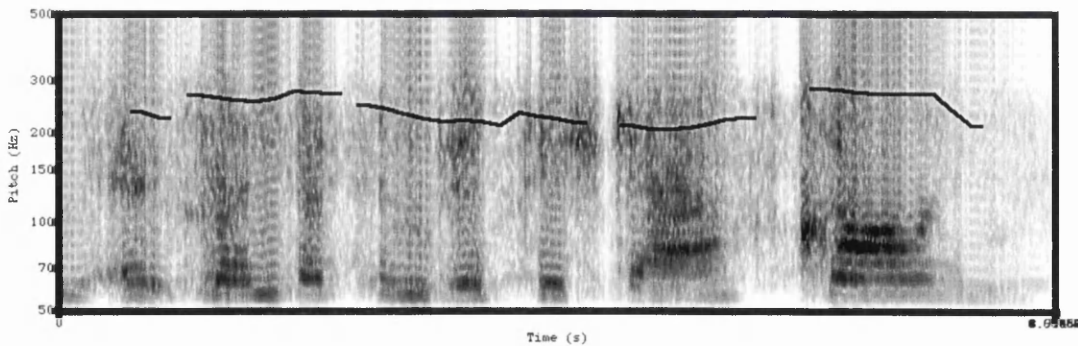
If we look at the identification section from the first three calls on Linda's first day of nesting, we can see a good deal of lexical, structural and prosodic variation between them:

Day 1 call 1813



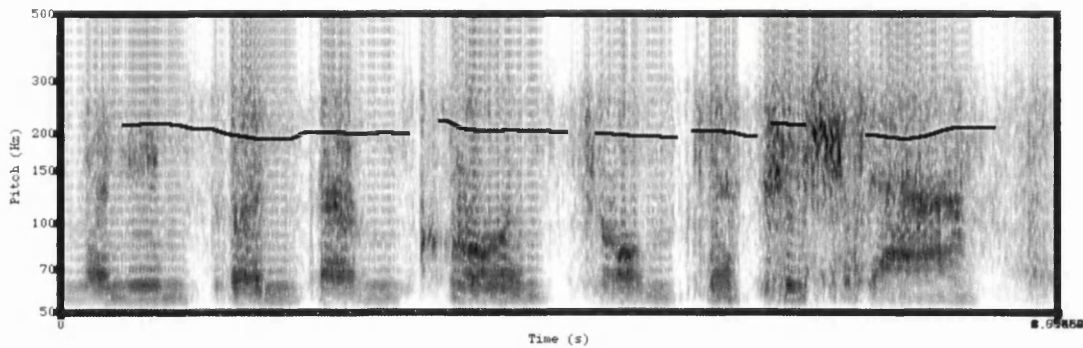
it's a quick call | from Bri-ish Gas

Day 1 call 1823



it's Linda | from British Gas calling

Day 1 call 1830

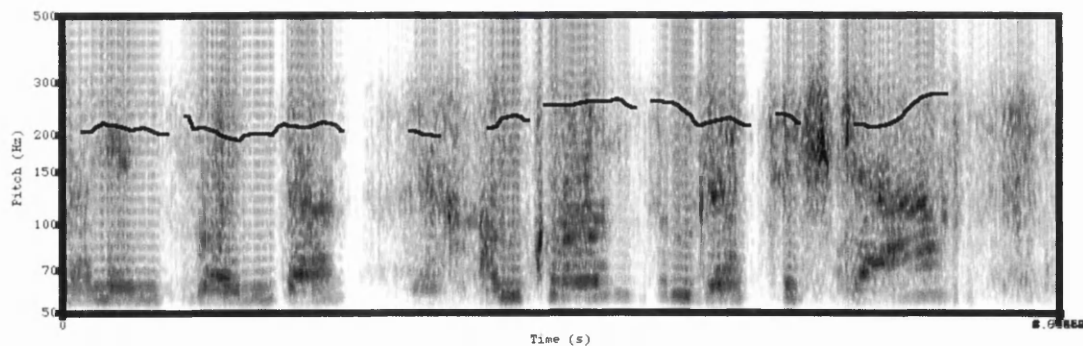


|my name's /Lin da | I'm .calling from British /Gas

Although the first few calls show variation in this way, this section becomes more uniform in later calls, with an intonational pattern most like that shown in call 1830 above. The utterance is divided into two tone units, both with final nuclear rises.

However, there are slight differences in the pitch height of these rises between different calls, and also in the pre-tonic tunes. In some calls the pre-tonic pattern is quite level, as in call 1830 above. On other calls, however, it has a stepping contour. In the call at 1923 we can see both a stepping head and a final high rise for the second tone unit:

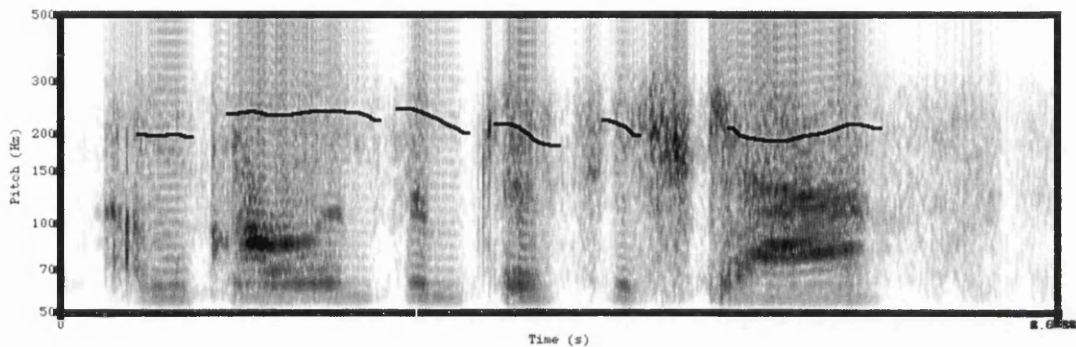
Day 1 call 1923



my name's /Lin -da(.)h I'm ↘calling from British /Gas

By the end of nesting, her pre-tonic patterns have levelled out (as we have seen for the other three female agents), and she has consistent low or mid nuclear rises in both tone units and a level head on the second tone unit:





I'm \\_calling from British \\_Gas

Aside from the omission of her first name, this pattern is not much different from that of the previous month, and at this point it seems her intonational patterns over this section of the call have become predictable.

**Linda: scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call about your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

The scripted parts C & D of Linda's call openings on day one are closely based on the script, although she does make minor deviations. For example, her hook is *is it convenient to speak with you?* rather than the prescribed *do you have a moment?*

Transcriptions of Linda's first few calls show that a uniform linguistic pattern has not developed at this point:

Day 1 call 1813

10 A: hi there |it's a \\_quick call |from Bri-ish \\_Gas (.)2|er  
it's re→garding your three star \\_cover you have with us

(0.9)

11 C: uhuh

12 A: erm 3|is it con→venient to \\_speak with you

Day 1 call 1823

5 C:           yes  
6 A:           2|erm it's a \u025cquick call |with re→gards to your three  
star a↑greement that you've got with us .hh |um 3|is it  
con→venient to ↑speak with you at the moment

Day 1 call 1830

7 C2:           hello  
8 A:           hello Mr HUM  
9 C2:           uhuh  
10 A:           hi there 1|my name's \u025cLinda 2|I'm .calling from British  
Gas .hhh 3|um it's a quick \u025ccall tonight 4|re→garding  
the three star a↑greement you've got with us at the  
moment

Day 1 call 1845

7 A:           4|it's (.) a \u025cquick call 5|regarding your three star  
a↑greement that you have with us  
8 C:           yes  
9 A:           =erm (0.3) you know (.) 6|for your central \u025cheating .hhh  
7|is it ok to ↑speak with you at the moment

Although her call-openings at this stage are all slightly different in terms of their lexical content, their general structure and their intonational patterns, we can see that the script is highly influential in shaping the interactions, and also that the majority of nuclear tones have a rising pattern. The transcripts also show a few hesitations, presumably because she is still relatively unused to reading from the script.

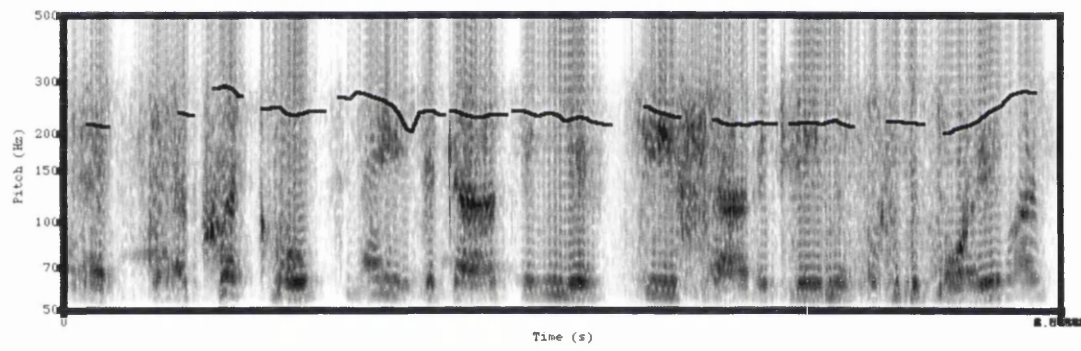
By the end of nesting the calls are lexically uniform with an accompanying intonational pattern that varies little between calls:

End of nesting call 1804

5 C:            yeah

6 A:            hi there |my name's Linda (.) |I'm →calling from British  
 ↓Gas .h |it's →just a quick ↓call tonight |re↓garding  
 your three star a↓greement |for the ↓boiler .h |is it  
 o→kay to ↑speak with you at the moment

End of nesting call 1726



it's a →quick ↓call tonight | re→garding your three star agreement for the ↓boiler

The pattern over the first tone unit is partially stylised, with an HLM pattern which the transcription does not adequately represent:

—  
 —      —  
 —  
 a quick call tonight

We can see from the contour that the long level head on the second tone unit means the pitch of the majority of the utterance is around the mid range of the tessitura.

The pattern has not changed a great deal since the later calls on day one, which suggests that the routine she is now using was adopted quite early on in the nesting

period. It is on the initial calls on the first day of nesting where most of the changes to this now established pattern occurred. Analysis of calls beyond the end of nesting show that the intonational patterns do not change any further.

**Linda: summary**

The data for this speaker show that unlike the other females discussed so far, the intonational patterns that accompany Linda's scripted call openings do not change a great deal after the first day of nesting. However, in general the intonational patterns she uses in later calls are much more uniform than they were for the first few calls. The data for this speaker also show that in some respects she is similar to the other females in that her pre-tonic patterns become more level at the very end of nesting.



## 6.7.5 ROSS

|      | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| ROSS | 13    | 7              | 0             | 0              | 20    |

### Ross: scripted part B: *it's ..... calling from British Gas*

Unlike the other speakers discussed so far, who had relatively few hesitations in their early calls, Ross's first call shows a high degree of uncertainty and unfamiliarity with the script which causes a temporary breakdown in the conversation. In his first turn, he hesitates over scripted part B, then repeats the company name at very fast tempo. He then misses out the next sections of the scripted opening, instead going straight into the hook. In his next turn, he once again gives the introduction section and then follows it with the scripted sections C and D. At this point the customer asks him to identify himself once again, and when he does so he gives the name of a different company, Scottish Power, in error and then repairs this by giving the correct name:

Day 1 call 1805

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please

2 C: yep (\*\*\*)

(0.7)

3 A: hi there (.) |it's ^Ross |from Scottish ^Ga- |((fast))er  
Scottish ^Gas |\_have you got a →moment to ^speak with  
u[s

4 C: [hello

(1.1)

5 A: hi there |it's ^Ross |from Scottish ^Gas (.) |have you  
got a ^minute |regarding your home^care agreement

(0.9)

6 C: who's that again

(0.6)



7 A: |it's ^Ross |from (.) S-Sco-ish ^Power (0.3)  
 |((fast))Sco-ish ^Gas

In the following call, the customer again has difficulty understanding Ross when he introduces himself, and he is forced to repeat himself:

Day 1 call 1806

(0.5)

3 C: yup (0.5) right

(0.3)

4 A: hi there |it's ^Ross |from (0.6) British ^Gas |

(0.3)

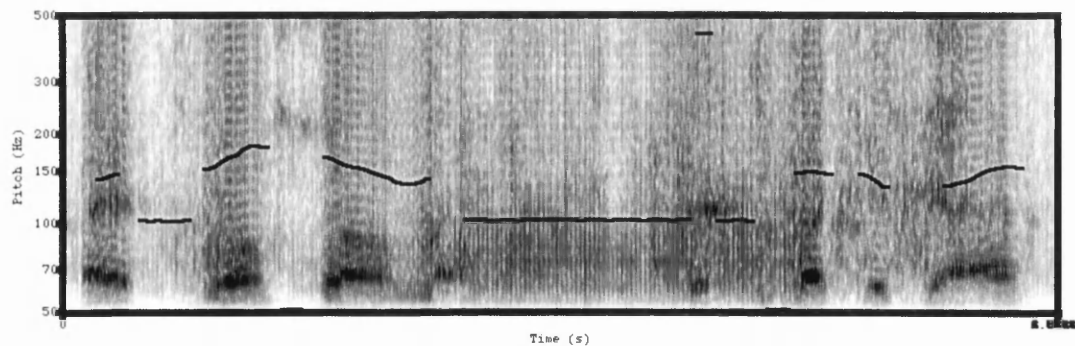
5 A: [(\*\*\*\*)]

6 C: [oh (\*) (.) sorry say that again

7 A: |it's ^Ross |from British ^Gas |

In the next few calls he continues to hesitate over this section, with a pause or final lengthening of the vowel, or both, and often an increase in tempo over the company name. However, this begins to reduce towards the end of the evening. Spectrograms taken of this section from different intervals on day one illustrate this more clearly:

Day 1 call 1806

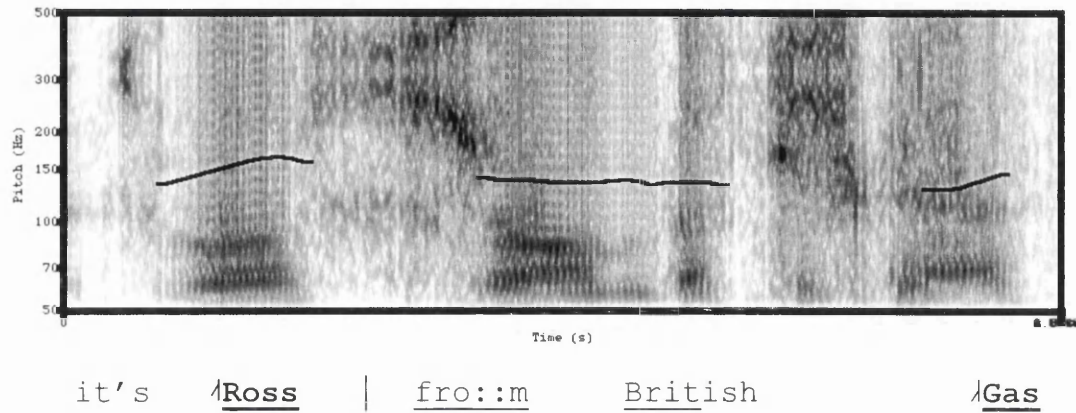


it's ^Ross |from (0.6) British ^Gas  
 it's ^Ross |from | British ^Gas

The pitch contour here has picked up some background interference which is why there appears to be a low band of noise on this call. The rising nucleus on *Ross* is

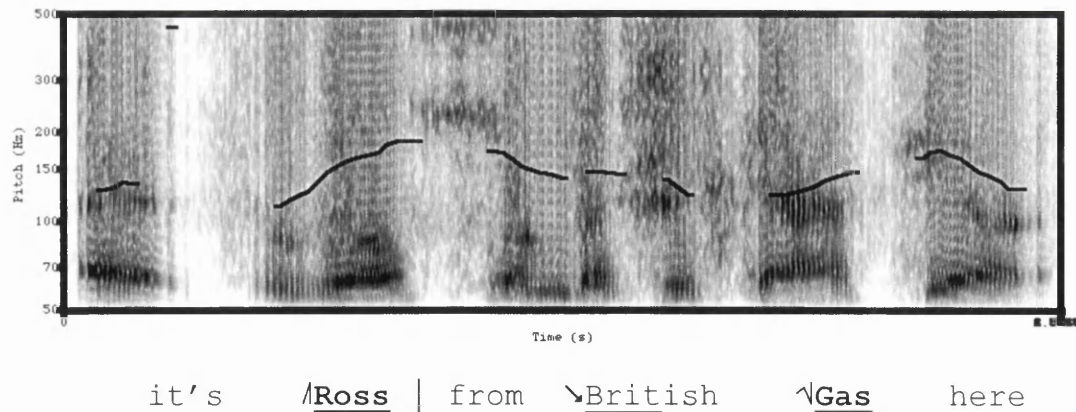
followed immediately by what appears to be a falling onset (which is also lengthened due to hesitation) in the next tone unit which makes this appear as a rise fall on the pitch contour, hence the alternative set of annotations.

Day 1 call 1811



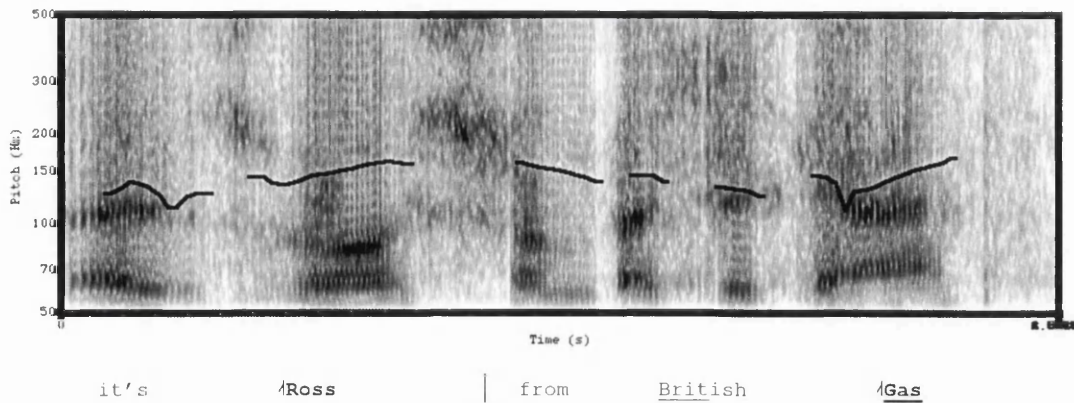
In this later call at 1811, we can see Ross is no longer pausing in the middle of the second tone unit, but he continues to lengthen the vowel and following nasal in *from*.

Day 1 call 1821



In this call at 1821 he adopts a slightly different pattern, with a full nuclear rise on *Ross* and then a rise-fall on *Gas*. He has a similar pattern in the call at 1826 but not in any other calls.

Day 1 call 1834

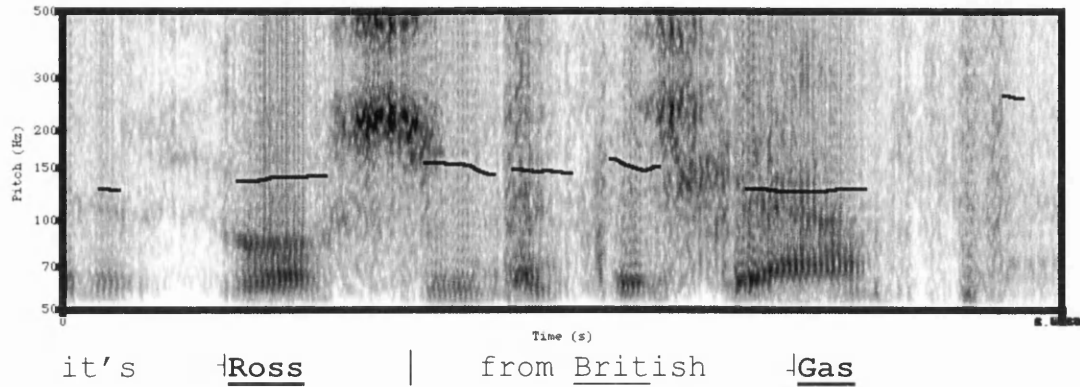


By this call made at 1834, we can see he is no longer hesitating over this section and the tempo has become much more even across the utterance. The last four calls he makes on this first day all have this same pattern, and as he is no longer hesitating, we can assume that he has become more familiar with the script and his role.

Ross's call openings on this day are at a consistently fast tempo. Even on calls in which he hesitates, the talk surrounding the hesitation is fast. As a result, he is asked to repeat himself on nine out of the thirteen calls analysed on this day. This may be the pace at which he talks naturally, or it may be in part due to nervousness. Despite the repeated requests for him to repeat himself, there is no noticeable reduction in pace towards the end of the evening,

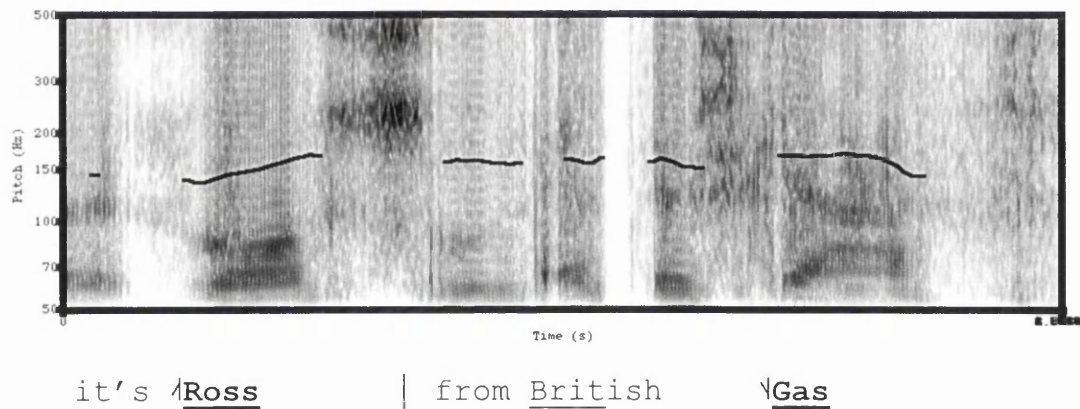
By the end of nesting, he has a very different intonational pattern over the identification section. It is still split into two tone units, but where he formerly had a rise on the tonic syllable of the first tone unit, he now has a perceptibly more level tone. The second tone unit has a level head, the onset of which is quite closely aligned with the previous nuclear tone, followed by a step down to a mid-low pitch and a near level tone on the second nucleus. This drop down from one level tone to another gives the utterance a slightly stylised quality. We can see this in the pitch contour below:

End of nesting call 1931



The only call on this day where he does not have this partially stylised pattern is at 1932:

End of nesting call 1932



With this one exception, the data show that Ross's intonational patterns on this utterance are now used routinely on all calls at this point in his employment and are different (almost stylised) melodies from the melody he was using on his first day. The tempo of this section is now slower than it was on day one.

**Ross: scripted parts C & D: *It's just a quick call about your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

Ross' first calls on day one reveal that he does not structure the conversation according to the script. After he has identified himself and the company, he goes straight into the hook (*have you got a moment*) rather than introducing the product.

Day 1 call 1821

(1.1)

6 C2: hallo

7 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM

8 C2 .hhhhhhh speaking

(0.4)

9 A: hi it's Ross from British Gas here (.) e::r have you got  
a minute t'speak about your homecare agreement

His first nine calls all have this structure, but on his tenth call he alters the order slightly so it is closer to the scripted opening:

Day 1 call 1830

(6.8)

10 C2: hello

(0.3)

11 A: hi there it's (.)Ross from British Gas (0.3) and we're  
just phoning about your ((fast)) homecare agreement  
((fast))have you got a minute to speak to us

This call also shows him now referring to himself in the first person plural, which is possibly a strategy to shift the focus away from him as an individual and on to the company.

The intonational pattern over scripted parts C and D is very similar across most of his calls on day one, which can be seen in the following extracts:

Day 1 call 1812

3 C: yeah



(0.5)

4 A: hi there (.)|it's ↑Ross |fro::m ((fast)) British ↑Gas  
|\_have you got a ↑minute |to speak about your ↑homecare  
agreement

Day 1 call 1823

(8.9)

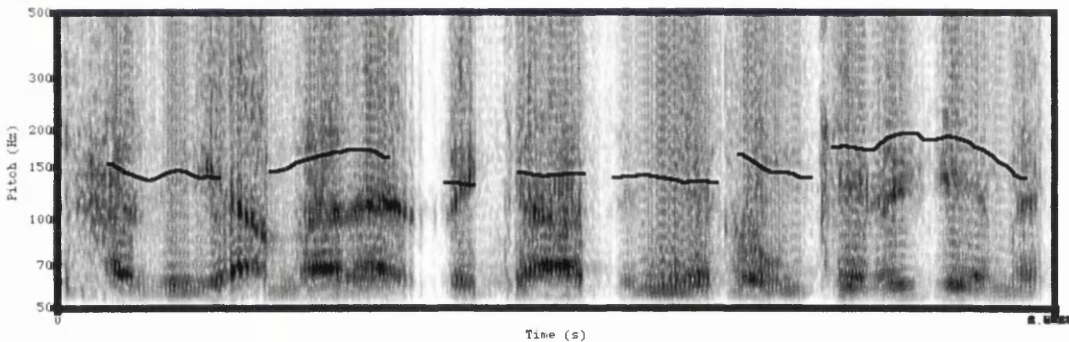
4 C2: hello

(0.5)

5 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Ross | from ((fast)) ↘British  
↑Gas |have you got a ↑minute |to speak about your  
↑homecare agreement

On his early calls the tempo of this utterance is rapid and quite uneven. The pitch contour he uses has quite an ‘up-and-down’<sup>77</sup> melody:

Day 1 call 1805

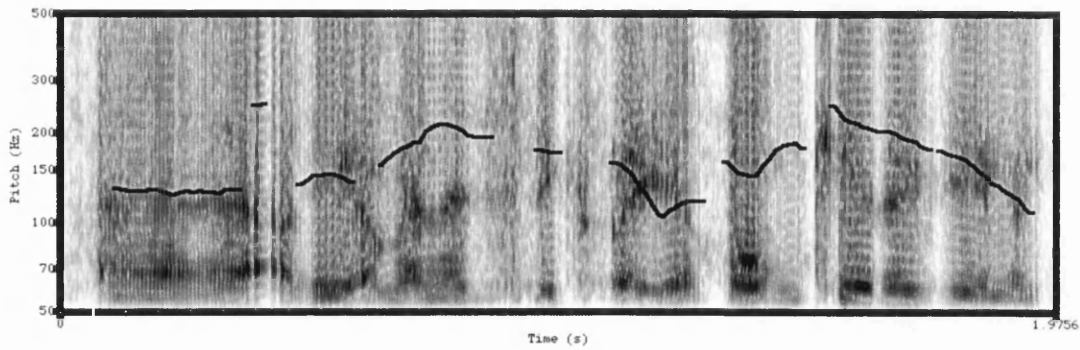


have you got a ↑minute |regarding your home ↑care agreement

This ‘up-and-down’ pattern becomes more pronounced in later calls on this day. His tempo remains fast, and the location of the nucleus shifts on to *home*.

Day 1 call 1821

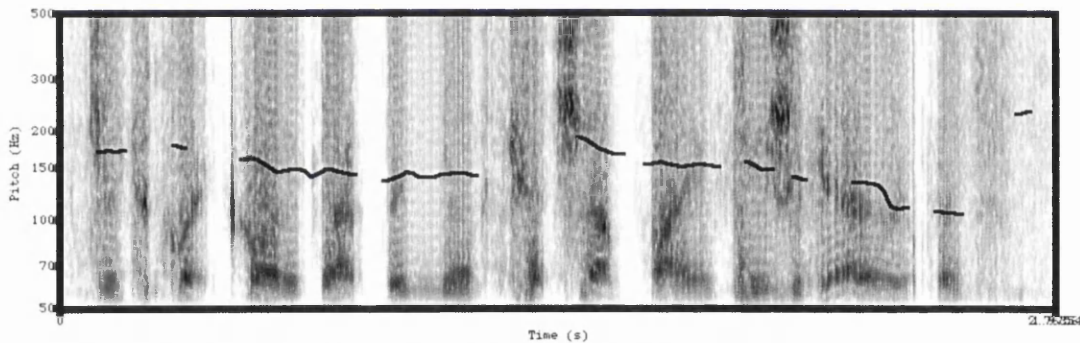
<sup>77</sup> Perhaps further clarification of what I mean by ‘up-and-down’ is required here, as this may be construed to be quite a vague label. Essentially, by ‘up-and-down’ I mean ‘not monotone’ or ‘not flat’ by having pronounced pitch movement/s.



have you got a minute | to speak about your home care agreement

By the end of nesting, this intonational pattern has changed to one which has a more distinctive falling melody. This is also different lexically, as he has now moved the hook to its scripted position at the end of the opening sequence and replaced it with the scripted line *it's just a quick call*:

End of nesting call 1945



just a quick call | re-garding your kitchen appliances you got out with us

As this agent resigned before the next time interval, there are no further data.

### Ross: summary

The calls analysed for this speaker indicate that during the nesting process, he has developed an intonation pattern on the call openings which was not present on his early calls. His first few calls show hesitation and indicate a general unfamiliarity

with the activity, which are greatly reduced as he gets into the routine of making calls. Where his speech is very fast and often incomprehensible to his interlocutors at the beginning of nesting, the calls after a month of work in the call centre show a similar rapid tempo, but a slowing down over the nuclear and post-nuclear syllables which was not present before. By the end of nesting he uses a falling pitch pattern which replaces the 'up-and-down' melody that characterised his intonation in the calls from day 1.



## 6.7.6 RYAN

|      | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
| RYAN | 9     | 6              | 5             | 9              | 29    |

### Ryan: scripted part B: *it's ..... calling from British Gas*

On most of his calls on the first day of nesting, Ryan uses *it's Ryan from British Gas* and in later calls, *it's Ryan from British Gas here* to identify himself to the customer.

There is one call where he omits his own name:

Day 1 call 1901

1 A:           hello Mr (0.9) hello (0.3) Mr HUM

(1.4)

2 C:           yeah what d'you want

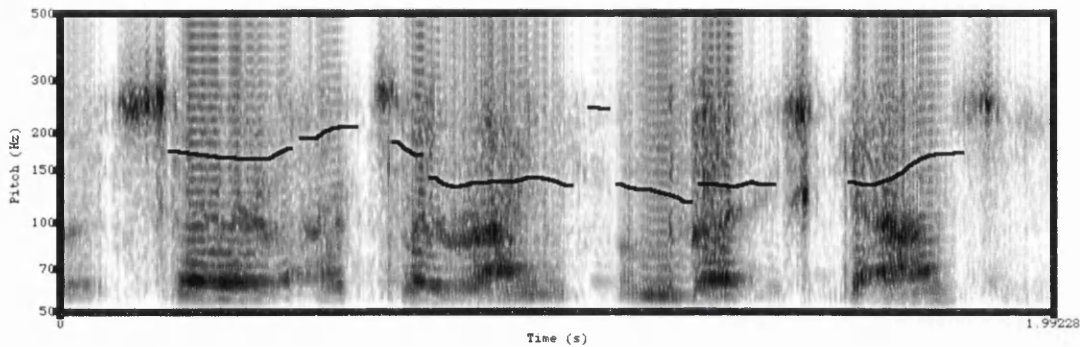
(0.5)

3 A:           it's Bri-ish Gas here it's actually just a quick call  
                  regarding your agreement with us is it a suitable time  
                  for yourself

This may be explained by the customer's face threatening act in the previous turn, prompting Ryan to distance himself slightly from the interaction.

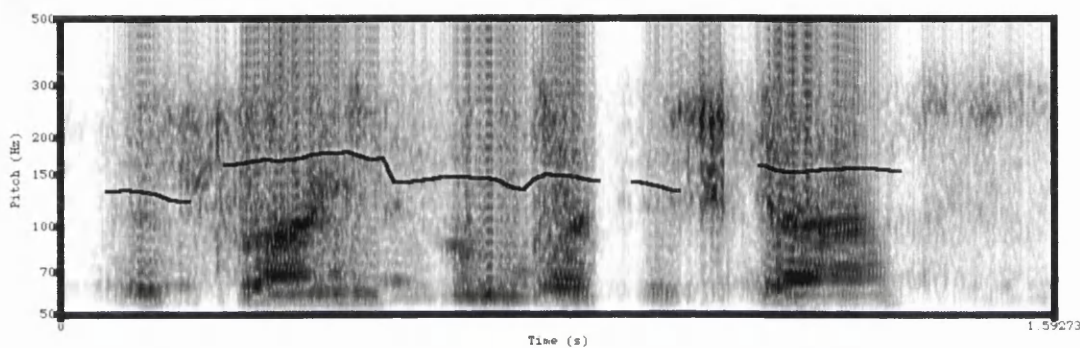
This section of the opening is therefore lexically and syntactically quite uniform from the beginning of day one. In terms of the intonational pattern which accompanies this section of the calls at this stage in his employment, there are minor changes in the first few calls, and then a more noticeable change in the call at 1858 where he starts to use the adverb *here* at the end of the utterance. The following pitch contours show the slight variation in his intonational patterns over this utterance on the first few calls:

Day 1 call 1849



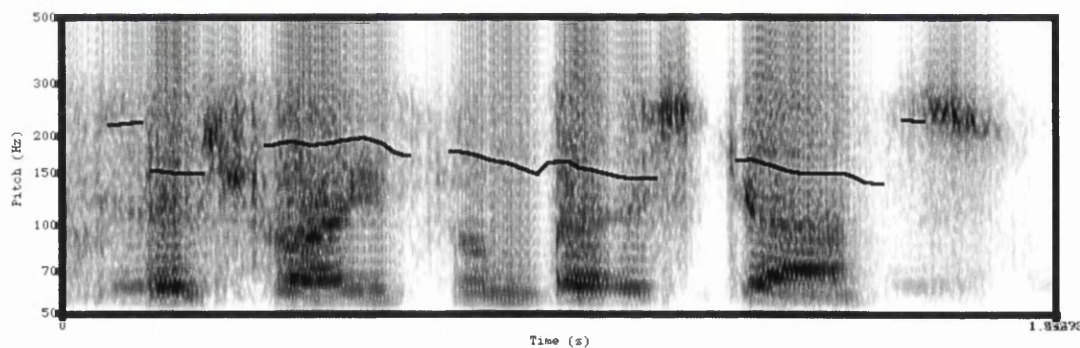
it's er actually | Ryan | from British Gas

Day 1 call 1857



it's Ryan | from British Gas

Day 1 call 1859<sup>78</sup>



it's Ryan | from British Gas here

This final extract exemplifies the pattern he goes on to use in the remaining calls on this day.

<sup>78</sup> This pitch track is misleading. The auditory data identified a fall rise tone over *Gas*

A month later, at the end of nesting, this utterance has a slightly different syntactic structure and intonational pattern. He is now using *it's Ryan here from British Gas*, as can be seen in the following examples:

End of nesting call 1739

1 A:           hello can I speak to Mrs HUM

2 C:           speaking please

3 A:           hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↑Gas

End of nesting call 1746

1 A:           hello can I speak to a Mrs HUM

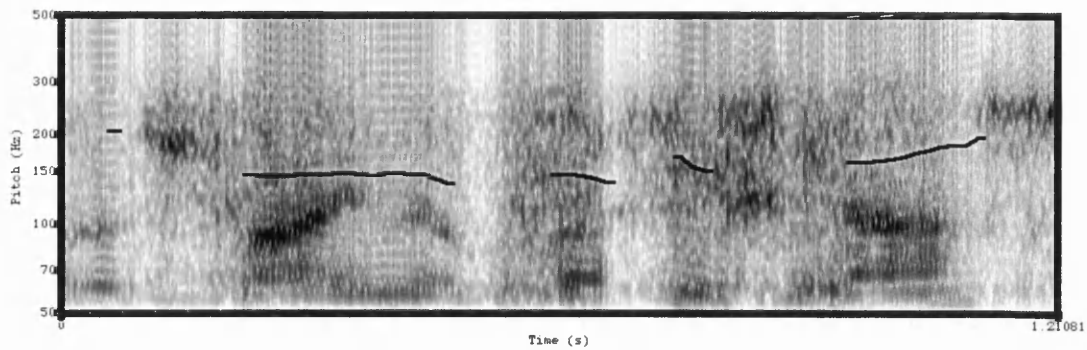
2 C:           speaking

3 A:           hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas

In five out of the six calls analysed for this day he used the intonational pattern shown in example 1739 above, with a rise-plateau tone on the nucleus of the first tone unit and a mid rise on the nucleus of the second. However, in contrast to this, there is one instance where he has a final nuclear fall (1746).

By the end of the month after nesting, his realisation of this section of the script has changed slightly once again. He is now saying *it's Ryan with British Gas* or *it's Ryan at British Gas* and his pitch over this utterance is now perceptually higher. *Ryan* now has a mid-level tone, and the nuclear syllable of the second tone unit, *Gas* has a high rise:

1 month later call 1900



's     ↓Ryan     at     British     ↑Gas ?  
 's     →Ryan     at     British     ↑Gas ?

The data from the following month shows that this pattern is generally retained, although there are a couple of calls where he substitutes a high fall for the high rising pattern on the second nucleus.

**Ryan: scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call about your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

The way in which Ryan realises this section of the script on the first day is subject to some variation in terms of both what he says, and how he says it. However, this really only applies to the first three calls, as after this the scripted parts C and D are realised in the same way on each call. If we compare the transcripts of the first three calls we can see the lexical and intonational differences between them:

Day 1 nesting call 1849

2 C: er HUM HUM speaking

3 A: hello sir |it's er \\\uactually Ryan from Bri-ish Gas  
|\just a quick call |regarding your agreement with us  
(.)|is it a suitable time for yourself

Day 1 nesting call 1856

5 C: who is it

(5.0)

6 A: |it's er \\\uRyan from Bri-ish Gas |it's regarding the  
current agreement you have with us

Day 1 nesting call 1857

7 C: oh speaking I'm just on my way out though

(0.4)

8 A: it- what it is is was actually |it was just a quick call  
|regarding your current agreement with us er |is it a  
→suitable time for yourself

These early calls show several lexical differences and omissions of scripted stretches of speech in the calls, as well as some differences in the accompanying pitch patterns. At this stage it is clear that there is no particular uniformity to these calls, beyond the fact that they all rely to some extent on the script. However, as he makes more calls, the opening sections become more similar to one another, lexically and prosodically:

Day 1 call 1901

7 C: .hhhhhhhhhh how can I help

(0.6)

8 A: erm |it's \s\actually just a quick ↓call |regarding your  
a↑greement with us::: |is it a suitable ↑time for  
yourself

Day 1 call 1908

3 C: speaking

4 A: (\*) er |it's ↑Ryan |from Bri-ish ↑Gas (.) |s'\just a  
quick ↓call |regarding your a↑greement with us::: |a  
suitable ↑time for yourself

Day 1 call 1929

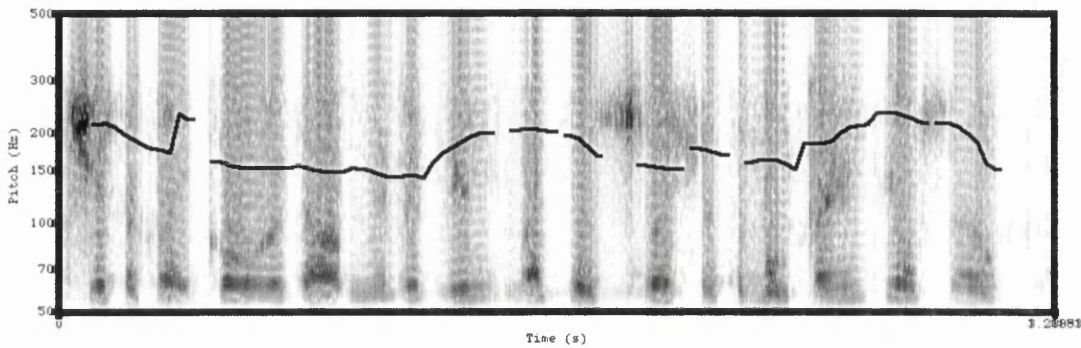
2 C: hhh speaking

(0.3)

3 A: er Mr HUM (\*\*)|it's ↑Ryan |from Bri-ish ↑Gas here 3|it  
was \just a quick ↓call |regarding::: your a↑greement  
with us::: |it is a suitable ↑time for yourself

The pitch contour below illustrates the ‘up and down’ melody that this pattern gives to the overall utterance:

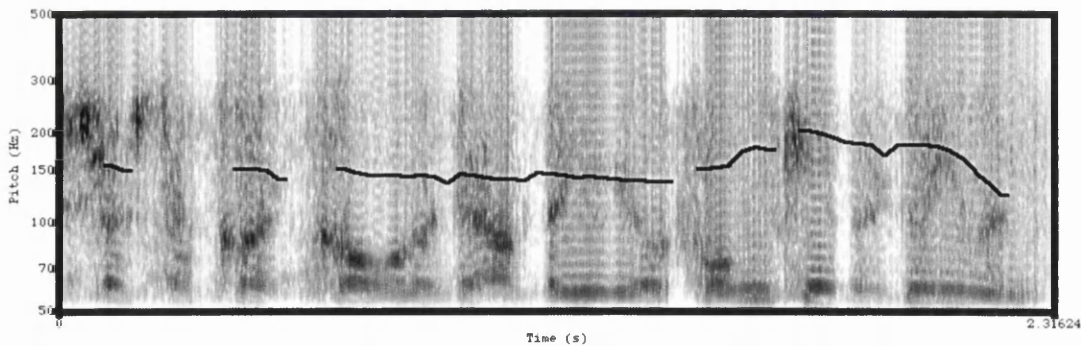
Day 1 call 1908



↘just a quick call | regarding your agreement with us:: | a suitable uptime for yourself

By the end of nesting, this pattern has changed, and so too has the lexical content of this section. He no longer refers to the product as *your agreement*, but as *your homecare agreement*, and he completely omits the hook section from all the calls analysed. Like the agents discussed above, his intonational pattern has become much more level across most of the utterance, only becoming dynamic over *homecare agreement* where there is a rise-fall tone. This is illustrated in the following example:

End of nesting call 1725

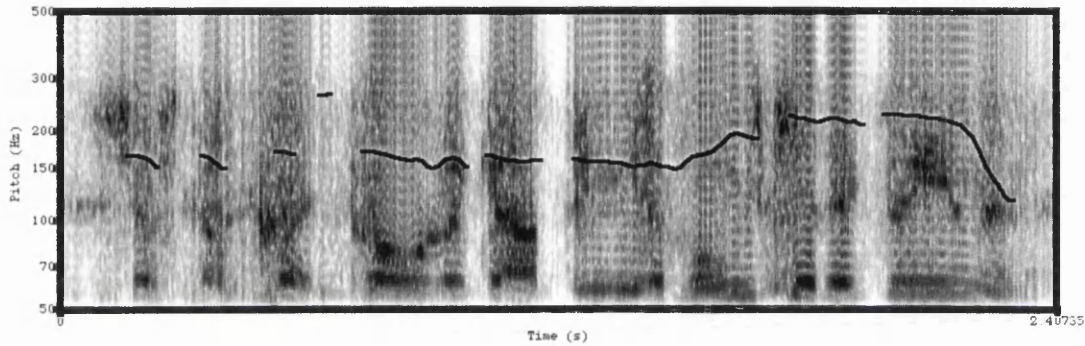


's →just a quick call | regarding your home care agreement

In the two months after nesting has ended, his pitch pattern on this utterance has changed only slightly, with a shallow falling pattern over most of the utterance and

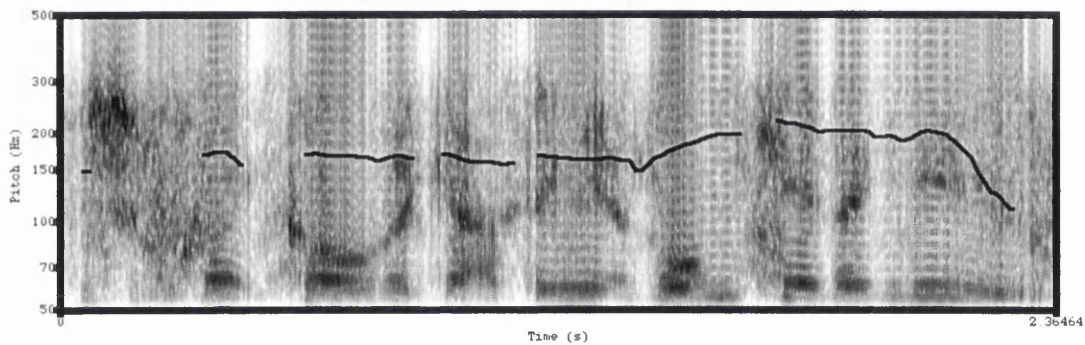
then a rise fall on *homecare agreement*. A comparison of the pitch tracks for calls at the end of nesting and 2 months later do not appear to show a great deal of difference, but a falling pattern is more clearly audible in the later extract:

End of nesting call 1738



's →just a quick call | re→garding your home care agreement

2 months later call 1856



it was a quick call re\garding your homecare agreement

Ryan only uses the hook on day 1, where it has a final high rise or rise-slump:

Day 1 call 1857



8 A: it- what it is is was actually |it was just a quick ↓call  
 |re→garding your current a↑greement with us er |is it a  
 →suitable time for your↑self

Day 1 call 1901

8 A: erm |it's ↘↘actually just a quick ↓call |regarding your  
 a↑greement with us:::|is it a suitable ↑time for  
 yourself

In the following month, and beyond that, it is completely absent from his calls.

**Ryan: summary**

This speaker adopts a uniform intonational pattern over the openings towards the end of his first day, which has a distinctly ‘up and down’ melody. However, a month after this the pattern consists of a long level stretch across most of the utterance with a final rise-fall. This then changes back again to an ‘up-and-down’ tune in the following month, and from this point his calls remain quite uniform.

**6.7.7 DANIEL**

|  |       |                |               |                |       |
|--|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
|  | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|--|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|

|        |   |   |   |   |    |
|--------|---|---|---|---|----|
| DANIEL | 7 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 27 |
|--------|---|---|---|---|----|

**Daniel: scripted part B: *it's.....calling from British Gas***

Of the eight informants for this study, Daniel is the agent whose identification section shows the most lexical and intonational variation on the first day. We can see this by comparing this section on each of the calls he makes on this day:

Day 1 call 1828

|it's ↑Daniel here | ↘calling from British ↑Gas this evening

Day 1 call 1841

|it's er ↑Daniel | from Bri-ish ↑Gas

Day 1 call 1845

|it's ↑Daniel here | ↗calling from Bri-ish ↑Gas this evening

Day 1 call 1846

|it's ↑Daniel | from Bri-ish ↑Gas calling you this evening

Day 1 call 1848

|it's ↑Daniel | from Bri-ish ↓Gas

Day 1 call 1854

|it's ↑Daniel here | from Bri-ish ↑Gas calling you this evening

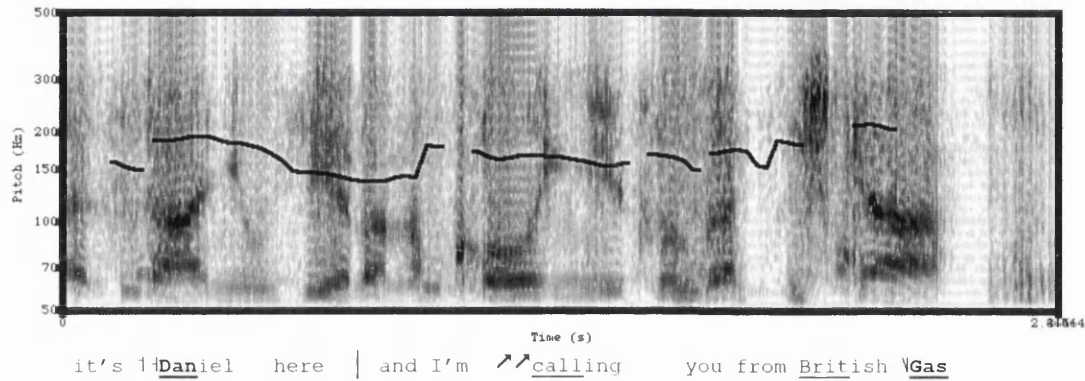
Day 1 call 1856

|it's ↑Daniel here | from Bri-ish ↑Gas calling you this evening

By the end of nesting, this variation has reduced almost completely, and the intonational pattern is now characterised by falling tones instead of the rising tones that were prevalent on day one. In addition to this, in some of the calls he uses what appears to be a stylised tone over *it's Daniel here*. This is transcribed with the

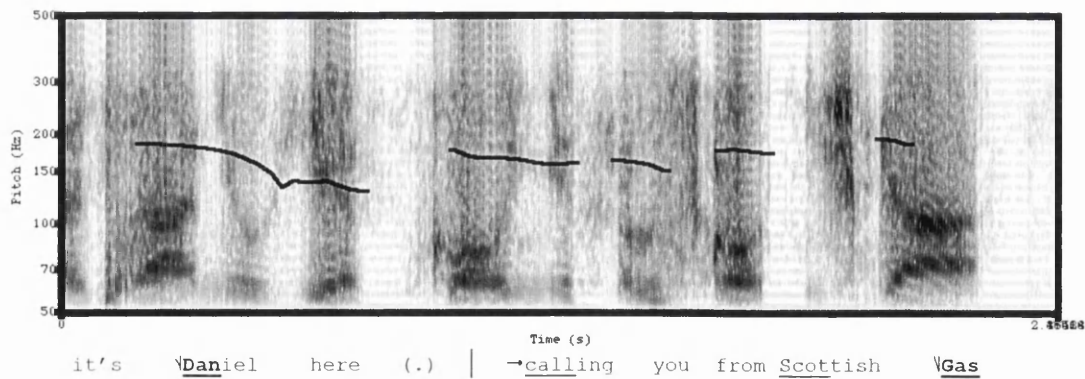
diacritic 1 1, which indicates a ‘chanting’ quality to the utterance<sup>79</sup>. It could be argued that a high falling tone is more appropriate, but this implies a steady fall rather than a jump down from high to mid pitch, which is what can be perceived in some of these calls.

End of nesting call 1726



The example 1726 above is one of the calls where this partially stylised tone is apparent. We can see a slight difference with another call where the tone is closer to a simple fall as there is a clear falling section and a :

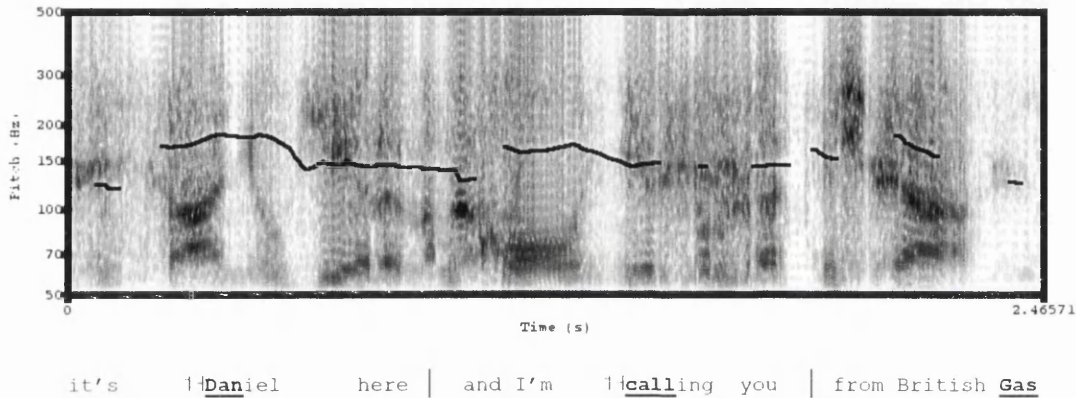
End of nesting call 1728



<sup>79</sup> This is perhaps more accurately labelled as ‘partially stylised’, as the step down is not abrupt, but rather there is a slight slump at the end of the first level syllable.

There is one example on this day where he uses the partially stylised tone in two adjacent tone units, with the first being a jump down from high to mid, and the second a further jump down from mid-high to mid-low:

End of nesting call 1808



In general, the contours on this utterance by the end of nesting are very similar to one another, although there are qualitative differences between individual tones as described above. The data also show that Daniel does not have level pre-tonic patterns that characterise the calls of the other agents at this stage in their employment.

Daniel varies the lexical content of this utterance very slightly between calls but in most of them he says *it's Daniel here calling you from British Gas*. The accompanying pitch pattern is spread over two tone units with the partially stylised tone (or in some a high fall) over the tonic syllable of the first and either a very slightly rising or a level head over the second, with a full fall on the tonic syllable, as follows:

End of nesting call 1809

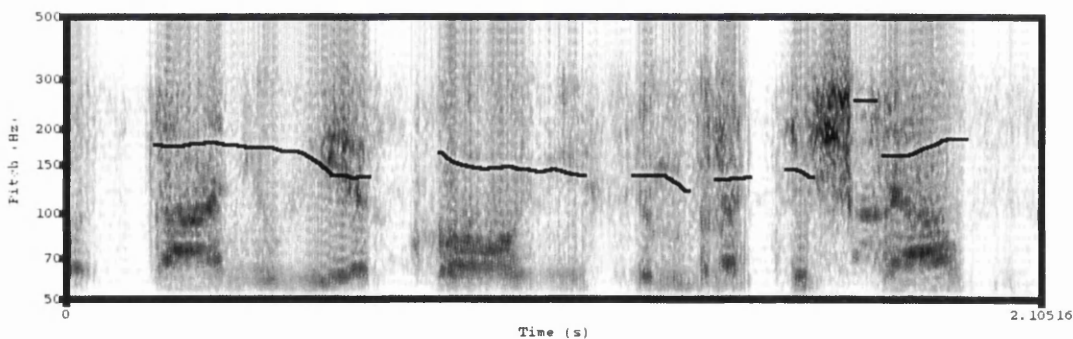
1 A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi Miss HUM |it's 1<sup>h</sup>Daniel here |↗calling you from  
British ↘Gas

End of nesting call 1844

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
3 C: yes speaking  
4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's 1<sup>h</sup>Daniel here |.calling you from British  
Gas

In the months following nesting, further developments occur to this pattern. In some calls, Daniel continues to use *it's Daniel here calling you from British Gas* and in those calls the only change to the pattern described above is the replacement of the full fall on *Gas*, to a rise (usually a high rise):

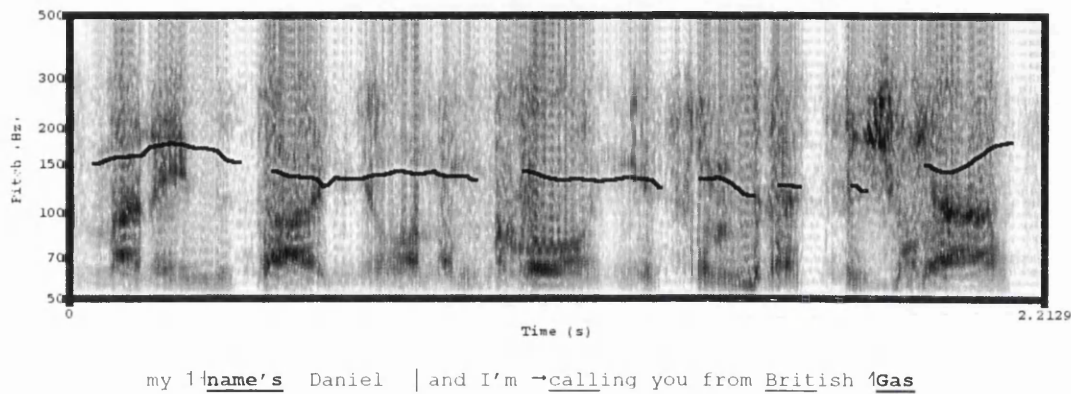
1 month later call 1928



it's 1<sup>h</sup>Daniel here |↗calling you from British ↗Gas

Daniel is now also using a slightly different pattern which accompanies a slight alteration in the lexical content of the utterance to *my name's Daniel and I'm calling you from British Gas*. Again, there are sections of this that have a stylised quality:

1 month later call 1932



Again, there is a distinct step down from a mid-high level pitch to a mid-low level pitch which gives the tone a stylised quality, although this is not as pronounced due to the slump on *Daniel*. These two examples typify the two patterns which Daniel goes on to use in the following month.

Although a segmental analysis was not carried out, it became clear upon listening to Daniel's calls that whereas he used a glottal stop in all tokens of *British* on his first day of nesting, he had no glottals in tokens of *British* a month later, nor in any of the calls subsequent to this.

**Daniel: scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call about your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

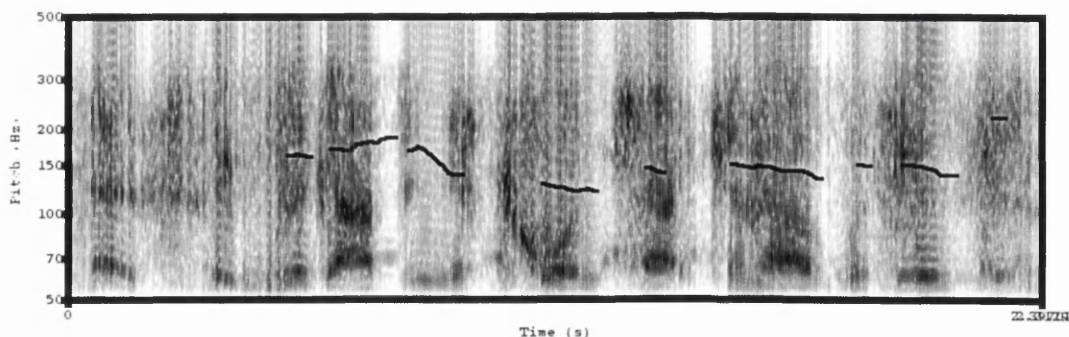
In the same way as for scripted part B, there is a great deal of variation across Daniel's first calls in terms of the lexical content of his turns and the intonational patterns he uses. He deviates from the script on several calls, and although it tends to guide the general structure of his openings, he completely changes certain elements, for example:

Day 1 call 1856

- 1 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi Mr HUM it's Daniel here from Bri-ish Gas calling you  
this evening (.) could I grab a few minutes to go over  
some offers

In many of the calls he completely leaves out scripted part C (the business-at-hand), but where he does include it he tends to refer to the product as *your contract*, although in one call (1848) he refers to it as *our kitchen appliance care package*. Again, there is no uniform pitch pattern associated with this utterance at this point, although the majority of nuclear tones are rises and rise-plateaux:

Day 1 call 1828



.hh it's re\garding your ↑contract you have with us

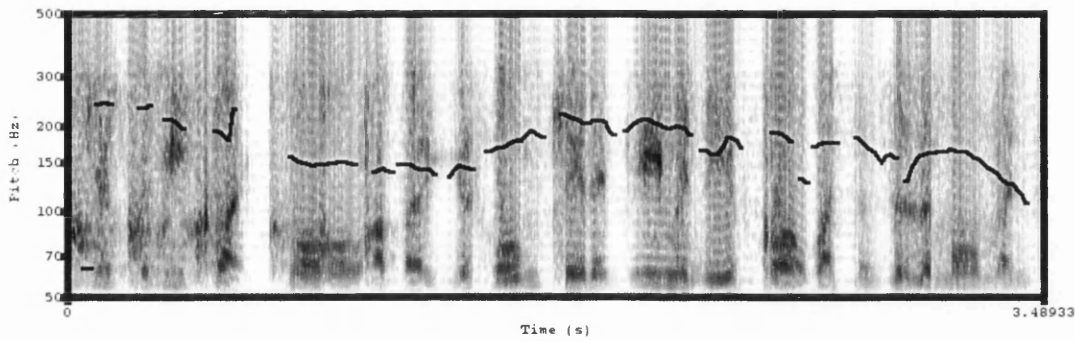
In this utterance shown above, Daniel uses a noticeably 'sing-song' melody. The rise







End of nesting call 1728

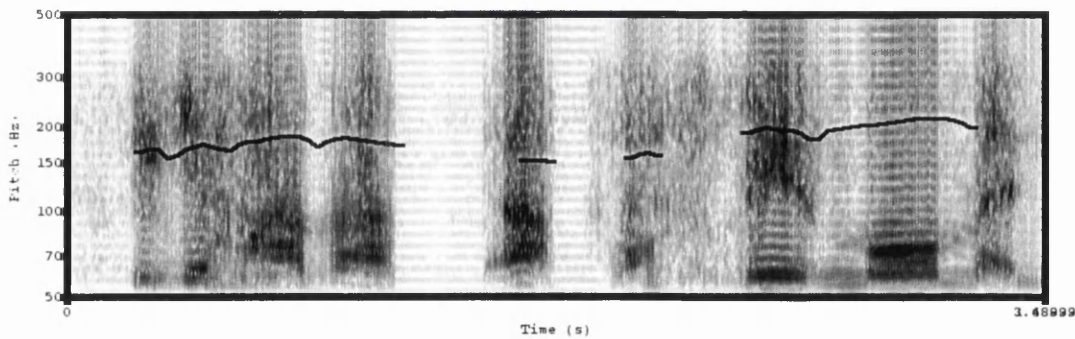


↘↘just a wee quick call|in regards to your homecare agreement|you've got with us at the mo...

Where Daniel used mostly high rises, he now has a distinctive falling pattern which stretches across the entire turn. Because there is no pause in between tone units, and the onset of the second of the final two tone units is level with the tail of the preceding nucleus, they almost sound like a single wide rise-fall tone. There is also more evidence of partial stylisation on the very first tone unit.

In the hook, calls from this point in his employment show further stylisation patterns, or at least patterns which are more 'sing-song' than everyday speech, possibly as a result of the rises and falls consisting of steps up and down rather than smooth transitions from low to high / high to low.

End of nesting call 1900

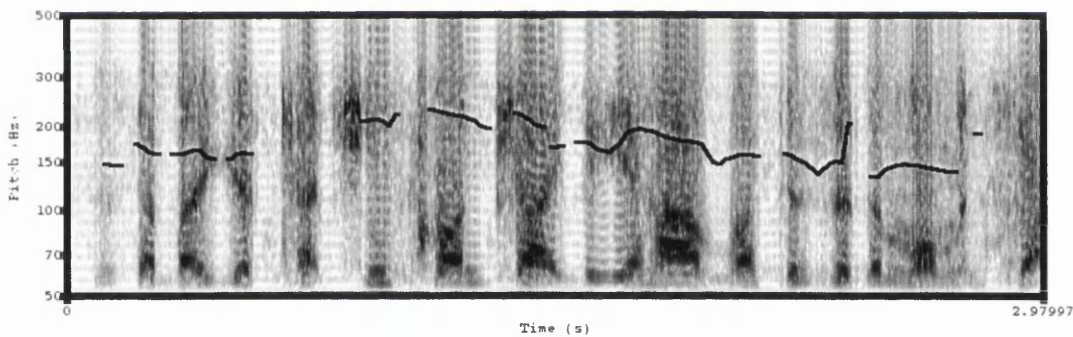


do you have a- a spare moment

We can see also that he is now longer saying *can I grab a wee minute off you* but instead sticks more closely to the script. In addition to this, on two calls (1728 & 1857) he adds an extra unscripted *I promise I won't keep you long*, which appears to be a strategy for extending the call, as was also found in Gail's later calls.

In the month after nesting, this pattern continues, although in later calls his openings have slight lexical differences between them. It seems that regardless of the lexical content, there is still a routinely-used pitch pattern (a rise (or rise-slump) and then a fall (or a rise-fall)) associated with this section of the script for Daniel. In many of the calls the combination of neighbouring tones gives an overall wide rise-fall pattern:

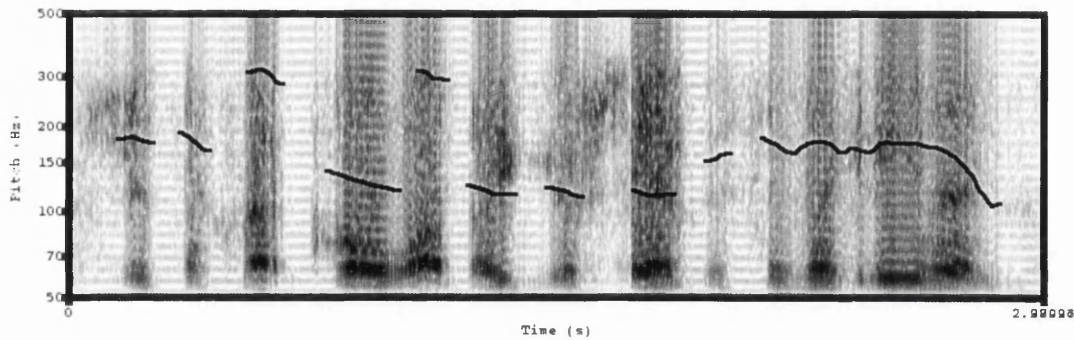
1 month later call 1925



|it's about your ↑kitchen contract | that you ↓have with us at the moment sir

Two months after the end of nesting, this section has become much more concise, and with the same 'up-and-down' pattern on each call (although only 3 calls were available):

2 months later call 1906



s' \u026a just a quick call | about your services agreement

Aside from these prosodic changes, there is also an interesting segmental development in Daniel's speech. He uses a glottal in *British* on every call on day one, but by the end of nesting he is using an alveolar plosive. He continues to do so, until the calls 2 months after the end of nesting, where he once again uses it on all three of the calls analysed for that day.

### Daniel: summary

The call openings on Daniel's first day are very different, both in terms of their structure, their lexical content and their intonation, from the calls analysed on the final day of nesting. The script has more influence in these later calls, and he also has begun to adopt a more uniform intonational pattern which accompanies each line of the script. Where he was using lots of high rises and rise-plateaux on his first day, by the end of nesting his intonation is characterised by falling patterns. Later on, the same pattern is in use, although his calls are not lexically uniform.

### 6.7.8 DAVID

|  | Day 1 | End of nesting | 1 month later | 2 months later | Total |
|--|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------|
|  |       |                |               |                |       |

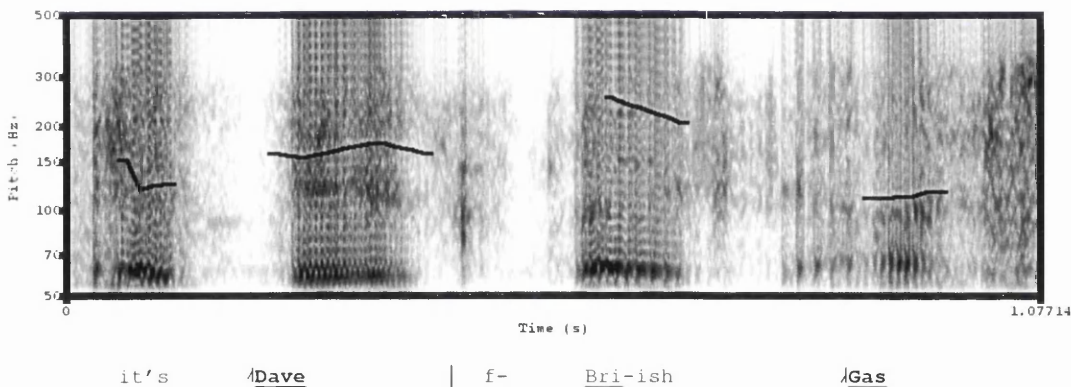
|       |    |   |   |   |    |
|-------|----|---|---|---|----|
| DAVID | 17 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 37 |
|-------|----|---|---|---|----|

**David: scripted part B: *it's ..... calling from British Gas***

For the majority of calls on day one, David adheres closely to the script for this section of the opening, using *it's David calling from British Gas*. However, on his first call we can see a slight difference in his realisation of this section of the script, where he says *it's Dave f- Bri-ish Gas*, which he does not do again in later calls.

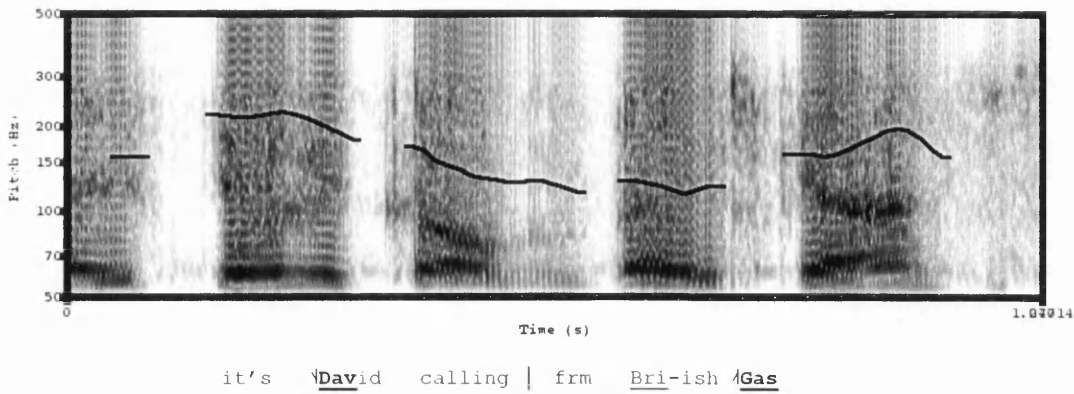
Although this study does not focus on the segmental changes which may or may not occur over time in the agents' speech, this particular instance is worth mentioning here, as it shows a clear example of style shift over the space of one call:

Day 1 call 1810 (first call)

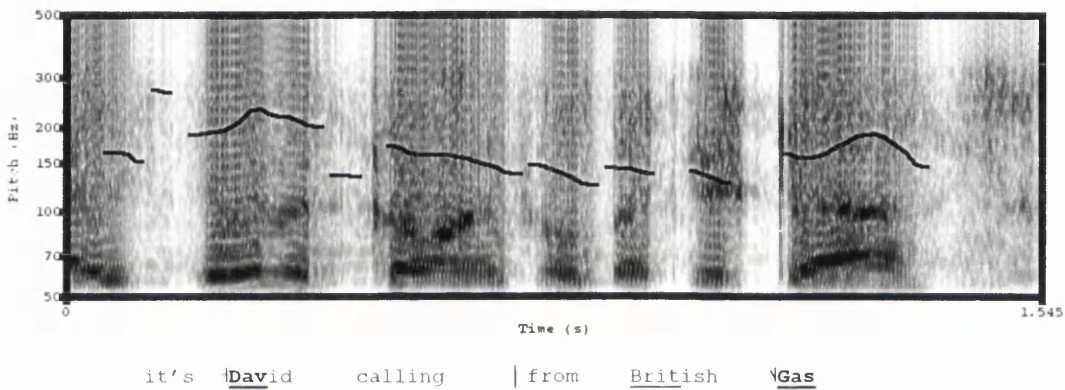


(There is a slight anomaly on the pitch contour over *Bri-ish* above which is actually low in the speaker's tessitura.)

Day 1 call 1812 (second call)



End of nesting call 1852

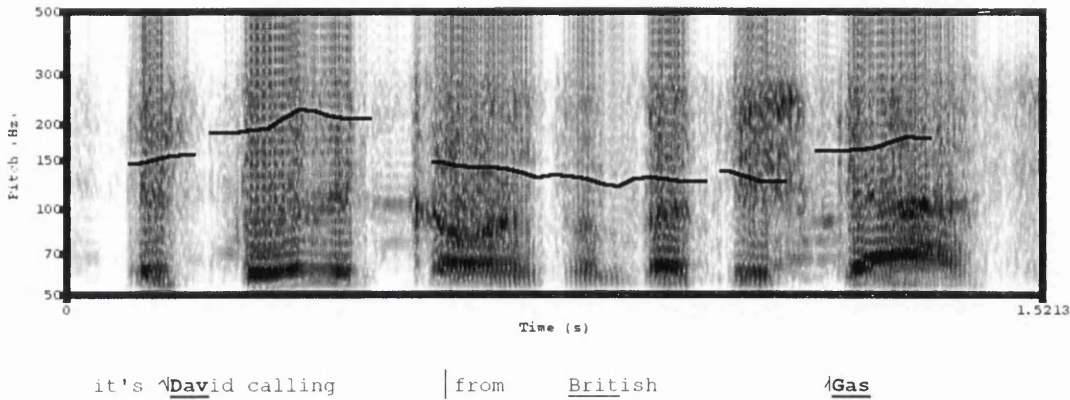


In this final example, taken from the end of nesting, we can see further segmental differences from his first calls, most notably in *British* the replacement of the post-alveolar approximant and glottal with an alveolar trill and an alveolar plosive respectively. In addition to this, the creaky voice which coloured his speech on his first call is not present from the second call onwards.

As far as his intonation is concerned, on his first day his pitch patterns are quite uniform across different calls later on his first day. He uses a pattern which has an overall 'fall then rise' melody, shown in the following call:

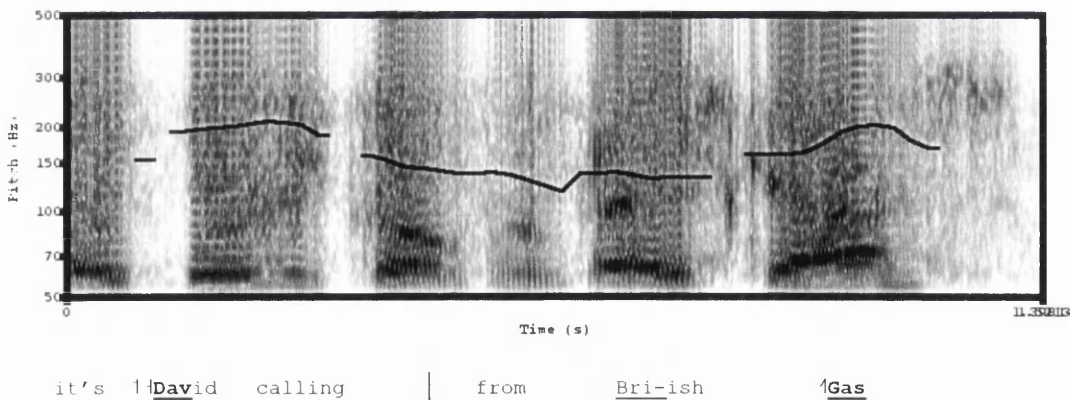
Day 1 call 1848





According to the shape of the pitch track, it looks like the nuclear tone of the first tone unit should be labelled as a rise-fall. However, this fall involves a large step down from a relatively high level pitch to a low level pitch on the second syllable of the tail rather than a more steady descent. In other calls on this day the pattern over this stretch of speech sounds like a partially stylised tone:

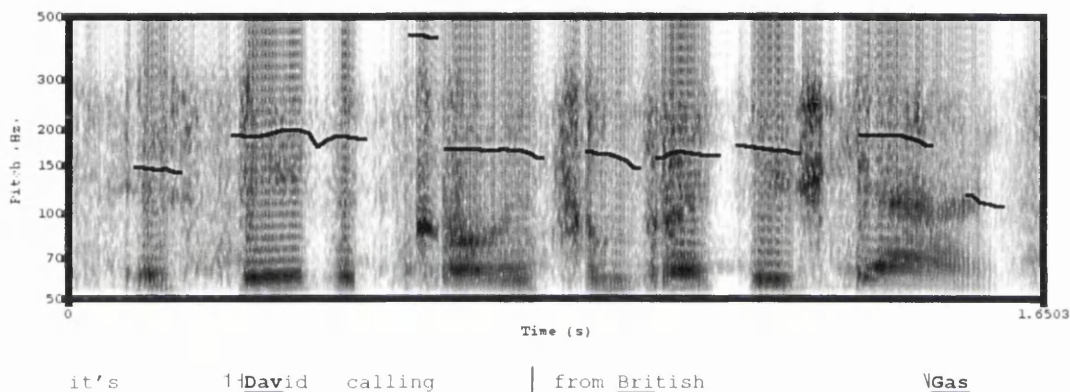
Day 1 call 1845



Unlike a 'pure' stylised tone, the tempo of this section of speech remains at the same fast tempo as the rest of the utterance, not standing out particularly from the surrounding, 'plain' contours (Ladd 1978). Despite this, however, the way in which adjacent tones relate to one another here gives the utterance a definite stylised 'flavour'.

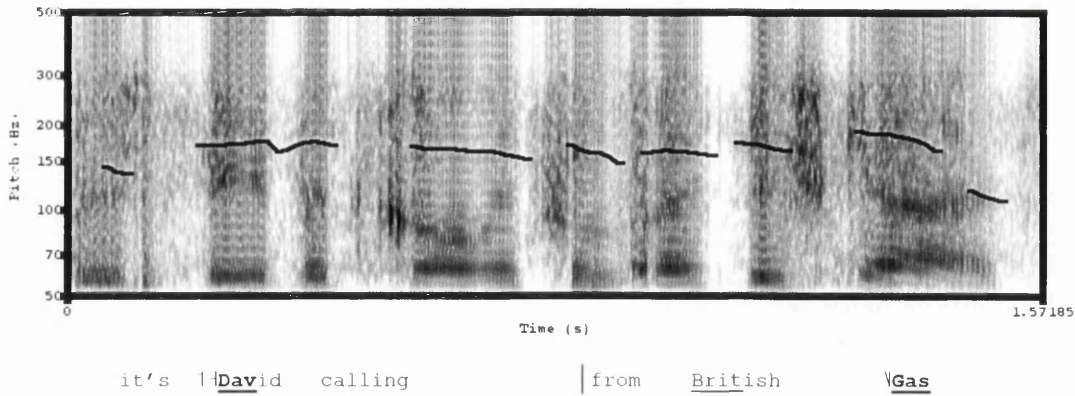
By the end of nesting, David has begun to adopt a different pitch pattern over this section of the call openings. In place of the rising-falling pattern with a stylised flavour which was identified over *it's David calling* in his early calls, there is now a pattern which consists of two much more level tones, with a step down between them which is much closer to a 'pure' stylised tone:

End of nesting call 1937



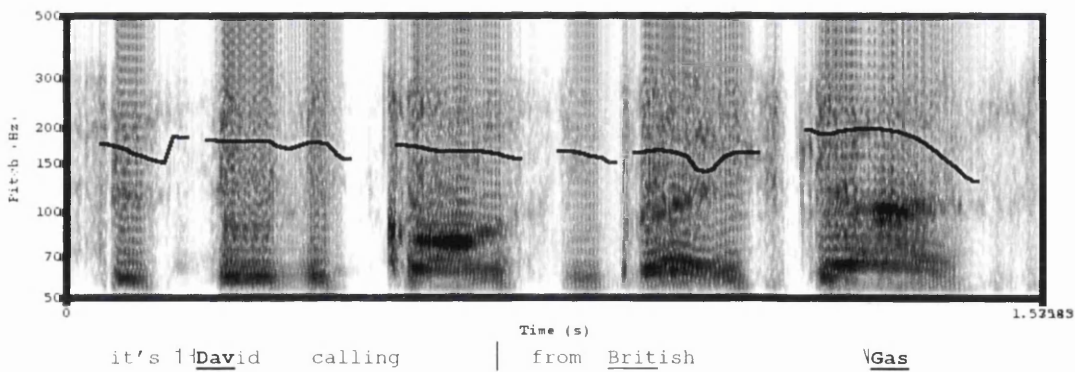
The data from this day indicate that there are qualitative differences between calls with regards to this tone. We can see an example from the end of nesting where there are two level tones but where the gap between them is much narrower, making them sound almost monotone, although there is still a perceptible step down between them:

End of nesting call 1852



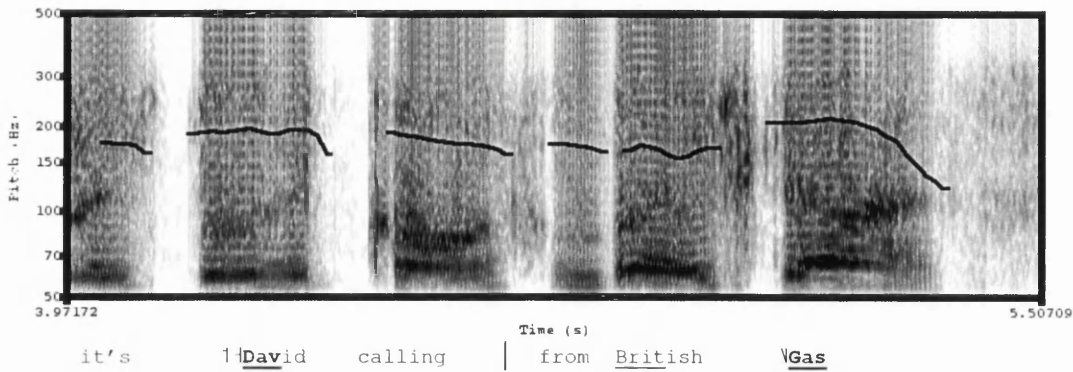
As well as this very level, shallow down-step nuclear tone of the first tone unit, the pitch contour also shows that where David previously had a mid or high rising tone on day one, he is now using a full fall over *Gas*. He continues to use the same pattern over this utterance in the months after nesting. Pitch tracks taken at two further points illustrate how uniform this section of his openings is:

1 month later call 1942





2 months later call 1952



**David: scripted parts C & D: *it's just a quick call about your three star agreement, do you have a moment?***

Analysis of this section of David's calls on his first day of nesting reveal that he tends to adhere quite closely to the script in terms of the lexical content and basic syntactic structure of the opening sections. On some calls he follows the script more closely than on others, however. He does not use the hook on every call, and on some he omits *it's just a quick call*. On one early call he misses out the business-at-hand section altogether, and goes straight into the hook. It's not until later in the call that he explains what the call is about, after being prompted by the customer:

Day 1 call 1814

- 1 C: hello
- 2 A: hi can I speak to a Mr HUM please
- 3 C: that's me
- 4 A: hi (.) it's David calling from Bri-ish Gas (.) can I spare a moment of your time
- (1.4)
- 5 C: no (.) wha y- y- what are you selling now
- (6.8)

6 A: sorry

7 C: w- I'm- (0.6) no I don't wanna (.) .hh what it is it you  
want

(0.5)

8 A: oh it's just regarding your three star agreement

In comparison to some of the other agents discussed here, he gets into a routine fairly early on during this first day as far as his pitch patterns are concerned

On his first call, his pitch patterns are as follows:

Day 1 call 1810

6 C: oh right er what's it regarding

7 A: er Mr HUM | \just a quick ↓call (.) | f- →Bri-ish ↓Gas  
| re→garding your three star a↑greement (.) | can you  
↓spare a moment of your ↑time

The pitch patterns which accompany each of these tone units stay the same for the first five calls, with the same contour described in the first call above. In his fifth call, however, David changes the structure of his turn slightly, as well as the corresponding pitch pattern:

Day 1 call 1829

8 C2: hello

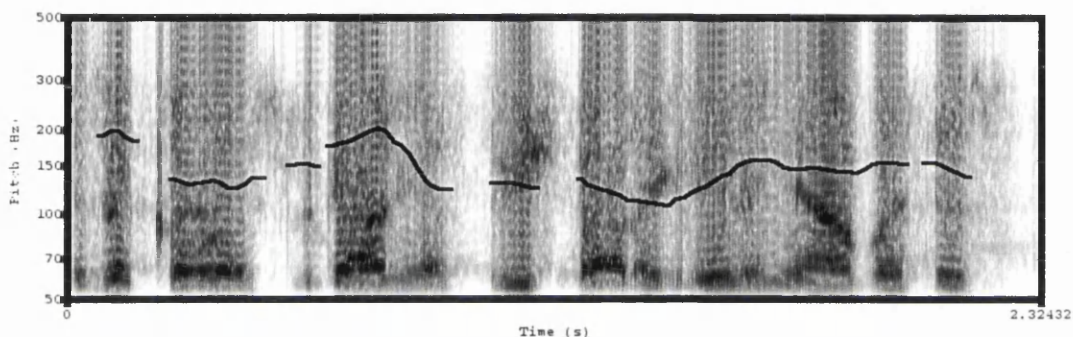
9 A: hello Mr HUM

10 C2: yes

11 A: hi | it's ↓David from Bri-ish ↑Gas (.)<sup>2</sup> | \just a quick  
↓call | re→garding your three star a↑greement you have  
with us (3.8) | hello could you ((fast)) ↑spare a moment

This call shows a slight change in the pattern towards the end of his turn, with an additional clause *you have with us* now forming part of the tail of the rise-fall over *(three star) agreement* and the change from a high rising pattern at the end of the hook to another rise fall over the more concise *could you spare a moment?* We can see further prosodic and lexical ‘adjustments’ to his call openings on this evening in calls 1836, 1845 and 1847:

Day 1 call 1836

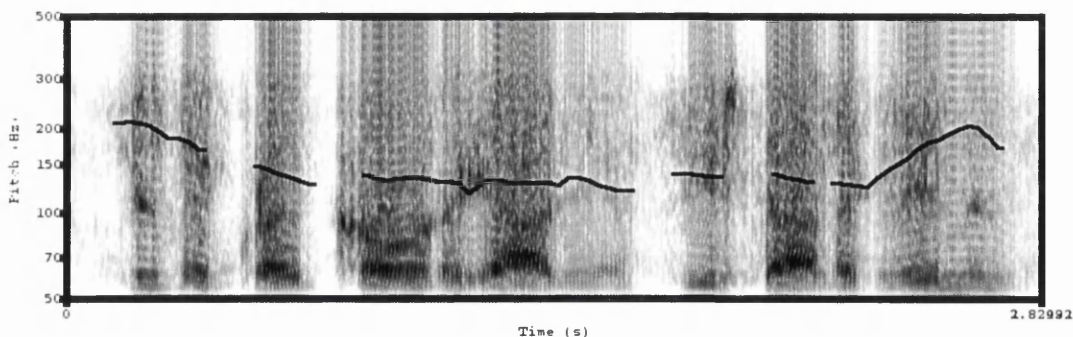


it's a call | it's re~~v~~garding your three star a~~f~~greement you have with us

The pitch pattern over the first tone unit sounds stylised: with a MHL-shaped tune:

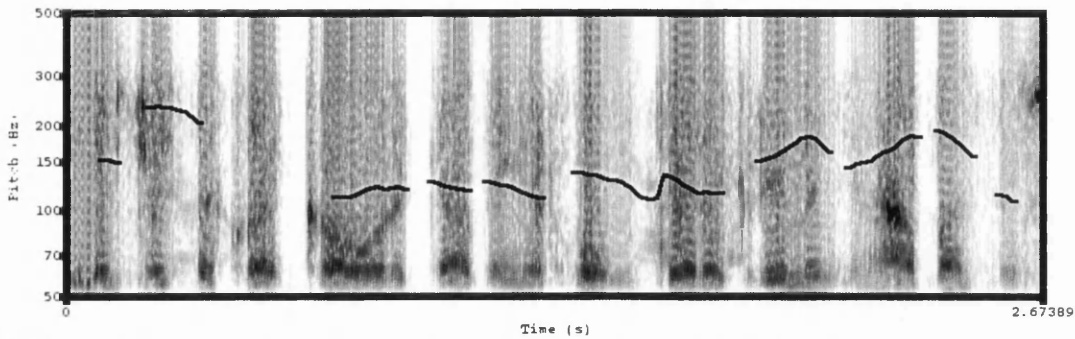
— —  
— —  
it's a call

Day 1 call 1845



↘ just a quick ↘ call | re~~v~~garding your three star a~~f~~greement

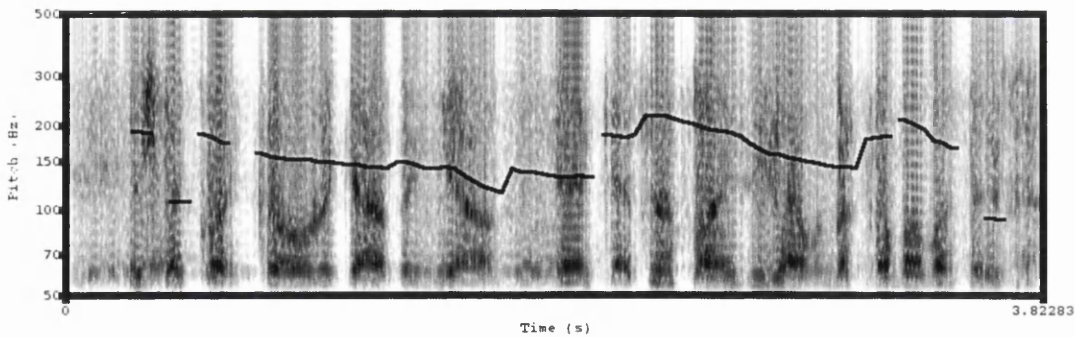
Day 1 call 1847



it's \Njust a quick call |re→garding your home care a↑greement |you \have with us

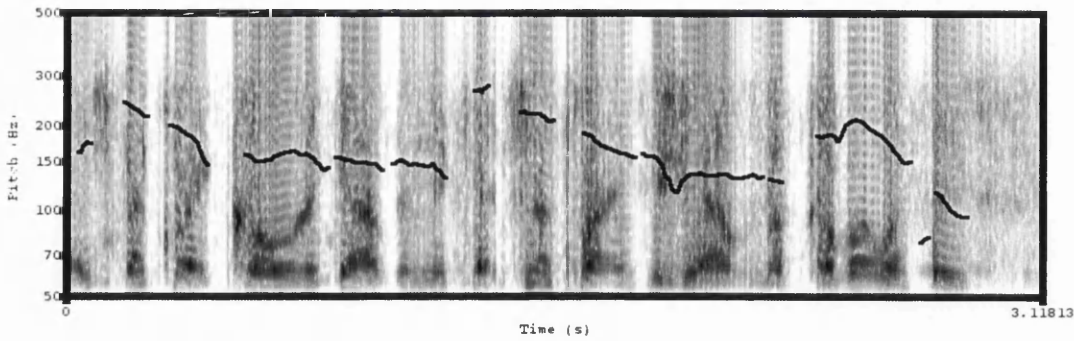
These three examples show some variation between the intonational patterns over this section of the utterance, especially in terms of the pitch height and movement of the pre-tonic patterns. Overall, we can see his intonation has an 'up-and-down' melody on these calls. Although these calls on day 1 are not completely uniform, by the end of nesting his pitch patterns on this section of the call openings are very similar across all calls, with David routinely using the following pattern:

End of nesting call 1857



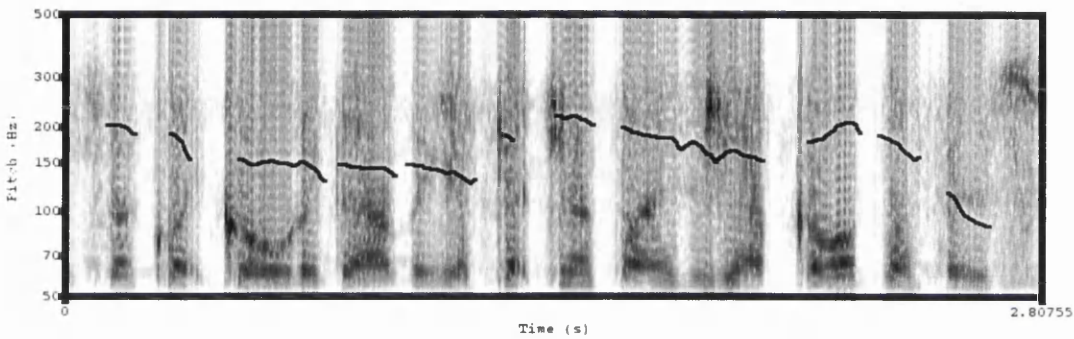
just a quick ↓call|regarding your(.) er ↑kitchen appliances|you \have under \cover with us

End of nesting call 1919



just a quick call | regarding your kitchen appliances | you have under cover with us

End of nesting call 1935



just a quick call | regarding your kitchen appliances | you have covered with us

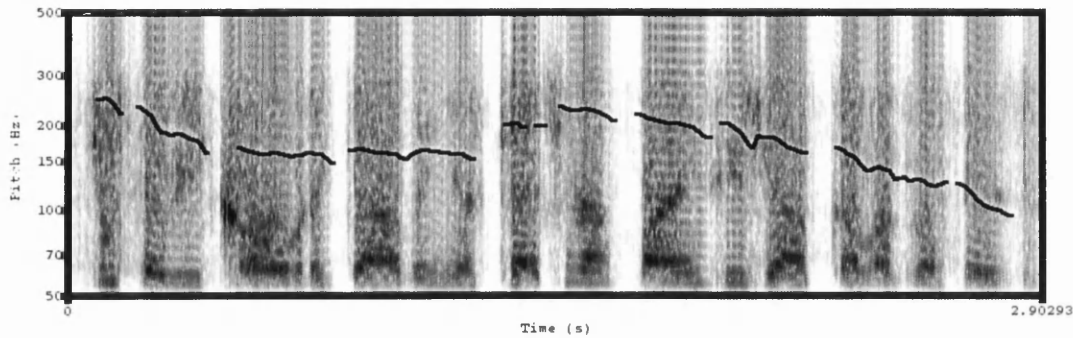
These contours illustrate the remarkable degree of similarity between calls there is at this stage, in contrast to the variation which was identified on day one. The pattern over the first tone unit seems most appropriately classified as stylised. It has the following pattern:

—  
—    —    —  
just a quick call

In the following months, the pitch pattern over this section of the calls has remained fairly similar, with an even further defined falling pattern, as the two final tone units have become one long fall. We can see this in the following call:



1 month later call 1952



^N^just a wee ^call |regarding your ^kit^chen appliances you have covered with us

As the example shows, he has replaced *just a quick call* with *just a wee call*, and in some utterances it has a non-stylised (falling) pattern, although this utterance retains its stylised pattern on some of the calls.

### David: summary

The data for this speaker show a change from variation to uniformity in his pitch patterns which takes place between the beginning and end of the nesting period. By the end of nesting some of his utterances have taken on a stylised quality, and the majority of nuclear tones have a rise-fall or falling pattern, in contrast to the simple rises which were identified on his first day. After the end of nesting, he retains most of this pattern although the falling sections become even more prominent.

## 6.8 Summary of Findings

In the sections below, the key findings for each agent are summarized using tables, first for scripted part B, and then for scripted parts C and D. In this way it is possible to see the development of prosodic patterns over time for each agent, their use (or not)

of stylised patterns, and the similarities and differences in specific patterns and use of patterns with respect to text.

### 6.8.1 Individual development profiles: *it's..... calling from British Gas*

| <b>Gail:</b> |  |
|--------------|--|
| Day 1:       | chunked into two tone units with a rise-fall on <i>Gail calling</i> on all calls but with variation in tone on <i>Gas</i> across calls.  |
| End of N:    | chunked in same way as day one with an additional accented syllable in second tone unit. Now (quite high) level pattern over both tone units with a final high rising nuclear tone at the end of the utterance. This is a uniform pattern on this day.             |
| 1 month:     | Further pitch pattern change. Nuclear tone on <i>Gas</i> now varied across calls (falls and rises) but pattern on first tone unit quite similar to previous month (i.e. around the mid range and quite level). <i>Gail calling</i> now has slightly stylised tone. |
| 2 month:     | Calls now uniform. Pitch still focused around the mid-range over majority of utterance with a final fall from mid on <i>Gas</i> . Still has stylised tone over <i>Gail calling</i>   |

| <b>Anne:</b> |  |
|--------------|--|
| Day 1:       | Utterance chunked into 2 tone units although tone-unit boundary not clearly defined via prosodic means. Some lexical differences, but an emergent pattern of fall-rise on <i>Anne</i> and low rise on <i>Gas</i> .   |
| End of N:    | Perceptible rise in pitch across whole utterance. Same pitch pattern as emergent on day 1 but with steeper gradients on rising and falling components of rise-fall on <i>Anne</i> and therefore tone unit boundary is more easily located. Pattern uniform across calls. |
| 1 month:     | Pattern described at end of nesting continues.   |
| 2 months:    | Pattern described at end of nesting continues  |

| <b>Kerry-Ann</b> |   |
|------------------|---|
| Day 1:           | Utterance is lexically the same across calls. Same applies to intonational patterns: chunked into two tone units with a falling tone on <i>Kerry-Ann</i> and a low level tone on <i>Gas</i> (overall falling contour on utterance). Only first call is different with a high rise on <i>Gas</i> . |
| End of N:        | Now mid level pattern across most of utterance (near monotone). Where dynamic pitch movement occurs it is as a mid fall on final syllable <i>Gas</i> . Same contour used on all calls.  |
| 1 month:         | Now no longer uses first name in identification. Overall contour still fairly level but has slight stepping descent over whole utterance so less monotonous than previous month. Now has slightly stylised tone over <i>it's a quick call</i> .   |
| 2 month:         | No data available   |

| <b>Linda:</b> |   |
|---------------|---|
| Day 1:        | Lots of lexical and prosodic variation although this utterance becomes more uniform after first three calls and a pattern begins to emerge. It is chunked into 2 tone units with final rises on <i>Linda</i> and <i>Gas</i> . These rises differ in height between calls so not quite uniform. Slight variations between calls in pre-tonic patterns at this point. |
| End of N:     | Overall pitch contour now more firmly established and uniform across calls. Consistently has rise on <i>Linda</i> , then a rise on <i>Gas</i> with level in between. Rises vary slightly in height between calls but first rise tends to be lower than second.  |
| 1 month:      | Pattern continues as previous month   |
| 2 month:      | Now omits name completely. Now one tone unit with level head and slight mid rise on <i>Gas</i> . Occasionally more level nuclear tone.  |

| <b>Ross</b> |   |
|-------------|---|
| Day 1:      | Early calls are characterised by lots of hesitation, incomprehensibility and mistakes, more so than other agents. Deviates from scripted structure. By last 4 calls this utterance is becoming quite uniform intonationally across calls, chunked into 2 tone units with a mid rise on <i>Ross</i> and the same on <i>Gas</i> |
| End of N:   | Overall contour of utterance is now quite level and sounds stylised due to the step down between two level nuclear tones. Same on all calls except one.   |
| 1 month:    | No data available   |
| 2 month:    | No data available   |

| <b>Ryan</b> |   |
|-------------|---|
| Day 1:      | Not much lexical or syntactic variation but some intonational variation especially on first three calls. Then becomes more uniform with level tone on <i>Ryan</i> and rise-slump on <i>Gas here</i> . |
| End of N:   | Slight syntactic change and accompanying pitch contour. Now has quite low pitch rise-slump on <i>Ryan here</i> and rise on <i>Gas</i> in all but one call.  |
| 1 month:    | Further syntactic adjustment and slight rise in overall pitch. <i>Ryan</i> has mid rise and <i>Gas</i> also has rise at slightly higher pitch.  |
| 2 months:   | Same contour as previous month on most calls with few exceptions (sometimes a more level tone on <i>Ryan</i> )  |



| <b>Daniel</b> |  |
|---------------|--|
| Day 1:        | Identification section varies lexically and intonationally between calls. No clear pattern.  |
| End of N:     | Reduction of variation in syntax and pitch contours between calls. No longer has lots of rising tones which were used on day 1. Has developed a partially stylised tone on <i>Daniel here</i> on some calls, and now has a full fall on <i>Gas</i> . Does appear to be a pattern developing between calls but qualitative differences in tone between calls. |
| 1 month:      | Some lexical and syntactic changes since previous month. 2 different pitch contours used, always with a final fall on <i>Gas</i> but sometimes has a partially stylised tone on first tone unit over <i>Daniel here</i> which is on other calls a simple falling pattern   |
| 2 months:     | Same as previous month, two slightly different patterns identified, one of which has a partially stylised tone over the first tone unit. But only 3 calls available.   |

| <b>David</b> |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1 month:     | Utterance lexically and syntactically similar across calls as follows script closely. First call different – including segmental differences. Has uniform pitch contour over later calls on this day which has an overall fall-rise melody. Has a partially stylised tone over <i>David calling</i> and a rise on <i>Gas</i> . |
| End of N:    | Much more level contour. Still has stylised tone on <i>David calling</i> but only slight step down. Rising tone on <i>Gas</i> on day 1 now replaced with a fall.   |
| 1 month:     | Pattern continues from previous month  |
| 2 months:    | Pattern continues from previous month.   |

**6.8.2 Individual development profiles: *it's just a quick call regarding your homecare agreement, do you have a moment?***

| <b>Gail:</b> |  |
|--------------|--|
| Day 1:       | Lots of hesitation, slight deviation from script and varied lexis. Intonational contour quite varied on early calls – no routine pattern at first although pattern towards end of day with overall ‘up-and-down’ shape (successive fall rises). Only uses hook on two calls – has no pattern but has neutral tonicity in both. |
| End N:       | Has same ‘up-and-down’ pattern as emergent on day one – characterises all calls on this day. Hook now also has a rise-fall nuclear tone and marked tonicity  |
| 1 month:     | ‘Up-and-down’ pattern continues as previous month. Does not use the hook on all calls but where she does it is now quite varied, lexically and intonationally, with changes to and extension of the scripted text  |
| 2 months:    | ‘Up-and-down’ pattern used fairly consistently across calls. Slightly more lexical variation for this utterance since last month.  |

| <b>Anne:</b> |  |
|--------------|--|
| Day 1:       | Lots of lexical variation of part C between early calls. Variety of intonational contours over this utterance with no clear pattern across calls. Hook also intonationally and lexically quite varied. In later calls a routine pitch pattern emerges made up of successive nuclear rise-falls giving an ‘up-and-down’ melody. |
| End of N:    | Now much more concise (has omitted parts of the script which she used on day 1) and lexis more uniform across calls. Slight change in overall contour: still has first fall-rise on <i>homecare agreement</i> but now tends to use a full fall on tonic syllable of the hook.  |
| 1 month:     | Pattern continues from end of nesting. Slight qualitative change in nuclear tone over <i>homecare agreement</i> since last month   |
| 2 months:    | Pattern continues from end of nesting. Rise-fall tone over <i>homecare agreement</i> has developed since last month with less prominent rising section and nasality.   |

| <b>Kerry-Ann</b> |  |
|------------------|--|
| Day 1:           | Very little lexical or intonational variation across calls on this day. Scripted part C tends to have an overall falling-rising contour. Hook has a final high rising nucleus.   |
| End of N:        | General reduction in pitch range on this utterance which has an overall fall-from mid pattern (not a very steep gradient). Hook is included in this overall contour, with a fall on the tonic syllable. Pattern the same across all calls. |
| 1 month:         | Melody much more ‘up-and-down’ than previous month and she is now using a much greater range of pitch. Pattern the same across all calls.  |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Linda:</b> |  |
| Day 1:        | Some hesitation and deviation from script. Utterance is lexically and prosodically varied across calls although tends to have rising nuclear patterns. Hook tends to have nuclear rise on the first few calls and a rise-slump pattern in later calls. |
| End of N:     | Calls now lexically and intonationally uniform with stylised tone over <i>quick call tonight</i> followed with a very long level head and final rise on <i>boiler</i> . Hook tends to have a rise-fall on the tonic syllable.                          |
| 1 month:      | Pattern continues from previous month. Slight qualitative differences in hook between calls although always quite similar shape on each call.  |
| 2 month:      | Pattern continues from previous month.   |

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>Ross</b> |   |
| Day 1:      | Does not stick to the scripted structure, hook comes before scripted part C. Calls have very similar 'up-and-down' contour from early on, with a clear rise-fall tone over <i>homecare agreement</i> . Not much intonational variation between calls. |
| End of N:   | Now has a more distinctive falling melody across the whole utterance with a noticeably long tail on the second of the two tone units as a result. Agent also follows scripted structure more closely  |
| 1 month:    | No data available   |
| 2 month:    | No data available   |

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>Ryan</b> |   |
| Day 1:      | Not a lot of lexical or syntactical variation on later calls but some clear differences between this utterance on first 3 calls. Then pattern emerges where he starts using overall 'up-and-down' melody from two consecutive rise-slump nuclei, one on <i>agreement</i> and one on <i>time</i> |
| End of N:   | Different pattern used uniformly on calls. Now less 'up-and-down' with a quite level contour over the first tone unit and head of following tone unit with a final rise-fall on <i>homecare agreement</i> . Now omits the hook completely.  |
| 1 months:   | Much more 'up-and-down' contour as a result of the falling pattern over the first tone unit ( <i>it's just a quick call</i> ) which was level the previous month. Still retains the rise-fall tone over <i>homecare agreement</i> . No hook   |
| 2 months:   | Pattern continues as previous month.  |

| <b>Daniel</b> |   |
|---------------|---|
| Day 1:        | Lots of syntactic, lexical and intonational variation. Most nuclear tones have a rising pattern. Does not use the hook at all.  |
| End of N:     | Script has more of an influence than day 1. This section now has a uniform pitch contour across calls which has an 'up-and-down' melody. Partially stylised nuclear tone on first tone unit followed by a prominent rise-fall. Hook has a 'sing-song' melody. |
| 1 month:      | Some syntactical differences between calls but same pattern as previous month.  |
| 2 month:      | Further lexical and syntactical changes, utterance more concise but same 'up-and-down' pattern.   |

| <b>David</b> |  |
|--------------|--|
| Day 1:       | Follows script closely but omits some sections including hook on some calls. Intonational pattern begins to emerge on first few calls day; still some variation between later calls. Pitch contour used on most calls overall 'up-and-down' melody.                  |
| End of N:    | 'Up-and-down' contour retained and more uniform across calls made up of stylised falling tone, then a rise-slump followed by rise-fall on hook.  |
| 1 month:     | Pitch pattern still uniform across calls although slight change in overall contour. Stylised section still the same as previous month but now much more definite falling melody over utterance. Nuclear rise-fall on <i>kitchen appliance</i> followed by long tail. |
| 2 month:     | Patterns continue from previous month.   |

## 6.9 Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the speech of 8 individuals during their first three months of employment in NTB provides evidence for the following observations:

The first of these is that the most variation in syntax, lexis, pitch contour and general conversational structure occurs on the first day of nesting. The first few calls on day 1 of nesting are where we can see speakers becoming used to performing the script, as this is when they begin to use the printed text in front of them within a real interaction with an interlocutor. As a result, it is on these early calls where we find most evidence of hesitation, contrasting with later calls where the agents have become more familiar with the activity through repetition, and possibly where they have stopped reading from the physical script. Without exception, all agents varied the syntactic, lexical and

intonational features of the call openings during their first day of nesting, and it appears to be during the first few calls where this tends to happen to the greatest extent. Speakers were identified as having several different pitch contours and syntactic arrangements for the same chunk of the script in their early calls, but then in later calls on the same day this variation would begin to reduce or even disappear completely. This highlights the commonsense notion that the basic activity of making the same call and saying the same thing repeatedly naturally results in the development of linguistic patterns (albeit short-term ones). It also points to the fact that although the printed script standardises interactions in the wider context of NTB, it is not necessarily responsible for the lexical and syntactic uniformity which develops within an individual speaker's repertoire over time. If this were the case then the lexical content and syntactical structure of the call openings would be consistent from the first call, which they are not. What seems to happen is that the printed script forms a basic guide for 'what to say' on the early calls, but that at some stage the agent internalises it, and starts to develop his/her own personal script which is slowly adjusted and adapted as more calls are made. The data appear to show that this does not only apply to the lexical and syntactical elements of the openings, but also to the pitch contours which accompany each scripted chunk. As the transfer from physical script to internal script takes place (and as the agents engage in the activity more and more) there seems to be an initial phase where the matching of pitch contour to scripted chunk is still underway, and this manifests in 'testing out' of different intonational patterns until the agent becomes linguistically comfortable.

Another observation is that by the end of nesting, the agents are producing each scripted chunk with much less variation in the accompanying pitch contour than they

were on day 1. This indicates further that they now have an internal/learned script (although it is still in the early stages of development) that relates each scripted move to a particular tune. For a few of the agents this internal script does not appear to change a great deal in the months after nesting except in terms of minor lexical and syntactic adjustments, as the data show that their pitch patterns do not change a great deal. However, for most of the agents, prosodic changes continue to occur after nesting has ended, which indicates that moving away from the nursery and into the main call centre may play a role in the development of these internal scripts.

What we can see from the qualitative analysis is that each of the eight agents is further consistent with respect to tying script chunks to an accompanying pitch contour after three months of employment in the call centre. By the end of the data collection period, the data show that agents all usually produce each chunk of the script with a routine pitch contour, with very few exceptions. Although lexical and syntactic adjustments can reshape this contour, in many cases the overlying contour remains the same. This suggests that the way in which the internal script links together each scripted chunk with an accompanying pitch contour is not so much tied to the linguistic content of each chunk but more to its place within the larger structure of the call opening.

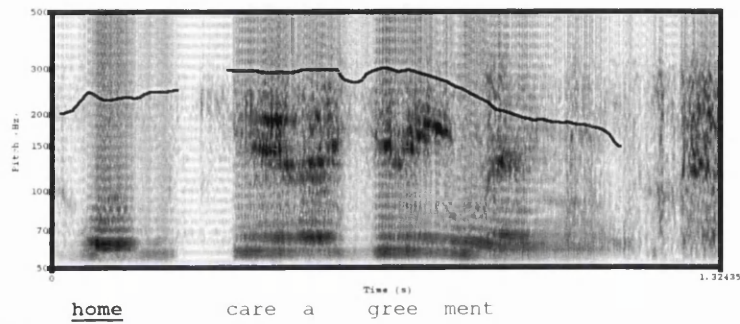
Although there is a high degree of uniformity within each agent's own repertoire, and each agent tends to use the same pitch contour consistently for each scripted chunk by the end of the data collection period, the agents do not all do this in the same way. In other words, there is not a particular intonation pattern associated with each specific turn type for all agents. In this sense there is no evidence for a fixed NTB call-

opening intonation pattern which all speakers gradually adopt after spending more time in the call centre taking calls. However, what the data do reveal is that there are some general *prosodic similarities* across the speech of different agents during the call openings. Some of these similarities appear to arise as a result of them all engaging in the same routine scripted activity. For example, they all have a tendency to run adjacent clauses (which usually correspond with tone units) together without a discernable pause between. This results in some agent turns being composed of very long stretches of talk which lack the usual disfluencies of spontaneous speech. Although the agents do not all do this all the time and to the same extent, it is still a defining general feature of the corpus. We can also see evidence of several of the speakers adopting stylised or partially stylised contours over some tone units which, as suggested in Chapter 1, is likely to be symptomatic of the routine nature of the task. However, this may also be attributable to the process suggested above, whereby speakers tie sections of the (internal) script to particular pitch contours. As each chunk becomes more routine for the speaker, so the possibility for stylisation occurs.

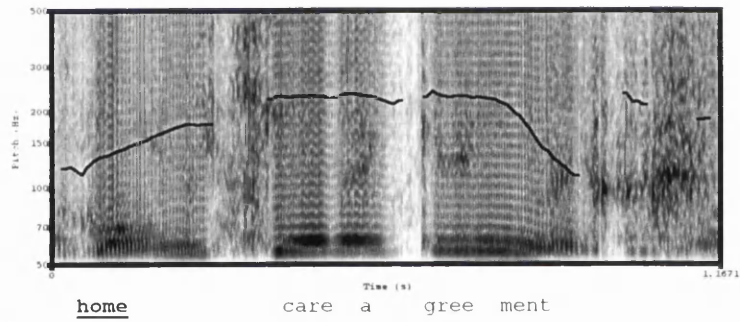
There are also other prosodic features (or, more specifically, one particular pitch contour), which several speakers from this corpus appear to use that do not appear to be solely attributable to the repetitious nature of NTB sales calls, or to the stylistic effects of producing non-spontaneous utterances. Instead, we must look to local stylistic practices within NTB to explain them (although in the absence of more data, this suggestion is made tentatively at this stage). The pitch contour in question is the rise-fall tone (↘) which is found frequently across the corpus, and often on the tonic syllable of the phrases *it's regarding your homecare agreement / that you have with us / do you have a moment*, and which is not present to the same extent in very early

calls at the beginning of nesting. As mentioned in section 2.1, Cruttenden (1994) describes the rise-fall as a tone rising from a low point on the main accent, right to the very top of the speaker's pitch range and then falling back down over the rest of the tail. He also adds that it is used by speakers to make a contrast or show a reservation. The rise-fall in the NTB data appears to have a slightly different function which we can see in the following extracts from calls made on the final day of data collection:

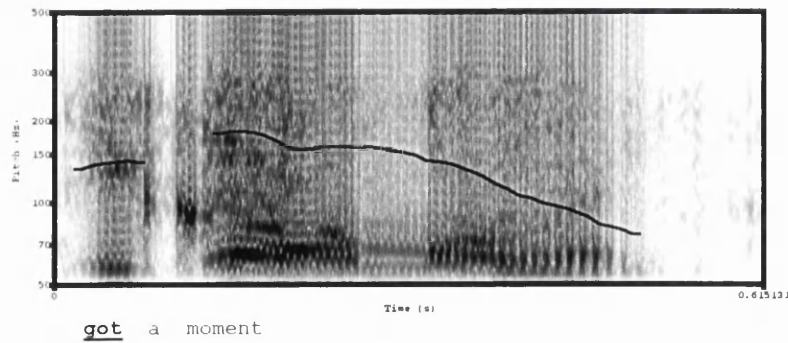
**Anne**



**Ryan**

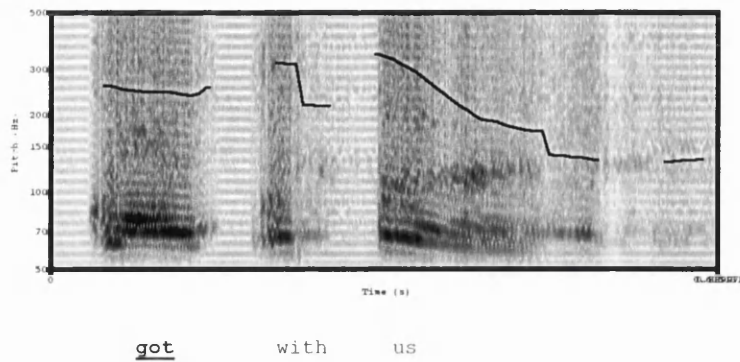


**David**

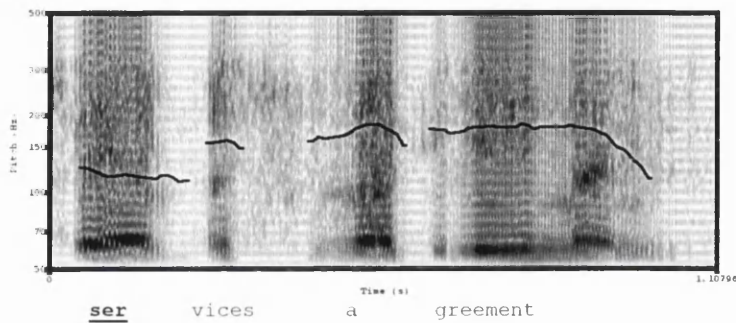




## Gail



## Daniel



This rise-fall is characterised by a low nucleus and then a jump up to the highest point of the speaker's range and then a fall over a relatively long tail. In some utterances it appears in a tone unit which has marked tonicity, such as the examples for Gail and David. In none of these cases is it being used in the ways suggested by Cruttenden. Based on the data it appears that this tone is characteristic of NTB prosody in these openings – and with a very specific function – to specify **the** topic of the call.

If we consider that *homecare agreement* is **the** key topic of the script/call, and that the function of the whole call is to deal with, and indeed to persuade the customer to change, their financial arrangements with respect to this particular contract, this is perhaps why it ends up getting a special/stylised contour. It seems possible that this particular chunk of the call has developed its own special contour for the function required by NTB.

By carrying out a qualitative analysis in this way, some subtle patterns of variation have been revealed. Chapter 7 goes on to try account for these patterns by looking to the local practices which were investigated through the ethnographic fieldwork.

## Chapter 7: CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1 Learning a Style

The NTB study provides further evidence to show that traditional, unidimensional conceptualisations of style can only take us so far. These models attempt to link single linguistic forms to single social meanings, rather than beginning with wider styles and working downwards to the individual linguistic variables which speakers combine to create distinctive ways of speaking. In this way, it is not possible to account for the complex and unstable ways in which these meanings are assigned to linguistic forms as part of local social practice. It is only when communities are viewed up close via ethnography that we can really begin to understand the way in which styles are constructed, and ultimately gain a better understanding of the mechanisms which lie behind linguistic variation. The concept of style as a process of ‘bricolage’ (Eckert 1996) and the process of ‘corporate styling’, as Cameron (2000a, 2000b) defines it, allow us to understand the effects of managerial control on the stylistic performance of agents whilst at work.

This study focused on the prosodic features of a group of trainees during telesales calls to customers, looking specifically at how these features develop as they enter the call centre community of practice. An ethnographic approach to the fieldwork was taken, using long-term participant observation in order to map out the local social landscape, and an attempt was made to understand this from the perspective of a ratified community member rather than as a detached outsider. The value of the ethnographic method in this way cannot be underestimated; it is only by observing and engaging with individuals within their local communities that we can hope to

unravel the complex and continually changing way in which speakers construct styles and the role in which linguistic variation plays in this process.

One of the more general findings from this study, which backs up the assertions of theorists such as Lave & Wenger (1991), is that newcomers (specifically those new to a profession) do not suddenly appropriate a set of norms via abstract structures, but rather learn their role gradually through increasing participation in local practices. The relationship during this process in NTB between apprentice and expert, between newcomer and old-timer, is key. Examination of the training and nesting processes in the call centre reveals that newcomers are initiated into daily practices via interaction with existing staff, and then customers, in two very different learning arenas. The training classroom places a physical and emotional barrier between trainees and the rest of the call centre, and access to local knowledge is restricted and filtered by those members of staff who have been appointed to instruct them. It is only when they first begin work in the call centre during nesting that trainees really begin to engage in the central business of the call centre.

## **7.2 The Role of the Script**

One of the questions raised by this thesis is, “exactly what effect does the script have on the speech of workers, and how is it used by individuals during interactions with customers?” Chapter 5 examined the structure of NTB calls, and compared them to other telephone-mediated interactions such as those scrutinised by Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986). It found that although sales call openings have a similar canonical sequence of turns which both participants must negotiate before the main talk can take place, there are certain clear differences which relate to the formal, business-related

nature of the calls. This is partly defined by the lack of familiarity between participants, and is partly a result of the script.

The NTB data also reveal that although the script appears to provide a basic template which partially determines the format of call openings, the structure of the call openings is also shaped by the other participant of the interaction: the customer.

Analysis of the calls showed that customers employ varying degrees of 'gatekeeping' when called by an NTB sales agent, which disrupts the extent to which the agent can follow the script. Engagement by customers in this gatekeeping can be linked to levels of willingness to participate in this type of unsolicited sales call. However, it seems that even where there are customers who are less willing to participate in these interactions, almost all of them observe the underlying rules found in telephone interaction relating to negotiation of the opening sequence.

### **7.3 An NTB Prosodic Style?**

It was originally hypothesised that there might be such a thing as call centre prosodic style which arises as a direct result of managerial codification practices in the call centre and/or the routine and repetitive nature of sales calls. The findings of this study do not provide evidence of a clearly definable 'tone of voice' which is associated with NTB calls, but this is perhaps not surprising considering the speech of novice workers was examined rather than that of workers who had been employed for a longer period. The trainees' pitch patterns appeared to stabilise in the latter stages of the data but it is unclear what happens later, or if further development occurs. However, the data do reveal some individual patterns of variation in the speech of trainee workers which appear to be linked to the process of learning to be a call centre agent and 'getting into

the routine' of this particular activity. The ethnographic data reveal that management in the British Gas call centre do not usually overtly prescribe prosodic features in the same way they are able to exert control over elements like conversational structure and lexical choice via the use of a script. However, the process of nesting does seem to play a key role in the development of workers' prosodic performance in that trainees are expected to listen to (and possibly mimic) nester's prosodic productions, and respond to advice about their own tone of voice.

The data show that some agents use a pitch contour which has a stylised quality (e.g. Ladd 1978). Although these contours do not necessarily fulfil all the phonetic criteria for intonational stylisation, they do bear some stylised characteristics (such as level pitch) which make them sound different from 'plain' contours. This may be as a result of the routine and repetitive nature of the calls: repeating the same conversation again and again on a daily basis is likely to effect agents' pitch patterns in this way. Because the calls are so repetitive one might expect all agents to do this a lot more than they do, and in a more uniform way. However, as agents are encouraged not to sound bored or 'robotic' by nesters (using prosodic features as a resource for this), it is possible that stylised contours are suppressed or avoided by agents in some cases.

The data also show that over time the agents develop certain pitch contours which are strongly associated with a specific chunk of the script. A rise-fall contour was identified as recurrent in the data which seems to be directly associated with the core elements of the scripted interaction, i.e. the product which the agents are attempting to sell. Although the rise-fall contour has been identified elsewhere in the speech of Glaswegians (e.g. Ladd, 1996; Cruttenden, forthcoming), its appearance in the NTB

data suggests that agents use it differently, in a way that relates it directly to their NTB role. This leads us back to the process of stylistic *bricolage*, whereby speakers appropriate existing linguistic resources from the wider sociolinguistic landscape and give them new meanings (Eckert 1996). It is not clear *why* speakers in NTB use this particular contour in this way, but evidently the process of matching pitch contours to scripted chunks of speech has a big part to play. The fact that workers tend to use this contour on certain utterances far more towards the end of the nesting period than they do at the very beginning indicates that it is *not* the act of reading a script which results in its use, but rather increased exposure to the local stylistic meaning which this tone has developed in NTB. Nesting, and the nesters, have a vital role here. They provide the stylistic template with which trainees associate local expertise, and success. If the nesters demonstrate a style which, among other things, includes the use of distinctive, stylised pitch contours, then it is possible that new agents also seek to appropriate these contours during participation in nesting.

#### **7.4 Locating the Stylistic Agent**

As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, Cameron's (2000a, 2000b) work on call centres focuses specifically on the prescriptive practices utilised by the call centre industry in order to standardise the speech of employees, and to impose a pre-determined corporate persona upon them. For this reason she argues that this leads to 'a diminution of their agency' as language users (2000b: 323). She conceptualises a slightly different mode of stylistic practice from other uses of this term, contrasting the *self-styling* practices identified in communities by, for example, Eckert (1996), with *corporate styling* that takes place in call centres. The main difference here is, as

Cameron explains (2000a: 326), that ‘the roles of speaker and stylistic agent are separated to a significant extent’.

The results of the present study show that separation of the roles of speaker and agent also occur to a certain extent in NTB, where agents’ stylistic choices are restricted by the use of a script and by various forms of managerial codification and surveillance. However, the ethnographic findings of this study reveal not just the simple imposition of an abstract corporate style upon workers, but rather differing and complex *layers* of stylistic prescription at work. Examination of printed checklists, the script, and training documents reveals the first layer; scrutiny of managerial practice and interaction with workers reveals the second; and finally the third layer is uncovered by observing the nesting process, whereby expert community members and newcomers engage with one another in the co-construction of style during live calls. It is clear that each layer of prescription plays a role in controlling (or at least, shaping) the stylistic output of NTB workers. This additional layer of complexity to the styling process may well go some way in explaining why any broad, uniform patterns of prosodic behaviour occur across the data.

## **7.5 Future Directions**

There is substantial scope for further investigation of these data and call centre speech in general. A useful follow-up to this work which would compliment the present study of intonation would be to look at segmental features in order to see how they are affected during the first three months of employment.



A different approach to the data collection might also be beneficial. The present thesis looked at a small sample of speech of the informants longitudinally, in an attempt to reveal patterns of variation developing over a short time period, by taking an initial set of time 'slices'. However, there is much more work to be done to investigate the potential variation between these slices: for example, the range of variation exhibited during nesting, or over the days and months that follow as agents become established. It would also be useful to examine the speech of agents between different stylistic contexts, for example in informal conversations, reading tasks and word lists, to see the extent to which the patterns identified here relate to those of other kinds of speech activity, including normal spontaneous speech. Data of this nature were originally collected for the present study. However, as a result of the long time delay between the two phases of data collection it was not possible to continue with the original methodology. Also, since the role of the 'nesters' seems particularly important, it would be interesting to consider the interactions both on- and off-call, between agents and nesters over the nesting period. It is also clear that investigation of established workers would be useful in order to compare with the emerging patterns found in the speech of the trainees. As the time period of data collection was only three months, it remains unclear whether these patterns stay the same or whether they develop even further.

The quality of the data recordings placed limitations on the analyses, and prevented any acoustic measurements from being taken. Quantification would have lent weight to some of the claims made about change over time, for example in pitch range. The poor data quality made even auditory analysis difficult, as there was quite a lot of background noise that prevented looking at features such as voice quality in any great

depth. A potential solution to this would be to gather experimental data, using agents who remain in the call centre but take calls in isolation, and use recording equipment which is independent from the call centre's in-house recording system.

Another issue worth further scrutiny is that of gender in the NTB data.

The current approach considered the behaviour of individuals and found that although there was no clearly definable norm of behaviour to which they all subscribe, there are certainly general patterns of usage and identifiable prosodic strategies which the informants all had in common to a greater or lesser extent. However, what was not examined in great detail was the correlation between the development of a prosodic style and the gender of the informants. Overall, the findings indicate that there might be gender differences in the appropriation and deployment of prosodic resources during nesting. For example, more of the males (3 of 4) adopted the stylised contours than did the females (1 of 4). If this were to be considered in future work, examination of the speech of larger groups of speakers of both genders may well be able to uncover a correlation between prosodic style and gender. From the ethnographic research there appeared to be some differences in the selling strategies adopted by the male and female informants, and the way that they described their daily role as salespeople. Several of the male agents told me that to be a good salesperson you had to 'have the gift of the gab', whereas reports from females tended to focus more on politeness and friendliness.

The community of practice model was used in this study as part of the ethnographic research, with the overarching concept of the call centre Community of Practice providing a framework within which to understand how new employees learn how to

work in the call centre. However, a further application of this model would be useful in order to identify smaller communities of practice within the institution. This research so far assumes that all employees are equally motivated to sell and to conform to the prescribed practices and behaviours of the call centre. However, in reality it is unlikely that this is the case and some employees are more likely to be supportive of and engaged in corporate practices than others. Eckert and Wenger (1994) identify workers in an insurance firm who are marginalised in similar ways to the burnouts in Eckert's (1989, 2000) Detroit study: 'like the burnouts' view of school, the claim processors see the workplace as a necessity, but not the centre of their social worlds'. It seems reasonable to assume that there are similar communities of practice within the call centre, and that as part of their marginal role they are less inclined to respond to managerial control or to be motivated to perform as well as other employees might be. Further investigation of this may be able to explain stylistic variation in the speech of workers.

Finally, it would also be useful to look beyond the call openings analysed in this study, for example, at the actual sales pitch. It is not clear what the agents do prosodically when they are fully engaged in selling the product. Do they employ the same stylised contours found in the opening sections, or does the nature of the sale require a whole different set of linguistic strategies? How much do they adhere to the script when they are fully engaged in their spiel, and what roles do their interlocutors play at this stage in the call? Further examination of these questions and others are certain to lead to better understandings of call centre speech, which is a now a fundamental part of our modern existence.

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## Appendix I

### Intonational Notation

The notation system I have used for my data is intended to make the transcription as accessible as possible to readers who may not be particularly familiar with intonational notation. The diacritics selected illustrate both direction and relative height of pitch movement. My notation system is based on Wells' (2006: 260) iconic system which is based itself on a similar system put forward by O'Connor & Arnold (1961, 1973). However, as I require a finer level of detail than is usually required, I have adapted Wells' system slightly, using a font designed specifically for intonational transcription: Intone-d Inton SILDoulosL<sup>80</sup>, with slightly different diacritics, for example when marking prominence or labelling the tonic and pre-tonic patterns. These differences are purely as a result of the fonts at my disposal; the basic framework and principles of the system remain generally consistent with Wells's version. Another difference is that my system allows for fine differentiation between relative pitch heights. Instead of just referring to tones as 'high' or 'low' pitch, my system includes tones located around the mid point of the speaker's range.

Accented syllables are indicated by single underlining. Nuclear tones are indicated by single underlining and bold font, for example:

She was trying to over**take** me

The nuclear pitch movements and their associated diacritics are outlined below. The diacritic is always placed before the syllable to which it applies, for example:

---

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/fonts.htm>

She was trying to over \take me

## Pitch movement      Symbol

### Falls

|            |   |  |
|------------|---|--|
| High fall: | ↘ | fall from high to mid pitch  |
| Mid fall   | ↘ | fall from mid-high to mid-low pitch  |
| Low fall:  | ↓ | fall from mid – low pitch  |
| Full fall  | ↘ | Fall from high to low pitch  |
| Rise-fall: | ↗ | rise from mid to high pitch and then a fall from high to low pitch. The fall is narrow if the tail is short and wide if the tail has several syllables |

### Rises

|                     |     |  |
|---------------------|-----|--|
| High rise:          | ↑   | rise from mid to high pitch  |
| Mid rise            | ↑   | rise from mid-low to mid-high pitch  |
| Low rise:           | ↑   | rise from low to mid pitch   |
| Full rise:          | ↑   | rise from low to high pitch  |
| Rise-slump          | ↑↓  | similar to the rise-fall, but with a shorter drop in pitch on the falling section, i.e. a ‘slump’ rather than a fall |
| Rise-plateau:       | ↑—  | a rise then levelling out of pitch   |
| Rise-plateau-slump: | ↑—↓ | a rise, level section, then slight fall <sup>81</sup>  |

### Levels

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Low level:  | ↓ |
| Mid level:  | ↑ |
| High level: | ↑ |

---

<sup>81</sup> These patterns typically take place over several syllables, for example:  
*about your homecare agreement*

### 'Partially' stylised tones

I include a set of tones which describe the patterns I identified in the data where speakers were using contours which sounded quite stylised, although they did not necessarily meet all the criteria for stylisation, which Ladd (1978: 517) outlines as 'the stepping down from one fairly steady level pitch to another'. The difference between a partially stylised contour and e.g. a high fall, is an audible level contour over the tonic syllable.

High-mid:            ˩ ˩

High-low:           ˩ ˩

Mid-low:            ˩ ˩

Although the nuclear patterns are of primary interest in this study, onset (head) patterns are also transcribed where this is relevant to my analysis. The head begins with the stressed syllable of the first pre-nuclear accented word and ends with the syllable just before the nucleus. The difference between heads and nuclear syllables is related to the relative importance for the meaning in the sentence of a word. Nuclear syllables typically are most important to the meaning of a sentence. (O'Connor and Arnold 1961). E.g.:

a) I might go out tonight

b) I might go out tonight

In the examples shown above, a change in the meaning of the sentence alters the intonational structure, with only the second sentence containing an onset as there is no possible space for a pre-nuclear pattern in a).

The following symbols are used:

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| High level head:              | •  |
| High falling head:            | ↘↘ |
| Mid falling head:             | ↘  |
| High stepping head:           | ↘↘ |
| Stepping head <sup>82</sup> : | ↘  |
| Mid level head:               | →  |
| Low level head:               | •  |
| Mid rising head:              | ↗  |
| Low rising head:              | ↗↗ |
| High prehead:                 | —  |
| Low prehead:                  | —  |

### Other transcriptional conventions:

In order to show how each tone unit operates within the interaction, I also employ a system of conversational transcription. This is based on the system developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson & Heritage 1984 for further details).

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ]:     | overlapping talk  |
| =:     | latched utterance, i.e. an utterance that immediately follows the preceding utterance without a gap |
| wo:rd: | stretching of the immediately preceding sound   |
| .hhh:  | an audible in-breath. .h = 0.1 sec  |
| hhh:   | an audible out-breath. h = 0.1 sec  |

---

<sup>82</sup> The term is taken from O'Connor & Arnold (1973). Wells (2006: 212) refers to this type of head using his own term, 'complex high level head' where 'successive accented syllables form a series of level steps, each one lower pitched than the preceding. Any unaccented syllables are at the same pitch height as the accented syllable they follow'.



(0.5): duration of silences in tenths of a second.

(.): silence less than 0.1 sec

(\*): inaudible syllable

On all call transcripts the speakers are labelled as follows: A: for agent (i.e. the call centre worker initiating the call); and C: for customer (i.e. the answerer).

### **List of British Gas Abbreviations & Terms**

ACD: Automated Call Distribution

AHT: Average Handling Time

ASC: Area Service Centre

KAC: Kitchen Appliance Care

KPI: Key Performance Indicators

NTB: National Telebusiness

## Appendix II

The following extracts show the intonation patterns used by the agent on the scripted sections B, C & D in all of their calls. These calls are analysed at monthly intervals, from the first day of training up until three months later. By using such a detailed, narrow transcription, it is possible to show qualitative differences in the intonational patterns used by agents on the scripted openings which occur at each stage of employment. Additional information applying to individually numbered tone unit are noted underneath each extract as and where appropriate.

### GAIL

#### First day of nesting

1818

1 C: anyone there

(0.5)

2 A: .hhhhh hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM

(0.6)

3 C: .hhhh (0.6) y- you want to speak to Mrs HUM

4 A: uhuh

5 C: .hhh that's me (.) [yes

6 A: [oh right hi there

um 1|it's \Gail calling| from British \Gas

2|it's \just a quick (.) er \courtesy call|er

3|about your \three star agreement 4|\_that you

\have with us at the moment|

1820

(23.4)

10 C2: hello

(0.3)

11 A: (\*) hi there erm (0.5) is that Mr HUM

12 C: yeah speaking

13 A: oh er hi there um 1|I'm \\\jjust phonin' | er  
2|it's \\\jjust a quick courtesy \\\call 3|about your  
three star agreement that you \\\have with us at  
the moment|

1842

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM

2 C: pardon

3 A: can I speak to Mrs HUM

4 C: Mrs HUM speaking who is it

5 A: oh hi there 1|it's \\\Gail calling 2|from  
Bri-ish \\\Gas | (.)er 3|it's \\\jjust a quick \\\call| um  
4|re\\garding the like 5|your →three star a\\greement  
6|that you →have with us at the \\\moment|

IP 3: sounds stylised - MHL

1846

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM

2 C: speaking

3 A: oh hi there 1|it's \\\Gail calling 2|from  
British \\\Gas 3|it's \\\jjust a quick \\\call 4|just  
about your \\\three star agreement 4|that you  
\\have with us at the moment|

1850

(9.2)

4 C2: hello

(0.3)

5 A: hello Mr HUM

6 C2:

7 A: hi 1|(.)it's \Gail calling 2|from Bri-ish \Gas  
3|it's \just a quick call about your \uthree  
star agreement 3|that you \have with us at the  
moment|

(0.4)

8 C2: yes

(.)

9 A: erm 4|have you \got a few minutes to \spare|

1931

1 C: hello

(0.4)

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM

(0.7)

3 C: this is Mrs HUM speaking

4 A: (\*)hi there erm (.)1|it's \Gail calling 2|from British  
\Gas (.) 3|it's \just a quick \call (.)4|about your  
\uthree star agreement 5|that you \have with us|

1932

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM

(0.3)

2 C: yes that's me

(0.3)

3 A: oh hi there um (0.3) er 1|my name's ↓Gail 2|and I'm  
→calling from British ↑Gas 3|.hh it was ↘↘just a quick  
↓call to |er:: 4|about your ↑three star agreement 7|that  
you ↓have with us 6|(.) er do you →have a ↓moment|

## End of nesting

1858

1 A: hi there (.) can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

2 C: who's calling

3 A: 1|it's ↑Gail 2|→calling from British ↑Gas|

(0.9)

4 C: yeah speaking

5 A: (hiya Mrs HUM)3|it's just a 1↑quick call

4|regarding your ↓homecare agreement|

6 C: yes

7 A: 5|do you ↑have a ↓moment|

IP 3: if this tone is stylised then it's only very slight – same shape but not long enough

1859

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there (.) could I speak to Mrs HUM please

3 C: yeah speaking

4 A: (hi there Mrs HUM)1|\_it's ↑Gail 2|→calling from British

↑Gas|

(0.7)

5 C: yeah

6 A: 3|\_just a 1↑quick call 4|regarding your ↑homecare

agreement 5|do you ↑have a moment

1912

- 1 C: hello
- 2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM please
- (0.2)
- 3 C: speaking
- 4 A: (hi there Mrs HUM) 1|it's ↑Gail |→calling from British  
↑Gas (1.0) 2|((fast))~just a →quick ↑call  
3|((fast))re'garding your ↑homecare agreement 4|that  
you've ↑got with us|
- 5 C: yeah
- 6 A: 5|do you ↑have a moment 6|just to go ↑over a few things|

1923

- 1 A: hi there could I speak to Mr HUM
- 2 C: yeah speaking
- 3 A: hi there have I pronounced that right
- 4 C: yes you have yeah=
- 5 A: =yes thank you hahah .h
- 6 C: s'alright
- 7 A: I'm just like that oh I don't know right anyway 1|it's  
↑Gail |→calling from British ↑Gas (.) .hhh 2|↘↘just a  
quick ↑call 3|re'garding your ↑homecare agreement 4|that  
you've ↑got with us|
- 8 C: oh right yeah=
- 9 A: 5|er do you have a ↑moment|

IP 1: slight step down between *Gail* and *calling*

1933

1 A: hiya can I speak to Mrs HUM

2 C: speaking

3 A: hiya 1|it's Gail| →calling from British Gas .hhhhh  
2|↘↘just a quick call |um 3|regarding your homecare  
(fast) agreement 4|that you've got with us at the  
moment

4 C: uhuh

5 A: 5|do you have a moment|

1942

(7.7)

6 C2: hello

(.)

7 A: hi there Mrs HUM(0.3) 1|it's ↘↘just a quick call  
2|regarding your homecare agreement 2|that you've got  
with us 3|\_it's Gail 4|→calling from British Gas|

(0.3)

8 C: right

9 A: 5|do you have a moment|



1944

1 A: hi there could I speak to a Mr HUM please (2.5) hello (.)  
could I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: that's me

(0.3)

3 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British  
Gas|

(.)

4 C: aye

5 A: 3|↘↘just a quick call 4|regarding your homecare  
agreement (0.4) 5|do you have a moment

1946

1 A: hi there could | speak to Mrs HUM please

(.)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British  
Gas|

4 C: uhuh

5 A: 2|↘↘just a quick call 3|regarding your homecare  
agreement (.) 4|do you have a moment

1952

1 A: hi there could I speak to a Miss HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there Miss HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British  
Gas|

4 C: oh hello

5 A: 2|it's \ \ just a quick call regarding your homecare  
agreement

6 C: yes

7 A: 3|do you have a moment | just to go over a few things

1 month after nesting

1743

1 C: hello

(0.3)

2 A: hiya can I speak to Mr HUM

(.)

3 C: speaking

4 A: er hi um 1|it's \Gail 2|calling from Bri-ish \Gas (.)

3|it's \just a quick \call about your (.) 3| \*three star  
a\greement that you have with us|

5 C: mm yes

6 A: um 5|do you \have a- a few minutes just to \spare 6|\_just  
to (.) ^go over a couple of \things with you|

1757

1 C: hello

(0.4)

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

3 C: who's speaking

4 A: 1|it's \Gail 2|calling from British \Gas|

(0.6)

5 C: yes

(0.3)

6 A: is that yourself

(0.8)

7 C: yes

8 A: yes it's just a quick call Mrs HUM 3|in re.gards to the

\home care agreement 4|that you've \got with us

1758

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there could I speak to Mr or Mrs HUM please

3 C: yes

(0.6)

4 A: hiya Mrs HUM 1|it's Gail calling 2|from British Gas

(0.6) 3|it's just a quick call 4|in regards to the

homecare agreement 5|that you've both got with us

(0.3)

5 C: yes

6 A: 5|is it okay to speak with you at the moment

1759

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.9)

2 C: who is it what- (\*) what's it about duck

3 A: 1|it's Gail 2|calling from British Gas 3|it's

regarding the homecare agreement

1811

1 C: hello

(0.6)

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

(0.5)

3 C: yeah (\*\*\*\*)

(0.7)

4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British Gas|

5 C: yeah

6 A: 3|it's just a quick call 4|in regards to the home  
agreement 5|that you've already [(\*) with us

7 C: [yeah y-

8 A: 6|is it →okay to go over a few things with you

1812

1 C: hello

(0.4)

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

3 C: er speaking

4 A: hiya Mr HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British Gas

5 C: oh yes

6 A: 3|it's a quick call 4|in re'gards to your homecare  
agreement 5|that you've already got with us (0.9) 6|is  
it →okay to speak with you at the moment

1833

(.)

4 C2: hello

(0.5)

5 A: hiya Mr HUM

6 C: yes

7 A: hiya 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British Gas (0.3) .hhh  
erm 3|'s just a quick call (.)4|in regards to your  
[↑homecare agreement|

8 C2: [you've picked a sod of a time d'you know the world  
cup's on

1912

1 C: hello

2 A: .hhh hi there could I speak to a Mr HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling calling from  
British Gas|

5 C: hello

6 A: um 3|it is just a quick call 4|in regards to the  
[↑homecare agreement 5|that you've already got with us|

7 C: yeah

8 A: .hh erm 4|would it be →okay to speak with you at the  
moment|

1944

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hiya Mrs HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British Gas  
5 C: hi  
6 A: hiya er 3|it is just a quick call 4|in re<sup>g</sup>ards to  
the homecare agreement 5|that you've already got with  
us .hhhhhh 6|is it →okay to speak with you at the  
moment

1946

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please=  
3 C: =hi speaking  
4 A: hiya Mr HUM 1|it's Gail 2|→calling from British Gas  
(0.5)  
5 C: [right okay  
6 A: [(\*\*)3|it's a quick call 4|in regards to the homecare  
agreement 5|that you've got with us|

## 2 months after nesting

1907

(4.6)

6 C: hello

(0.2)

7 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's 1|Gail calling 2|from British  
Gas|

8 C: yes

9 A: 3|it is just a wee quick call er 4|to check over er  
5|the kitchen appliance care details 6|that we've got  
for you|

1911

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: yes

3 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|it's 1|Gail calling 2|from British  
Gas|

(0.8)

4 C: British Gas

5 A: yep

6 C: [yeah

7 A: [3|it- it is just a wee quick call 4|in regards to the  
homecare agreement 5|that you've got with us (0.4)  
6|.hhhh is it a convenient time (.) 7|just to go over  
the details 8|to make sure (0.4) um 9|that ev'rything  
is correct for you



1933

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr or Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speakin'  
3 A: hiya Mr HUM 1|it's Gail 2|calling from British Gas  
(1.2) 3|it is just (.) 4|a quick call tonight 5|in  
regards to the homecare agreement 6|that you have  
already got with us (1.1)7|now is it a  
((fast))convenient time 8|just to go over the  
details with you 9|at the moment

1937

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
(0.3)  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hiya Mr HUM 1|it's Gail calling 2|from British Gas  
(1.1)  
4 C: yeah  
5 A: 3|it's a quick call tonight 4|in regards to the  
homecare agreement 5|that you've got with us  
6|at the moment|  
(0.3)  
6 C: okay=  
7 A: 5|=is it a convenient time 6|just to go over a few  
details with you|

1940

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

(0.3)

2 C: who is it please

3 A: 1|it's 1|Gail calling 2|from British Gas (0.5).hhh|

4 C: from where

(0.2)

A: from British Gas

(0.5)

C: how can I help

A: 3|it's re'garding the 1|homecare agreement 4|that you've  
(0.4) er 5|that you've \already 1|got with us 6|.hhhh er  
it \is just er 7|a quick 1|call tonight 8|is it okay if  
I just \check over the 1|details

1956

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: this is him this is Mr HUM

(.)

3 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|it's 1|Gail calling 2|from British  
Gas| (0.4) .hhh 3|just a 'quick 1|call tonight 4|in  
re'gards to your \homecare agreement 5|(0.3) .hhh is it a  
convenient time 6|\just to go over a few 1|details with  
you 7|at the moment

1 A: oh hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.9)

2 C: er yeah (.) it's her (.) speaking

3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's 1|Gail calling 2|from British  
Gas|

4 C: oh aye ye[s

5 C: [3|it's \\\ujust a wee quick 4|in re→gards to  
to the:: 5| (0.3)kitchen appliance care 6|that you've  
got with us 7|\\\ujust to make sure we have got the  
correct details 8|\_is it ↗okay if we check over them at  
the moment

Anne

**First day of nesting**

1737

1 C: good evening

(3.5)

2 A: hello

(0.8)

3 C: can I help you

4 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

5 C: who's calling

6 A: .hhh 1|it's ^Anne 2|from ^British ^Gas|

(0.4)

7 C: yes

8 A: (.) is this Mr HUM I'm speaking to

9 C: yes

10 A: 2|er it's ^Anne regarding your home^care agreement

3|you've →got with us just ^now .hhhhhh er 4|do you have

a quick ^moment

(1.1)

11 C: .hhhh 5|it's regarding your home^care agreement 6|that

you ^have 7|with ^British ^Gas

(0.3)

12 A: 5|do you have a few ^moments

1751

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there (.) can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: Mrs HUM speakin'  
4 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's Anne calling here 2|from  
British  
Gas 3|a<sup>^</sup>'bout your home care agreement .hh 4|\_that you  
currently have with us .hh 5|\_do you have a few min-  
er 6|moments for a quick call

1752

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's (.) Anne calling 2|from British Gas  
5 C: [yeah  
6 A: [3|.hh re<sup>→</sup>garding your homecare a<sup>^</sup>greement you've got  
with us|  
7 C: okay regarding  
8 A: 4|your homecare agreement you have (.) 5|your  
heating coverage you have with us (0.2) .hh 6|do  
you <sup>^</sup>have a few moments I could speak to you

1800

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: who's calling  
4 A: 1|it's Anne 2|from British Gas|

(.)

5 C: how can I help

6 A: hi (.) hi Mrs HUM 2|it's ^Anne 2|from British ^Gas

4|just re→garding your home^care agreement

5|y'already ^have with us

1838

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ^Anne calling here 2|from British ^Gas

.hhh 3|re'garding your home^care agreement you have with

us 4|your central ^heating cover

1841

1 C: hello

(0.6)

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please

3 C: er who's calling I'm in the middle of eating at the  
moment

4 A: 1|it's ^Anne here 2|from British ^Gas 3|re→garding your

home^care agreement 4|your central ^heating cover|

1945

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: hi (.) it's (\*) speaking  
4 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↓Gas  
(.)4|it's ↓just regarding your home↑care agreement .hh  
5|you ↑have with us (.) 6|your central ↑heating agreement  
.hh

1949

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
(.)  
3 C: hello (\*\*\*\*) hello (\*\*)  
4 A: h- hi there  
5 C: hi there  
6 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|here fro- .hhh from  
British ↓Gas 3|regarding your ↑homecare agreement 4|your  
central ↑heating covers you have with us

## End of nesting

1916

(4.4)

4 C2: hello

5 A: hi Miss HUM

6 C: yes

7 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↓Gas  
3|re→garding your home↓care agreement .hhh|

8 C: yeah

9 A: 4|we're ↘↘just doing a little customer's review of your  
account 5|do y'ave a few ↑moments|

1918

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: who's speaking

3 A: it's Anne calling from British Gas

(8.3)

4 C: hello

(.)

5 A: hi Mr HUM

6 C: it is

7 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↓Gas  
3|re→garding your home↓care agreement (0.2) .hhhhh  
4|d'you →have a few moments for a quick ↓call



1927

1 C: hello

(0.2)

2 A: hi can I speak to Mr or Mrs HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: .hhh hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas|

(0.2)

5 C: okay

6 A: 2| re→garding your home↓care agreement

7 C: okay

8 A: 3|d'y ↑have a few ↓moments 4|for a quick ↓call|

1929

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

2 C: I'm Mrs HUM

3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas (0.3)

.hhh 3| re→garding your home↓care agreement .hhhh 4|d'y

↑have a few ↑moments 5|for a quick ↓call |

1950

1 C: hello

(0.4)

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: .hhh hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas

.hhhhhh 3| re→garding your home↓care agreement|

5 C: yes

6 A: 4|d'y ↑have a few ↓moments 5|for a quick ↓call |

1951

1 A: .hh hi- hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.2)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas (0.2)

.hhh 3| re→garding your home^care agreement|

(0.2)

4 C: yes

5 A: 4|d'y ^have a few ↑moments 5|for a quick ^call |

1953

(12.7)

8 C2: hello

9 A: .hh hi Mr HUM

(0.2)

10 C2: hello

11 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Anne 2|from British ↑Gas 3| re→garding

your home^care agreement .hh|

12 C: oh

13 A: 4|d'y ^have a few ↑moments 5|for a quick ^call

## 1 month after nesting

1835

1 C: hello

(0.3)

2 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

(0.5)

3 C: yeah speaking

(0.4)

4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↓Gas .hhh  
3| re→garding your home↓care agreement|

1903

1 C: hello

(0.2)

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

(0.4)

3 C: er you're speaking to HUM

4 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↓Gas  
.hhhhh 3| re→garding your home↓care agreement|

5 C: mm[m

6 A: 4|do y'ave a \*couple of minutes for a quick ↓call

1926

1 A: hi can I speak to Miss .hh HUM please

(0.4)

2 C: yes

3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's <sup>1</sup>Anne calling 2|from British Gas .hhh  
3|re→garding your homecare agreement|

4 C: oh yes

5 A: 4|do y'ave a couple o minutes 5|for a quick call

1945

1 C: hello

(0.2)

2 A: hi can I speak to a Mr or Mrs HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's <sup>1</sup>Anne calling 2|from British Gas (0.3)  
.hhhh 3| re→garding your homecare agreement|

5 C: yeah

6 A: 4|do y'ave a couple o minutes 5|for a quick call

1951

1 A: hi can I speak to Mr or Mrs HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's <sup>1</sup>Anne calling 2|from British Gas (0.2)  
.hhhhh 3| re→garding your homecare agreement| .hhh

4 C: mmm

5 A: 4|do y'ave a couple o minutes 5|for a quick call|

1952

1 A: hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.3)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas

(0.3) .hhhh 3|re→garding your ↑homecare agreement .hhhhh

4|do y've a ↓couple o minutes 5|for a quick ↓call |

## 2 months after nesting

1842

1 C: hell[o

(0.3)

2 A: [hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: (0.2) hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas

(0.3)

5 C: yes

6 A: 3|re→garding your three star ↑homecare agreement (0.9)

4|do y've a ↓couple of minutes 5|for a quick ↓call |

1900

1 A: hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please (2.3) hi can I speak to  
Mrs HUM

2 C: hello

(0.4)

3 A: hello Mrs HUM

4 C: speaking

5 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas

6 C: yes

7 A: 2|re→garding your three star ↑homecare agreement |

8 C: yes

9 A: 4|do y've a ↓couple of minutes 5|for a quick ↓call |

1940

1 C: hello

(0.8)

2 A: hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: .hh hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas

(0.5) .hhh 2|re<sup>→</sup>garding your three star ↑homecare  
agreement|

5 C: yes

6 A: 3|d'y have a couple of minutes for a quick ↓call|

1941

1 A: hi can I speak to (.) Mr HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas (0.3)

.hhhh 2|re<sup>→</sup>garding your three star agreement|

4 C: uhuh

5 A: 3|d'y have a couple of minutes for a quick ↓call|

1946

(16.0)

8 C2: hello there

9 A: hello there Mr HUM

10 C2: speaking

11 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas|

12 C2: yes

13 A: 3|re→garding your three star ↑homecare agreement|

.hhhhh 4|d'y have a ° couple of minutes for a quick call

1947

1 C: [hello

2 A: [hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please

3 C: yes you're speaking to me

4 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's ↑Anne calling 2|from British ↑Gas|

5 C: hello

6 A: hi there 3|re↗garding your three star ↑homecare  
agreement|

7 C: right

8 A: 4|do y've a couple of minutes 5|for a quick call |



Kerry-Ann

**First day of nesting**

1814

(7.0)

10 C2: hello

(0.6)

11 A: hiya (.) 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|from British Gas (\*)Mr HUM|

(0.4)

12 C2: yes

(0.4)

13 A: hiya 3|it's just a quick call 4|re→garding your three  
star agreement you have with us

1823

1 A: hiya (.) can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hiya (.) 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|from British Gas .hh 3|it's  
just a quick call 4|re→garding your three star  
agreement you have with us

1836

1 C: hello

2 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM

3 C: yeah speaking

4 A: hello 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|from British Gas .hh 2|it's  
just a quick call 3|re→garding your three star  
agreement you have with us (.)4|do you have a wee  
moment

1843

1 C: hello  
2 A: hiya can I speak to Mrs HUM  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hiya 1|it's er \Kerry-Ann 2|from British \Gas 2|it's  
\just a quick \call (.)3|re→garding your three star  
a\greement you have with us 4|do you \have a moment

1848

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hello 1|it's er \Kerry-Ann 2|from British \Gas .hhh  
3|it's \just a quick \call 4|re→garding your three star  
a\greement you have with us .hh |er 5|you →know the one  
6|→that er will cover your \central heating boiler  
5 C: uhuh  
6 A: 7|yep d'y' →have a \moment

1856

1 C: hallo  
2 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM  
3 C: who's speaking  
4 A: 1|it's er Kerry-Ann 2|from British Gas  
(.)  
5 C: yes  
(.)  
6 A: yes are you speaking yep  
7 C: pardon  
8 A: is this Mrs HUM yep  
9 C: it is yes  
10 A: yep um 2|it's just a quick call 3|re→garding your  
three star agreement you have with us

1904

1 A: hiya can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: sorry  
3 A: Mrs HUM  
4 C: yes who's speaking  
5 A: yep (.)hiya (.)1|it's er Kerry-Ann 2|from British Gas  
3|it's just a quick call 4|re→garding your three star  
agreement you have with us 5|do you have a wee moment

1917

(.)

7 C2: hello

8 A: hello is this Mr HUM

9 C2: yes

10 A: hi there 1|it's er \Kerry-Ann 2|from British \Gas 3|it's  
\just a (.)quick \call 4|re→garding the \homecare  
agreement 5|you →have \with us

1923

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please

2 C: yes speaking

3 A: hello 1|it's er \Kerry-Ann 2|from British \Gas 3|it's  
\just a quick \call 4|re→garding the \homecare  
agreement you have with us

4 C: oh yes

5 A: mhm yep 5|d'you \have a wee moment

## End of nesting

1838

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: pardon  
(0.3)  
3 A: can I speak to Mrs HUM  
4 C: speaking  
5 A: hello 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|→calling from British Gas  
.hhhh 3|it's →just a quick call 4|re→garding your  
homecare 4|agreement 5|d'you →have a moment to ↓speak

1842

(13.0)  
6 C2: hello  
(0.3)  
7 A: hello Mr HUM 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|→calling from British Gas  
.hhhhh 3| it's →just a quick call 4|re→garding  
your homecare agreement sir 5|d'you →have a moment to  
↓speak

1915

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
(0.3)  
3 A: hello 1|it's →just a quick call 2|from British Gas  
3|re→garding your kitchen appliance cover 4|you .have at  
the moment

1925

1 C: hello

2 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.3)

3 C: yes speaking

4 A: hello 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|→calling from British Gas|

4 C: [yes

5 A: [2|it's →just a quick call 3|re→garding your kitchen  
apliance cover 3|you have at the moment yep

1927

(10.3)

12 C2: hello

(0.2)

12 A: hello Mr HUM um 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|→calling from British  
Gas 3|it's just a quick call this evening 4|regarding  
your kitchen apliance cover you have

1930

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.4)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hello 1|it's Kerry-Ann 2|→calling from British Gas  
.hhhhh [3|it's →just a quick call 4|regarding your  
kitchen apliance cover 5|you →have at the moment

## 1 month after nesting

1816

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello can I speak to Miss HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: .hh hi 1|it's \just a quick \call 2|from ^British \Gas  
this evening .hhhh 2|re^garding your kitchen a^pliance  
cover you have|

1855

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi sir .hhh 1|it's \just a quick \call 2|from ^British  
\Gas this evening .hhh 3|re^garding your kitchen  
a^pliance cover

1859

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr and Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hiya 1|it's \just a quick \call 2|from ^British \Gas  
this evening .hhhh 2|re^garding your kitchen a^pliance  
cover

1922

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: (.) speakin'

3 A: hi sir 1|it's \jjust a quick \call 2|from ^British \Gas  
this evening .hhhh 2|re^garding your kitchen  
a^ppliance cover

1940

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.4)

2 C: speaking

(2.3)

3 A: Mrs HUM

4 C: yes

(0.3)

5 A: hi 1|it's ^just a quick \call 2|from ^British \Gas this  
evening .hhhh 3|re^garding your kitchen  
a^ppliance cover you have

1949

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM [please

2 C: [yeah speaking

3 A: hi sir 1|it's \jjust a quick \call 2|from ^British \Gas  
this evening .hhhh 2|re^garding your kitchen  
a^ppliance cover sir



1953

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please

(0.3)

2 C: that's me

(0.3)

3 A: hi sir 1|it's \↘just a quick ↓call 2|from ^British →Gas  
this ↘evening 3|re^garding your kitchen a↑ppliance cover  
sir

1957

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi 1|it's \↘just a quick ↓call 2|from ^British ↘Gas this  
evening .hhh 3|re^garding your kitchen a↑ppliance cover

LINDA

**First day of nesting**

1813

(.)

7 C2: hello

8 A: hi Mr HUM

9 C2: hello

10 A: hi there 1|it's a →quick †call 2|from Bri-ish †Gas

(.)3|er it's re→garding your three star †cover you have  
with us

(0.9)

11 C: uhuh

12 A: erm 3|is it con→venient to †speak with you

1823

1 C: hello

2 A: h::i good evening could I speak to a Mr or Mrs  
HUM please

3 C: she's not here (.) speaking

4 A: hi Mr HUM (.)1|erm it's †Linda 2|from British †Gas  
calling|

5 C: yes

6 A: 2|erm it's a →quick †call |with re→gards to your three  
star a†greement that you've got with us .hh |um 3|is it  
con→venient to †speak with you at the moment

1830

(.)

7 C2: hello

8 A: hello Mr HUM

9 C2: uhuh

10 A: hi there 1|my name's Linda 2|I'm calling from British  
Gas .hhh 3|um it's a quick call tonight 4|re→garding  
the three star a↑greement you've got with us at the  
moment

1845

1 A: hi good evening could I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: sorry which one do you want dear

3 A: erm Mr L. HUM

4 C: that's me

5 A: hi there Mr HUM .hh er 1|my →name's Linda  
(.)3|I'm calling from British Gas .h

6 C: oh yes

7 A: 4|it's (.) a →quick call 5|regarding your three star  
a↑greement that you have with us

8 C: yes

9 A: =erm (0.3) you know (.) 6|for your central heating .hhh  
7|is it okay to ↑speak with you at the moment

1900

- 1 A: hi good evening could I speak to Mr HUM please
- 2 B: yeah speaking
- 3 A: hi Mr HUM (.) um 1|my →name's /Linda (.)2| I'm →calling  
from British /Gas
- 4 B: uhuh
- 5 A: er it's a →quick /call 6|with regards to your three star  
a↑greement that you've got with us at the moment |.hh  
[is-
- 6 B: [yup
- 7 A: 7|is it con→venient to ↑speak with you just now|

1923

- 1 C: hello
- 2 A: hi there could I speak to Mrs HUM please
- 3 C: it is Mrs HUM speaking
- 4 A: hi Mrs HUM um 1|my name's /Linda  
(.)2|I'm ↘calling from British /Gas
- 5 C: yea::h=
- 6 A: =yea- 3|it's a →quick ↘call 4|re→garding your three star  
a↑greement that you've got with us (.) 4|\_for your  
→central /heating (.) 5|is it o→kay to ↑speak with you  
at the moment

1930

1 A: hi there good evening can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: (\*) speaking

3 A: hi Mr HUM u- 1|my →name's Linda (.)2|I'm \calling from  
British Gas [.hh

4 C: [yup

5 A: um 3|it's a →quick \call 4|re→garding your three star  
a↑greement that you've got with us [.hhh

6 C: [mhm

7 A: er 5|is it con→venient to ↑speak with you at the moment

## End of nesting

1726

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
(.)  
2 C: hello  
3 A: hello Mrs HUM  
4 C: yep  
5 A: hi there good evening (.) 1|my →name's ↓Linda (.) 2|I'm  
→calling from British ↓Gas (.)3|it's a →quick ↑call  
tonight 4| re→garding your three star agreement for the  
↓boiler (.)5| is it okay to ↓speak with you at the moment

1743

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: that's me  
3 A: hi there Mr HUM (.)1|my name's ↓Linda (.)2|I'm →calling  
from (.) British ↓Gas .hh 3|it's ↘just a quick ↑call  
tonight 4| re→garding your three star agreement for the  
↓boiler (.) 5|is it o→kay to ↓speak with you at the  
moment

1750

1 A: hello there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hello there Mr HUM 1|my name's Linda (.) .hh 2|I'm  
→calling from British Gas |  
4 C: hello  
5 A: hi there .h er 3|it's \*just a quick call tonight  
4|re→garding your three star agreement for the boiler  
(.) 5| is it okay to ↑speak with you at the moment |

1802

1 A: hello there can I speak to M- Mrs HUM please  
2 C: Mrs HUM speaking  
3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|my name's Linda 2|I'm →calling from  
British Gas |  
4 C: oh yeah  
5 A: er 3|it's a →quick call tonight 4|re→garding your  
three star a↑greement you've got 5|for your boiler  
(.)5|is it o→kay to ↑speak with you at the moment

1804

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello there (.) um could I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: hello  
4 A: hello Mrs HUM  
5 C: yeah  
6 A: hi there 1|my name's Linda (.) 2|I'm →calling from  
British Gas .h 3|it's →just a quick call tonight  
4|re\→garding your three star a\greement 5|for the boiler  
.h 5|is it o→kay to ↑speak with you at the moment

1806

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: Mr HUM speaking  
3 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|my name's Linda 2|I'm calling from  
British Gas  
4 C: yes  
5 A: 3|it's a quick call tonight 4|regarding your three  
star agreement 5|for the boiler (.)6|is it okay to  
↑speak with you at the moment

1808

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
3 C: pardon  
4 A: could I speak to Mrs HUM  
5 C: y:es  
6 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|my name's Linda (.)2|I'm calling from  
British Gas  
7 C: oh yes  
8 A: 3|it's a quick call tonight 4|regarding your three  
star agreement 5|for the boiler



## 1 month after nesting

1916

(11.7)

7 C2: hello

8 A: hello Mrs HUM

9 C2: yes

10 A: hi there good evening 1|my name's Linda (0.4) 2|I'm  
→calling from British Gas (0.3) .hhhhh er 3|it's a  
→quick call tonight 4|about your three star  
agreement you've got with us 5|for your boiler

11 C: mhm

12 A: um 6|is it o→kay to ↑speak with you at the moment

1918

(3.3)

5 C2: hello

6 A: h- h- hi there good evening sir .hh er 1|my →name's  
Linda (.) 2|I'm →calling from British Gas (0.2) .hhhh  
3|it's a →quick call tonight 4|con→cerning your three  
star agreement you have 5| for your boiler (0.2) .hh um  
6|is it o→kay to ↑speak with you at the moment

1919

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
(.)  
3 C: mister  
(.)  
4 A: yes please  
5 C: speakin'  
6 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|my name's Linda 2|I'm calling from  
British Gas (0.4) .h  
7 C: oh ri[ght yeah  
8 A: [erm (0.2) 3|it's a quick call tonight 4|about  
your three star agreement you have 5|for your boiler  
9 C: yea[h  
10 A: [6|is it okay to speak with you at the moment

1924

(4.4)  
7 C2: hello  
8 A: hello Mrs HUM  
(0.7)  
9 C2: yes  
10 A: hi there good evening 1|my name's Linda (.)2|I'm  
calling from British Gas  
11 C: yes  
12 A: erm 3|it's a quick call this evening 4|regarding your  
three star agreement you have 5| for the boiler .hhh  
um 6|is it okay to speak with you at the moment

1925

(11.2)

C2: hello

A: hello Mr HUM (0.7) hi there good evening 1|I'm \calling  
from British Gas .hhhhh um 3|it's a →quick call  
tonight 4|about your →three star agreement you have 5|  
for the boiler (0.4) um 6|is it con→venient to \speak  
with you at the moment

1926

A: hello there could I speak to Mr HUM please

(0.3)

C: who's speaking

A: hi there Mr HUM 1|I'm \calling from British Gas (0.3)  
.hhhhh um 2|it's a →quick call tonight 3|re→garding  
your three star agreement you have 4|for the boiler  
(0.2) .hhh um 5|is it o→kay to \speak with you at the  
moment

1943

A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

C: I'm Mrs HUM how can I help you

A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|my name's Linda (.)2|I'm calling  
from British Gas

(0.3)

C: mhm

A: um 3|it's a quick call tonight 4|regarding your  
three star agreement you have 5|for the boiler

C: mhm

A: right 5|is it convenient to speak with you at the  
moment| yeah

1944

A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM please

C: speaking

A: hi there Miss HUM 1|my name's Linda (.) 2|I'm calling  
from British Gas

C: yep

A: um 3|it's a quick call tonight 4|about your three  
star agreement you have with us 5|for your boiler  
(0.3) 6|um is it okay to speak with you at the moment

## 2 months after nesting

1912

- 1 C: hello
- 2 A: .hhhhh hello there can I speak to Mrs HUM please
- 3 C: speakin'
- 4 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|I'm \calling from British Gas .hhhhh  
2|it's a →quick call tonight 3|about your →three star  
agreement you have 4|for the boiler
- 5 C: [yeah (0.3) uhuh
- 6 A: 5|now is it o→kay to speak with you at the moment

1933

(5.5)

- 6 C2: hello
- 7 A: (.) hello Mr HUM
- 9 C2: yes
- 10 A: hi there good evening .hh 1|I'm \calling from British  
Gas .hhhh 2|it's a →quick call about your 3|→three  
star agreement you have 4|for the boiler
- 11 C: uhuh
- 12 A: 5|is it o→kay to speak with you for a moment

1936

1 A: hello there can I speak to Mrs HUM please

(0.5)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|I'm →calling from British ↗Gas .hhhhhh

2|it's a →quick ↗call tonight 3|a→bout your three star

a↗greement you have 4|for the ↗boiler (0.4) 5|is it

o→kay to ↗speak with you at the moment

1941

(14.0)

4 C2: hello

5 A: hello Mr HUM (0.5) hi there (.)1|I'm ↘calling from

British ↗Gas |.hhhhh er 2|it's a →quick ↗call 3|a→bout

your three star a↗greement you have 4|for the ↗boiler

(0.3)

6 C: [oh yeah

7 A: [5|is it okay to ↗speak with you (0.2) for a moment

1951

1 A: hello there can I speak to Mrs HUM please=

2 C: =er that's me

3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|I'm ↘calling from British ↗Gas. hhhh

4 C: mmm

5 A: er (.)2|it's a →quick ↗call tonight 3|about your →three

star a↗greement you have 4|for the ↗boiler

6 C: uhuh

7 A: .h um 5|now is it o→kay to ↗speak with you for a moment

1953

1 A: hello there can I speak to Mr HUM please

(.)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|I'm \calling from British ↓Gas .hhhh  
2|it's a quick ↓call 3|about your three star agreement  
you have with us 4|for the ↑boiler .hhhh right 6|is it  
(0.3) con→venient to ↑speak with you at the moment

Ross

**First day of nesting**

1805

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please

2 C: yep (\*\*\*)

(0.7)

3 A: hi there (.) 1|it's ↑Ross 2|from Scottish ↑Ga-  
3|((fast))er Scottish ↑Gas 4|\_have you got a ↑moment 5|to  
↓speak with  
u[s

4 C:

[hello

(1.1)

5 A: hi there 4|it's ↑Ross 5|from Scottish ↑Gas (.) 6|have you  
got a ↑minute 7|regarding your home↑care agreement

(0.9)

6 C: who's that again

(0.6)

7 A: 8|it's ↑Ross 9|from S-Sc-ish ↑Power (0.3) 10|Scottish  
↑Gas (0.3) ((fast)) 11|have you got a ↑minute 12|talk  
about your (.)↑homecare agreement



1806

1 C: hello  
(0.5)  
2 A: hi there (.) can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
(0.5)  
3 C: yup (0.5) right  
(0.3)  
4 A: hi there 1|it's ^Ross from 2| (0.6) British ^Gas |  
(0.3)  
5 A: [(\*\*\*\*\*)  
6 C: [oh (\*) (.) sorry say that again  
7 A: 3|it's ^Ross 4|fro::m British ^Gas |  
(0.6)  
8 C: mmm  
(0.4)  
9 A: hi there (.) er (0.4) 3|have you got a ^minute 4|to speak  
about your (.) ((fast)) ^homecare agreement you've got  
with us

1807

1 C: hello  
(0.2)  
2 A: hi there it's (0.2) er can I speak to a Mrs HUM please  
3 C: .hhh yeah who's speaking  
(0.3)  
4 A: hi there 1|it's ^Ross 2|fro::m (0.1) British ^Gas 3|I'm  
wonderin- 4|have you got a ^minute 5|to speak about your  
^homecare agreement

1809

1 C: hello

(0.3)

2 A: hi there (0.2) can I speak to a Mr HUM please

(0.4)

3 C: sorry

4 A: can I speak to a Mr HUM

5 C: that's me

6 A: .hh hi there (.) .hh er 1|it's 1Ross 2|fro::m British  
Gas 3|have you got a minute 4|to →speak about your  
homecare agreement

1811

1 A: hi there can I speak to a: (.) Mr HUM please

(0.2)

2 C: who's this

(0.5)

3 A: 1|it's 1Ross 2| fro::m ((fast)) British Gas 3|\_have you  
got a minute 4|to →speak about your homecare agreement

1812

1 C: four five eight nine

2 A: (.) hi there is a M- HUM there

(0.4)

3 C: yeah

(0.5)

4 A: hi there (.)1|it's 1Ross 2| fro::m ((fast)) British Gas  
3|\_have you got a minute 3|to →speak about your  
homecare agreement

1821

(1.1)

6 C2: hallo

7 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM

8 C2 .hhhhhhh speaking

(0.4)

9 A: hi 1|it's /Ross 2|from →British ^Gas here (.) e::r  
4|\_have you got a ^minute 5|t' speak about your ^homecare  
agreement

1823

(8.9)

4 C2: hello

(0.5)

5 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's ^Ross 2| from ((fast)) \^British  
/Gas 3|have you got a ^minute 4|to speak about your  
^homecare agreement

1826

(1.9)

12 C: hello

(0.4)

13 A: hi there 1|it's (.) ^Ross 2|from British ^Gas here 3|have  
you got a ^minute 4| to speak about your ^homecare  
agreement

1830

(6.8)

10 C2: hello

(0.3)

11 A: hi there 1|it's (.)1Ross 2|from British 1Gas (0.3) 3|and  
we're ↳just phoning about your ((fast)) ^homecare  
agreement 4|((fast))have you got a →minute to ↳speak to  
us

(0.4)

12 C: pardon

(0.3)

13 A: 5|it's 1Ross (.) 6|it's |from British 1Gas 7|→just about  
your ^homecare agreement

1832

(4.6)

6 C2: hello

7 A: hi there 1|it's 1Ross 2|from British 1Gas (0.5)3|and  
we're just →phoning about your ^homecare agreement

(0.5)

8 C2: yes

9 A: yep 3|((fast))have you got a minute to ↳speak about it

1834

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM please

(0.5)

2 C: erm there's a Mrs HUM here

3 A: oh sorry hah a Mrs HUM

4 C: yes

5 A: hi there (.)1|it's 1Ross |from 2British 3Gas

6 C: hiya

7 A: er (.)4just phoning 5about your 6homecare arrangement

1836

1 C: hello

2 A: .hhhh hi there is a Mrs HUM there

(0.6)

3 C: sorry

4 A: is a Mrs HUM there

(2.2)

5 C: who's speaking

6 A: 1|it's 1Ross 2|from 2British 3Gas (.)3|have you got a  
4minute to 5speak with us 4|about your 6homecare  
agreement

## End of nesting

1909

1 C: hello

2 A: (.) hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM

3 C: that's right

(0.3)

4 A: hi there (.)1|s' 1Ross 2|from British 1Gas

(0.4)

5 C: [oh yes

6 A: [(0.4) hiya (.)2| ((fast)) just a quick 1call 3|regarding  
your 1kitchen appliances

IP 2: creak on *appliances*

1913

(3.9)

5 C2: hello

(0.3)

6 A: hi there Mr HUM

(0.4)

7 C: hello

8 A: hi there 1|it's 1Ross 2|from British 1Gas

(0.2)

9 C: hi

10 A: 2| quick 1call 3| regarding your 1kitchen appliances you've  
got out with us

1931

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM

3 C: speaking

4 A: hi there 1|it's ↖Ross 2|from →British ↖Gas

(0.5)

5 C: u[huh

6 A: [2|quick ↖call 3|regarding your (1.1) er 4|your ↖kitchen  
appliances you've got withou- out with us

1932

1 C: hello

(1.7)

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM

3 C: speaking

4 A: hi there 1|it's ↖Ross 2|from British ↖Gas

(0.5)

5 C: British Gas

6 A: (.) yep

7 C: yes

8 A: (.)3|just a quick ↖call 4|regarding your (.)↖kitchen  
appliances y'got with us Mrs HUM

1935

(1.9)

9 C2: hello

10 A: hi there Mrs HUM

(0.7)

11 C2: hello

12 A: hi there 1|it's †Ross 2|from British †Gas (0.5) 3|just a  
quick †call 4|regarding your †kitchen appliances you've  
got out with us

1942

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM

(1.8)

2 C: hello

(0.3)

3 A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM

(0.3)

4 C: speaking

5 A: hi there 1|it's †Ross 2|from British †Gas

(0.4)

6 C: hello

7 A: hi 3|it's just a quick †call 4|regarding your †kitchen  
appliances you've got out with us



1945

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM

2 C: she's out at the moment sorry

3 A: is that Mr HUM

4 C: yes

5 A: hi there 1|it's Ross 2|from British Gas (0.6) 3|\>just a  
quick call 4|regarding your kitchen appliances you've  
got out with us

DAVID

**First day of nesting**

1810

1 A: hello  
2 C: hello  
3 A: can I (.) talk to a Mr: HUM please  
4 C: can I ask who's calling  
5 A: 1|it's ↑Dave 2|\_f- Bri-ish ↓Gas  
6 C: oh right er what's it regarding  
7 A: er Mr HUM 1|\_just a quick ↓call (.) 2| f- →Bri-ish ↓Gas  
3|re→garding your three star a↑greement (.)4|can you  
↓spare a moment of your ↑time

1812

1 A: hello  
2 C: hello  
3 A: hi could I speak to a Miss HUM please  
(dog barking)  
4 C: I'm sorry hang on a minute (0.4) ((aside)) quiet(.) um  
what did you say  
(0.5)  
5 A: er I'm lookin' to speak to a Miss HUM please  
6 C: .hhhhh b- speaking  
7 A: hi 1|it's ↑David calling 2|from Bri-ish ↓Gas  
(1.5)  
8 C: from where  
9 A: 3|↑David 4|from (.) British ↓Gas ((loud))  
(0.6)  
10 C: British Gas  
(0.2)

11 A: yeah (.)3|\↘\just a quick ↓call 4|re→garding your three  
star a↑greement

1814

1 C: hello

2 A: hi can I speak to a Mr HUM please

3 C: that's me

4 A: hi (.)1|it's ↘David calling 2|from Bri-ish ↑Gas (.) 3|can  
I ↘spare a moment of your ↑time|

(1.4)

5 C: no (.) wha y- y- what are you selling now

(6.8)

6 A: sorry

7 C: w- I'm- (0.6) no I don't wanna (.) .hh what it is it you  
want

(0.5)

8 A: 3|oh it's ↘just regarding your three star a↑greement

1821

1 A: hello

2 C: hello

3 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

4 C: speaking

5 A: hi 1|it's ↘David calling 2|from Bri-i- er 3|\↘Bri-ish ↑Gas  
4|re→garding your three star a↑greement

6 C: uhuh

7 A: er (.)5|(\*) you ↘spare a moment of your ↑time |

1827

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hi 1|it's David calling 2|from Bri-ish Gas|  
(.)  
5 C: who  
6 A: British Gas  
7 C: yes  
8 A: er 3|just a quick call 4|re garding your three star  
a greement

1829

(.)  
8 C2: hello  
9 A: hello Mr HUM  
10 C2: yes  
11 A: hi 1|it's David 2|from Bri-ish Gas (.)3|just a quick  
call 4|re garding your three star a greement you have  
with us (3.8) 5|hello could you ((fast)) spare a moment

1836

(.)

8 C2: hello  
9 A: hi Mrs HUM  
10 C2: yep  
11 A: er 1|it's \just a \quick call 2|from Bri-ish Gas  
12 C2: oh yes  
13 A: 3|it's a call 4|it's re\garding your three star  
a\greement you have with us

1845

1 C: hello  
2 A: hi Mr HUM  
3 C: yes speaking  
4 A: 1|hi it's \David calling 2|from Bri-ish Gas (.) 3|\just  
a quick call 4|re\garding your three star a\greement

1847

1 A: hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
(2.5)  
3 A: hi (.)1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas  
(0.5)  
4 C: yes  
5 A: 2|it's \just a quick call 3|re\garding your homecare  
a\greement 3|you \have with us

1848

(0.4)  
8 C2: hello  
(0.4)

9 A: hi Mr HUM (.)1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas

(0.7)

10 C2: pardon

(0.40

11 A: 1|it's ((slow)) \David calling 2|from British Gas

(0.5)

12 C2: yeah

13 A: 3|it's \just a quick call |re→garding your homecare  
a↑greement

1852

1 C: hello

2 A: hi Mrs HUM

3 C: yep

4 A: hi 1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas

5 C: right

6 A: aye 2|it's \just a quick call |re→garding your  
homecare a↑greement

1857

1 A: hi can I speak to Mrs HUM please

2 C: .hh speaking

3 A: hi Mrs HUM (.)1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas

4 C: oh yeah

5 A: hi (.)2|it's \just a quick call |re→garding your  
homecare a↑greement

IP 1: has a bit of creak on *gas*

1859

1 A: .hhhhhh hi Mrs HUM

(0.3)

2 C: y:::ep

(0.4)

3 A: hi 1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas  
(.)3|it's \just a quick call 4|re→garding your  
homecare a↑greement

1907

1 C: hello

(0.4)

2 A: .hhhh hi can I speak to Miss- Mrs HUM please

(0.9)

3 C: oh (.) er speaking

4 A: 1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas  
(.)3|\just a quick call 4|re→garding your homecare  
a↑greement

1909

1 A: hi can I speak to a Mrs HUM please .hhh

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi (.) Mrs HUM (.)1|it's \David calling 2|from British  
Gas

(0.7)

4 C: oh right yeah

5 A: hi (.)2|it's \just a quick \call |re→garding your  
homecare agreement

1911

1 C: hello

(0.4)

2 A: hi can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

3 C: yeah speaking

4 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's \David calling 2|from British Gas

(0.6)

5 C: okay

6 A: yeah 3|it's \just a quick \call 4|re→garding your  
homecare agreement

1917



1 C: hello

(0.3)

2 A: hi Mr HUM

3 C: this is

3 A: .hh (0.2) hi Mr HUM 1|it's \David calling 2|from British

↑Gas here

(0.4)

4 C: yes

5 A: er 2|\↘\↘just a quick ↓call |re→garding your homecare

a↑greement

### End of nesting

1852

1 C: 'ello

(0.3)

2 A: hello can I speak to a Miss HUM please  
3 C: speakin'  
4 A: hi there Miss 1|it's David calling 2|from British Gas  
(0.3)  
5 C: hiya  
6 A: yeah (.) 2|just a quick call 3|regarding the kitchen  
appliances 4|you have under cover with us

1857

1 A: hi can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
2 C: I'm afraid he's not in at the moment  
3 A: okay is that Mrs HUM  
(0.4)  
4 C: yes  
5 A: oh hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's David calling 2|from British Gas  
(0.3)  
6 C: right  
7 A: yeah (0.3) 3|just a quick call 4|regarding your (.) er  
kitchen appliances 5|you have under cover with us

1919

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello (.) can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
3 C: yes who's speaking

4 A: Hi Mr HUM 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from British Gas  
5 C: .hhhh (0.5) oh yes  
6 A: yeah (.) 3|just a quick call 4|regarding your kitchen  
appliances 4|you have under cover with us

1935

1 A: hi can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
(1.1)  
2 C: er speaking  
3 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from British Gas  
(0.6)  
4 C: aye  
5 A: yeah (.)3|just a quick call 4|regarding your kitchen  
appliances 4|you have covered with us

1937

1 A: hello can I speak to a Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from British Gas  
4 C: yes  
(0.2)  
5 A: yeah 2|just a quick call 3|regarding your kitchen  
appliances 4|you have covered with us

1953

1 A: hi can I speak to a Mrs HUM please  
2 C: this is Mrs HUM  
3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from British Gas  
4 C: .hhh uhuh

5 A: (0.3) yeah (0.2) 3|just a quick call 4|regarding the  
↑kitchen appliances 5|you have covered with us

1955

1 C: hello

(0.2)

2 A: hi can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

(0.5)

3 C: who

(0.4)

4 A: Mrs HUM

5 C: Mrs HUM speaking

6 A: hi there Miss 1|it's 1 David calling 2|from British Gas

(0.5)

7 C: yes

8 A: yeah .hh 2|just a quick call 3|regarding the ↑kitchen  
appliances 4|you have covered with us

### 1 month later

1830

1 A: hello can I speak to a Mr HUM please

2 C: er speaking

3 A: hi there sir 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from Bri-ish \Gas|  
4 C: (.) oh yes  
5 A: hiya how are you (0.3) you okay  
6 C: I'm fine  
7 A: yep (0.4) 2|just \giving you a wee \call 3|regarding your  
4|\kitchen appliances you have covered with us

1843

1 A: hallo=  
2 C: =hello  
3 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please  
4 C: speaking  
5 A: hi there sir 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from British \Gas|  
(0.9)  
6 C: pardon  
(0.4)  
7 A: 3|it's 1|David calling 3|from British \Gas  
(0.3)  
8 C: ah  
9 A: hiya (0.3) how are you  
(0.4)  
10 C: alright  
11 A: you okay (0.4) 4|just a wee \call 5|regarding your  
\kitchen appliances (.) 6|d'you \have a moment

1942

1 C: .hhhh hello  
2 A: .hhh hello can I speak to a Miss HUM please  
3 C: .hhhhhhh speakin' hhhh

4 A: hi there Miss 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from Bri-ish \Gas  
(0.3)  
5 C: oh right  
6 A: hiya (0.2) 3|\just a wee call 4|re<sup>g</sup>arding your three  
star a<sup>g</sup>reement 5|((fast)) d'you have a moment

1952

1 A: hello can I speak to a Mr HUM please  
2 C: speakin' hi  
3 A: hi there sir 1|it's 1|David calling 2|from Bri-ish \Gas  
(0.3)  
4 C: hi David  
5 A: hiya how are you  
6 C: (\*\*) not bad not b[ad  
7 A: [not bad (0.4) 3|\just a wee call  
4|regarding your kitchen appliances you have covered  
with us

## 2 months later

1847

1 A: hello can I speak to a Mr or Mrs HUM please

2 C: that's me

(0.2)

3 A: oh hi there Miss 1|it's +David calling 2|from Bri-ish  
Gas

(0.3)

4 C: oh hello there=

5 A: =hiya (0.4) 2|it was \jjust a wee call 3|regarding the  
^kitchen appliances you have on cover with us (0.4) yeah  
4|have you \ugot a moment

1849

1 A: hello can I speak to a Miss HUM please

2 C: (.) speakin'

3 A: (.) .hhhh oh hi there Miss 1|it's +David calling 2|from  
British \uGas

(0.2)

4 C: `ello

5 A: hiya (0.4) er 2|it's \jjust a wee call 3|regarding the  
^kitchen appliances you have on cover with us

1853

1 C: hello

2 A: .hhh hello can I speak to a Mr HUM please=  
3 C: =speaking  
4 A: oh hiya sir 1|it's †David calling 2|from British Gas  
5 C: mmm  
6 A: hiya (0.4) 2|it's †just a wee call 3|regarding the  
^kitchen appliances you have on cover with us

1900

1 C: hello  
(0.3)  
2 A: hello can I speak to a Dr HUM please  
3 C: yeah speaking  
4 A: oh hi there 1|it's †David calling 2|from British Gas  
5 C: y::::eah  
6 A: yeah (0.3) er 2|†just a call 3|regarding the ^kitchen  
appliances you have on cover with us 4|have you got a  
moment

1902

1 A: hello can I speak to a Dr HUM please  
2 C: yeah speaking  
3 A: (0.3) oh hi there sir 1|it's †David calling 2|from  
British Gas  
4 C: .hhh hi there  
5 A: hiya (0.3) er 3|†just a wee call 4|regarding the  
^kitchen appliances you have on cover with us (1.1)  
5|have you got a moment

1906

(7.2)



7 C2 hello  
8 A: hello Mr HUM  
9 C2 yes  
10 A: (0.2) hi there sir 1|I'm →calling from Bri-ish \Gas (0.7)  
2|\↘just a wee call 3|regarding the kitchen appliances  
you have on cover with us 4|have you got a moment

1913

(11.0)  
6 C2: hello  
7 A: hello Mr HUM  
8 C: speaking  
9 A: hiya (.)1|it's David calling 2|from Bri-ish \Gas  
10 C: yes  
11 A: er 3|\↘just a wee call 4|regarding the kitchen  
appliances you have on cover with us 5|have you got a  
wee moment

1928

1 C: hello  
(0.5)  
2 A: hello can I speak to a Mr HUM  
(0.5)  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: .hh hi there sir 1|it's David calling 2|from British  
Gas  
(0.5)  
5 C: who is it sorry  
(0.4)  
6 A: British Gas

(0.3)

7 C: British Gas

8 A: (.) yeah

9 C: (.) yeah

10 A: yep (.) er 3|↘↘just a wee call 4|regarding the kitchen  
appliances you have on cover with us (.) 5|have you got  
a wee moment

1952

1 A: hello can I speak to a Miss HUM please

2 C: yeah speaking

3 A: oh hi there Miss 1|it's David calling 2|from British  
Gas

(0.2)

4 C: hi there

5 A: hiya (0.4) er 3|↘↘just a wee call 4|regarding the  
kitchen appliances you have on cover with us (.) 5|have  
you got a wee moment

RYAN

### Day 1 nesting

1849

1 A: hello can I speak to a Mr-s Mr or Mrs HUM please

(0.5)

2 C: er Dick HUM speaking  
3 A: hello sir 1|it's er \actually 1Ryan 2|from Bri-ish 1Gas  
3|\just a quick 1call 4|regarding your a1greement with us  
(.) 5|is it a suitable 1time for yourself

1856

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello is Mrs HUM there

(0.2)

3 C: .h pardon

(0.3)

4 A: is Mrs P HUM there

(2.0)

5 C: who is it

(5.0)

6 A: 1|it's er 1Ryan 2|from Bri-ish 1Gas 3|it's re\garding the  
current a1greement you have with us

1857

1 C: hello

(0.3)

2 A: hello could I speak to a Mrs HUM please

3 C: who's speaking

4 A: 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|from British ↑Gas  
5 C: sorry  
6 A: 3|it's ↑Ryan 4|from British ↑Gas  
7 C: oh speakin I'm just on my way out though

(0.4)

8 A: it- what it is is was actually 5|it was just a quick  
↓call 6|re→garding your current a↑greement with us er  
7|is it a →suitable time for your↑self

1858

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello Mr HUM

(0.6)

3 C: it is  
4 A: erm 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|from British ↑Gas here 3|it's ↘↘just  
a quick call regarding your current a↑greement with us  
(1.5) 4|is there a suitable ↑time (.) 5|for your↑self

1859

(11.5)

7 C2: hello  
8 A: hello Mrs HUM  
9 C: mhm  
10 A: hello 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|from Bri-ish ↑Gas here (.)3| ↘↘just  
a quick ↓call (0.2) er 4|regarding your a↑greement with  
us::: 5|is there a suitable ↑time for yourself

1901

1 C: hello  
(0.3)  
2 A: hello can I speak to Mr or Mrs HUM please  
(0.3)  
3 C: who's calling

4 A: 1| ↑Ryan 2|from British ↓Gas

(0.3)

5 C: oh hi

6 A: thank you

7 C: .hhhhhhhhh how can I help

(0.6)

8 A: erm 3|it's ↘actually just a quick ↓call 4|regarding your  
a↑greement with us::: 5|is it a suitable ↑time for  
yourself

1902

1 A: hello Mr (0.9) hello (0.3) Mr W HUM

(1.4)

2 C: yeah what d'you want

(0.5)

3 A: 1|it's Bri-ish ↑Gas here 2|it's ↘actually just a quick  
↓call 3|regarding your a↑greement with us::: 4|is it a  
suitable ↑time for yourself

1908

1 C: hello

2 A: (.) hello could I speak to a Mr Wh- HUM sorry

3 C: speaking

4 A: (\*) er 1|it's 1Ryan 2|from Bri-ish 4Gas (.) 3|s'2just a  
quick 4call 4|regarding your a1greement with us:: 5|a  
suitable 1time for yourself

1929

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: hhh speaking

(0.3)

3 A: er Mr HUM (\*\*)1it's 1Ryan 2|from Bri-ish 1Gas here 3|it  
was 2just a quick 4call 4| regarding::: your a1greement  
with us:: 5|it is a suitable 1time for yourself

## End of nesting

1725

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas .hhh (0.3)

3|s'→just a quick ↓call 4|regarding your ↑homecare  
agreement

1738

1 C: hello=

2 A: =hello::: can I speak to Mrs HUM

3 C: yeah this is Mrs HUM

4 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas

5 C: yeah

6 A: 3|s'→just a quick ↓call 4|regarding your ↑homecare  
agreement

1739

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM

2 C: speaking please

3 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas

4 C: right

5 A: 3|s'→just a quick ↓call 4|regarding your ↑homecare  
agreement

1741

1 A: hello can I speak to Mrs HUM  
2 C: yeah speakin'  
3 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas  
4 C: yes  
5 A: 3|s'→just a quick ↓call 4| regarding ↑homecare  
agreement

1742

1 C: hello  
2 A: hello (.) could I speak to Mrs HUM  
(.)  
3 C: speaking  
4 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas  
5 C: yes  
6 A: 3|it's →just a quick ↓call 4| regarding your ↓homecare  
agreement

1746

1 A: hello can I speak to a Mrs HUM  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan here 2|from British ↓Gas  
4 C: oh right  
5 A: 3|it's →just a quick ↓call 4| regarding your ↑homecare  
agreement



## 1 month later

1820

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM

(0.4)

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Sir 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|with British ↑Gas (1.1) 3|just a  
quick ↓call 4|regarding the ↑homecare agreement

1900

1 A: hello could I speak to Mr HUM

(1.9)

2 C: I'm speaking yes

(0.2)

3 A: hi Sir 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|at British ↑Gas (0.5)

4 C: yeah

5 A: 2|it's a quick ↓call 3|regarding the ↑homecare agreement

1902

1 C: hello

2 A: hello (.) can I speak to Mrs HUM

3 C: yup

4 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|with British ↑Gas

(0.3)

5 C: yup

6 A: 3|it's a quick ↓call 4|regarding your ↑homecare agreement

1907

1 A: hello (.) could I speak to Mrs HUM  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|with British ↑Gas  
(0.7)  
4 C: [yes  
5 A: [2|it's (.) quick ↓call 3|regarding your three ↓star  
agreement

1929

1 C: hello  
(.)  
2 A: hello Miss HUM  
3 C: yes  
4 A: hi there 1|it's ↑Ryan 2|with British ↑Gas=  
5 C: =yes I know the voice well  
(0.4)  
6 A: hello  
7 C: .hhh hello  
(.)  
8 A: hi 2|it was a quick ↓call 3|regarding the ↑↑homecare  
agreement

**2 months later**

1805

1 C: hello

2 A: hello Mr HUM

3 C: hello

4 A: hi there 1|it's Ryan 2|at British Gas

(0.3)

5 C: oh yeah

6 A: hi Sir (0.3) 2|it was a quick call 3|re→garding the  
homecare agreement

1825

1 A: hello could I speak with Mrs HUM

(0.4)

2 C: m- er speaking yes Mrs HUM

3 A: Mrs HUM hi there 1|it's Ryan 2|at British Gas

(0.6)

4 C: yes

5 A: 3|it was a 1|quick call 4|re→garding your homecare  
agreement

1856

1 A: hello could I speak to Mr HUM

(1.2)

2 C: speaking

(0.4)

3 A: hi Sir 1|it's Ryan 2|at British Gas

(0.4)

5 C: yes

4 A: 2|it's a →quick †call 3|regarding your †homecare  
agreement

1917

1 C: hello

(0.3)

2 A: hello could I speak to Mr HUM

3 C: who's calling

(0.4)

4 A: it's is that Mrs HUM

5 C: er yep

6 A: hi there sorry about that 1|it's †Ryan 2|at British †Gas

7 C: oh yeah

(0.3)

8 A: 3|it was a †quick call 4|regarding your †homecare  
agreement

1931

1 C: hello

2 A: hello Mr HUM

3 C: yep

(0.3)

4 A: hi Sir 1|it's †Ryan 2|at British †Gas

(0.4)

5 C: right

6 A: 3|it was a →quick †call 4|regarding your †homecare  
agreement

1935

1 C: h[ello  
2 A: [hello (.) could I speak to Mrs HUM  
(0.2)  
3 C: er:::: you're speaking to her  
(.)  
4 A: hi there 1|it's Ryan 2|at British Gas  
5 C: yeah  
6 A: 3|it was a quick call 4|regarding your homecare  
agreement

IP 2: lots of creak at the beginning

1937

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr or Mrs HUM  
(1.2)  
2 C: this is Mr HUM  
(0.5)  
3 A: hi Sir 1|it's Ryan 2|at British Gas  
(0.9)  
4 C: er hello Ryan  
(0.6)  
5 A: 2|it was a quick call 3|regarding your homecare  
agreement

1940

1 A: hello can I speak to Mr HUM

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Sir 1|it's 1Ryan at British 1Gas

4 C: oh yeah

(0.2)

5 A: hi (0.6) 2|it was a quick 1call 3|regarding your  
1|homecare agreement

1941

(4.5)

5 C2: hello

(0.3)

5 A: hi Sir 1|it's 1Ryan 2|at British 1Gas

6 C2: oh yeah h- how can I help you

7 A: 3|it was a quick 1call 4|regarding your 1|homecare  
agreement

DANIEL

**Day 1 nesting**

1828

(.)

11 C: hello

12 A: hi Mr HUM it's 1|↑Daniel here 2|\calling from British  
↑↑Gas this [evening

13 C: [mhm

14 A: .hh 3|it's re\garding your ↑contract you have with us  
|erm 4|°could I grab a few ↑minutes off you 5|to \tell  
you about some ↑special offers

1841

1 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: who's speaking please

3 A: hi 1|it's er ↑Daniel 2|from Bri-ish ↑Gas

4 C: yeah (.) speaking

5 A: oh right okay e::rm 3|I'm \calling you 4|regarding the  
↑↑contract you hold with us

6 C: ya

7 A: er 5|°could I grab a few ↑minutes off you

1845

1 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 B: er just a moment please

3 A: thank you very much

(.)

4 C: hello

5 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's Daniel here 2|calling from Bri-ish  
Gas this evening 3|regarding your contract

6 C: yeah

7 A: erm 4| could I (.)grab a few minutes of your attention

1846

1 C: hello

2 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM

3 C: speaking

4 A: hi Mr HUM (.) 1|it's Daniel 2|from Bri-ish Gas calling  
you this evening=

5 C: =oh r[ight

6 A: [2|could I grab a few minutes of your time

1848

1 C: hello

2 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

3 C: who's calling please

4 A: 1|it's Daniel 2|from Bri-ish Gas

5 C: what's it about

(.)

6 C: 3|it's just a courtesy call 3|about our kitchen  
appliance care package



1854

1 C: hello

2 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

3 C: yeah speaking

4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Daniel here 2|from Bri-ish ↑Gas  
calling you this evening 3|regarding your ↑contract

5 C: yeah

6 A: erm 4|can I grab a few ↑minutes off you

1856

1 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Daniel here 2|from Bri-ish ↑Gas  
calling you this evening (.) 3|could I →grab a few  
↓minutes 4|to go →over some ↓offers

## End of nesting

1726

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: yes speaking  
3 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's ↑Daniel here 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British \Gas  
4 C: oh yes  
5 A: hiya (.) 3|it's →just a wee quick ↑call 4|in re\gards to  
your er ↑homecare agreement 5|that you've \got with us  
(.)6|at the \moment  
6 C: right  
7 A: 5|do you ↗have a spare \moment

1728

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: yes (.) speaking  
3 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's \Daniel here 2|calling you from Scottish  
\Gas  
4 C: oh right  
5 A: 3|it's ↘\ujust a wee quick ↑call 4|about ↘ your ↑homecare  
agreement 5|that you've →got with us at the \moment  
6|have you got a spare \minute | I promise I won't keep  
you long Mr HUM

1808

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's 1|Daniel here 2|and I'm 1|calling you  
3|from British Gas

5 C: hello

6 A: 4|it's 2|just a wee quick 1|call 5|in regards to your 6|  
1|homecare agreement 7|that you have with us at the  
moment Mrs HUM

7 C: yes

8 A: 7|do you have a spare moment

1809

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Miss HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Miss HUM 1|it's 1|Daniel here 2|1|calling you from  
British Gas

4 C: oh right yeah

5 A: hi 3|it's 2|just a wee quick 1|call 4|in regards to your  
1|homecare agreement 5|that you have with us at the  
moment

6 C: uhuh

7 A: 6|have you got a spare moment

1844

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please

3 C: yes speaking

4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's 1Daniel here 2|.calling you from British  
Gas

5 C: yeah

6 A: 3|it's \>\>just a wee quick call 4|in regards to your  
↑homecare agreement 5|that you have with us Mr HUM

7 C: yeah

8 A: 6|do you have a spare moment at all

1847

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mr HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's \>Daniel calling you 2|from \*Scottish Gas

4 C: yep

5 A: 3|it's \>\>just a wee quick call 4|in regards to your  
central ↑heating care agreement 5|that you ↑have with us

6 C: uhuh

7 A: 6|I hope you've got a moment

1857

1 A: hi there can I speak to a Mrs HUM please  
2 C: yeah speaking  
3 A: hi Mrs HUM 1|it's \Daniel here 2|^\calling you from  
British Gas  
4 C: oh yes  
5 A: hi there 3|I'm \calling 4|about your \homecare agreement  
5|that you →currently \have with us Mrs HUM  
6 C: yes  
7 A: 5|do you →have a spare \moment 6|I \promise I won't \keep  
you \long

1900

1 B: hello  
2 A: hi there I'm calling for Mr HUM please  
3 B: speaking  
4 A: hi Mr HUM 1|it's \Daniel here 2|from British Gas  
5 B: uhuh  
6 A: 3|I'm \actually calling in regards to the \kitchen  
a\ppliance care 4|that you've \got with us at the moment  
7 B: right  
8 A: do you ^\have a- a \spare \moment

## 1 month later

1827

1 A: hi there (.) can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi there 1|my 1|name's Daniel 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British 1|Gas 3|with regards to .hh your 1|homecare  
agreement

1831

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi there 1|my 1|name's Daniel 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British 1|Gas 3|it's about the 1|kitchen appliances  
|that you've got covered with us Mrs HUM

1925

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: HUM speaking yeah  
3 A: hi there 1|my 1|name's Daniel 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British 1|Gas 3|it's about your 1|kitchen contract  
4|that you have with us at the moment sir

1928

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mrs HUM [please  
2 C: [yeah speaking  
3 A: hi there Mrs HUM 1|it's \Daniel here 2|→calling from  
British 1Gas 3|it's about the 1kitchen appliances 4|that  
you've got 1covered with us at the moment

1932

1 A: hi can I speak to Mr HUM please  
2 C: speaking  
3 A: hi there 1|my 1name's Daniel 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British 1Gas 3|it's re→garding your kitchen  
appliance contract 4|that you've \got with us at the  
moment

1936

1 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please  
(0.3)  
2 C: yeah speaking  
3 A: hi there 1|my 1name's Daniel 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British 1Gas 3|regarding the 1kitchen contract  
4|that you've \got with us at the moment

1937

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM please

(0.3)

3 C: yeah I'm speaking

4 A: hi there 1|my 1|name's Daniel 2|and I'm →calling you  
from British 1|Gas 3|it's about your 1|kitchen appliances  
4|that you've got 1|covered with us at the moment

1955

1 A: hi there can I speak to Miss HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi Miss HUM 1|it's 1|Daniel here 2|→calling from British  
1|Gas 3|it's about the 1|kitchen appliance contract 4|that  
you've 1|got with us

1958

1 C: hello

2 A: hi there can I speak to Mr HUM pl[ease

3 C: [yes speaking

4 A: hi there 1|my 1|name is Daniel 2|and I'm 1|calling you  
from British 1|Gas 3|about the 1|kitchen appliance  
contract 4|that you've 1|got with us at the moment



## 2 months later

1834

1 C: hello

(0.2)

2 A: hello there can I speak to Miss HUM please

3 C: speaking

4 A: .h hi there I'm calling you from Bri-ish Gas Miss HUM

5 C: yeah

6 A: 1|it's \just a quick \call 2|about your (.)↑services  
agreement

1906

1 C: hello

(0.2)

2 A: hi there can I speak to Miss HUM

3 C: (\*) speaking

4 A: hi Miss HUM 1|it's \Daniel here 2|\calling you from  
Bri-ish \Gas

(0.3)

5 C: uhuh

6 A: 3|s'just a quick \call 4|about your ↑services agreement

1933

1 A: hello there (.) can I speak to Mr HUM please

2 C: speaking

3 A: hi there Mr HUM 1|it's Daniel here 2|→calling you from  
Bri-ish Gas

(0.4)

4 C: okay

5 A: 3|s'\just a quick call (.) about your home services  
agreement

## Appendix III

```
#praat script
scriptName$ = "censored.praat"
version$ = "2006:05:12"
#author: Daniel Hirst
#email: daniel.hirst@lpl.univ-aix.fr

#purpose: replace parts of a Sound with a hum
#requires: one Sound file and one TextGrid file both selected
#the form allows you to specify which tier (default 2) contains the
#labels of the portions of the sound which are to be censored
#as well as the name of the label identifying them (default "hum").
```

form select the tier and the labels of the parts of the sound you want to censure

```
natural Tier 2
word target hum
natural minF0 65
natural maxF0 250
```

endform

```
if numberOfSelected("Sound") <> 1 or numberOfSelected("TextGrid") <> 1
    pause Please select one Sound and one TextGrid
endif
```

```
mySound = selected("Sound")
name$ = selected$("Sound")
myTextGrid = selected("TextGrid")
select mySound
finish = Get finishing time
frequency = Get sampling frequency
To Pitch... 0.01 minF0 maxF0
myPitch = selected("Pitch")
select myPitch
To Sound (hum)
Override sampling frequency... frequency
myHum = selected("Sound")
select myPitch
Remove
```

```
select myTextGrid
nLabels = Get number of intervals... tier
lastStart = 0
end = 0
for iLabel from 1 to nLabels
    select myTextGrid
    label$ = Get label of interval... tier iLabel
    if label$ = target$
        start = Get starting point... tier iLabel
```

```
end = Get end point... tier iLabel
if start > lastStart
select mySound
Extract part... lastStart start Rectangular 1.0 no
endif
select myHum
Extract part... start end Rectangular 1.0 no
lastStart = end
endif
endif
endfor
```

```
if lastStart < finish
select mySound
select mySound
Extract part... lastStart finish Rectangular 1.0 no
endif
select all
minus mySound
minus myTextGrid
minus myHum
Concatenate
Rename... 'name$'-'target$'
myNewSound = selected("Sound")
```

```
select all
minus mySound
minus myTextGrid
minus myNewSound
Remove
select myNewSound
```

