

repair company phone call

In the following text, Hannah (H) phones a gas-heater repair company to get her heater fixed. Emily (E) is the receptionist who answers the call.

The following transcription key has been used.

<A A>	fast-paced utterance	?	questioning intonation
<L L>	slow-paced utterance	/	rising pitch
(.)	very short pause	\	falling pitch
(..)	short pause	^	emphatic stress
(...)	longer pause	@@	laughter
--	truncated utterance	<HH>	intake of breath
,	continuing intonation	[]	overlapping speech
.	final intonation		

1. E: Good morning/
2. Gas works/
3. Emily speaking/
4. H: Oh hello Emily\
5. I've got a heater (.) which I tried to put on earlier today,
6. <A now that it's suddenly got a bit colder @@ A>
7. and I can't seem to get it to work,
8. so I was just wondering if someone could come out and have a look at it?
9. E: Yes,
10. that's fine,
11. that's no problem.
12. What make of heater is it?
13. H: It's a ^Pyrox.
14. E: Pyrox,
15. right,
16. and is it a ^space heater or--?
17. H: Um,
18. I suppose it's a ^space heater,
19. it's pretty old though,
20. it's sort of a rec^tangular shape but horizontal rather than ^vertical?
21. (.) oh you know,

22. sorry @@ I'm not explaining that very well\
23. E: No,
24. I understand what you mean.
25. And how ^old do you think it is?
26. H: <H Oh, H>
27. (..) I really couldn't say\
28. It was already here when we moved into the house,
29. and I don't have any instruction manual,
30. but I guess it's about fifteen years' old or more?
31. E: And what's the problem?
32. Is it just blowing out ^cold air rather than ^hot?
33. H: No,
34. I just can't get it to stay alight.
35. I can light the ^pilot light,
36. (.) but then when I release the button the flame just goes out and nothing happens.
37. E: That's a fairly common problem,
38. the pilot light going out.
39. Does it have a model number by any chance?
40. H: um (.) I'll just have a look.
41. (...) No,
42. I can't see ^anything here.
43. E: <A Don't worry,
44. that's fine. A>
45. Now,
46. whereabouts are you?
47. H: In Alphington.
48. E: Okay/
49. I'll just put you on hold for a moment and see when I can get someone out there to you.
50. H: Thanks.

This transactional conversation takes place on the phone between Emily, a gas company receptionist, and Hannah, a customer of the company whose boiler is not working. Hannah is seeking to gain assistance with her boiler, and Emily elicits information with a view to sending a repairman to fix it, whilst also maintaining a friendly and helpful manner as a representative of her employers.

The text is a phone conversation between strangers, one of whom is acting in a professional capacity, and this shapes the way that information is shared and coherence assured. As the receptionist Emily takes a lead in ensuring that the discourse is predictable and coherent. Intonation is an important way in which this is achieved, as when she uses questioning intonation and standard interrogatives to clearly indicate that the floor is being passed to Hannah: "What maker of heater is it?". Once the central subject of the heater is introduced, the pronoun 'it' is used repeatedly by both speakers with anaphoric reference, enabling the women to exchange ideas about it cohesively, as on line 25, "How old is it?", and line 34 "I just can't get it to stay alight." Emily's role as the dominant speaker reflects her position as employee of the company who is attempting to help, and is apparent in her control of topic management. On line 25 she shifts topic to the age of the heater with the interrogative "And how old do you think it is?" and on line 45 she uses the discourse marker "now" to shift to the topic of Hannah's address.

The register is somewhat informal, as might be expected given the social purposes of building rapport and meeting face needs but it also contains some formal elements reflecting the relatively distant tenor between the two women. Sentences are standard, as in the declarative "I've got a heater which I tried to put on earlier today". The lexical choices are also Standard English, with some more formal Latinate vocabulary such as 'horizontal' and 'instruction manual' adding to the formality. While Standard English, however, most of the lexis is drawn from the more frequently used end of the spectrum, as exemplified by verb phrases such as "have a look at it" and "get it to work", both based on core, Anglo-Saxon origin verbs. The casual minimal response "okay" and the fragment answer "In Alphington" also reflect the relatively relaxed attitude each woman takes in the conversation, as well as their efforts to reassure and cooperate with the other.

Both Emily and Hannah make use of stylistic choices to further the communicative purpose of the text, as well as to build rapport with one another. The field of the conversation is evident in the lexis drawn from the semantic field of heaters and heating, such as "Pyrox", "Space heater" and "pilot Light". Stress is used by Emily to highlight important details in her questions, as when she asks, "is it a ^space heater?" or "how ^old do you think it is?". The emphasis placed on the adjective "old" in the second example clearly signals the most important elements of the utterance. Each speaker uses faster speech to add in less essential information, which nevertheless has the effect of building rapport and establishing a social connection. Hannah uses faster speech, for example, when adding in the subordinated clause "<now that it's got a bit colder@@>", also laughing to indicate the more light hearted intent of this extra detail. Similarly, Emily uses faster speech to reassure Hannah about her inability to see anything with the imperative "<A<Don't Worry, that's fine.A>" before moving on to asking her about the more essential facts of her address.