

What's it mean: it's different, spoken grammar?

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Spoken-like and written-like language is a continuum, with highly oral language at one end and highly literate language at the other.

Tannen, Oral and Literate Strategies in spoken and written discourse

Lexical sparsity, grammatical intricacy

The use of this method of control unquestionably leads to safer and faster trains running in the most adverse weather conditions. (12 lexical items, 1 clause = lexical density of 12)

If you control the trains this way / you can be quite sure / that they'll be able to run more safely and more quickly / no matter how bad the weather gets (12 lexical items, 4 clauses = lexical density of 3)

A typical average lexical density for spoken English is between 1.5 and 3, whereas the figure for written English settles down somewhere between 3 and 6.

Halliday, Spoken and written language

Key features of spoken English

- The sound of speech: speed, pitch, volume, pausing, rhythm, intonation
- Spoken grammar: fillers, hesitation devices / topicalization, heads, tails / 'simple', 'ordinary', generic words / auxiliaries / (near) ellipsis
- Planned v unplanned speech: longer more written-like, formal sentences v shorter sentences, idea units, incomplete sentences
- Slips and errors: 'acquire special significance' for foreign language learners

Based on Luoma, Assessing Speaking

Auxiliaries (*I'm starving, I am. I did enjoy that. Where's he live?*)

Emphasis

H We can use the auxiliary verb *do* to give emphasis to a statement in the present or past simple. In speaking, we stress *do*.

*I **do** like Thai food.*

*I **did** enjoy that film.*

*He **doesn't** watch much TV, but he **does** like nature programmes.*

With tenses and forms that already have an auxiliary verb, we stress the auxiliary to express emphasis.

*I **am** looking forward to the weekend.*

TIP

You may hear *does* pronounced as 's in some questions in informal spoken English.

'Who's this bag belong to?'

'What's it look like?'

'Where's he live?'

'How long's the film last?'

Note this contraction is not used in written English.

(near) Ellipsis (*Sorry about that. Going to the meeting? S'OK. S'everything OK?*)

In conversation and informal writing, we can often omit a verb, or subject + verb, at the beginning of a sentence.

~~I'm~~ *Sorry about that.*

~~Are you~~ *Hungry?*

~~Is~~ *Everything OK?*

We can also omit subject + auxiliary verb.

~~I've~~ *Just been listening to Pink Floyd.*

Elimina le parole superflue nelle risposte.

- A ~~Are~~ you going to the meeting?
 B I'm possibly going to the meeting. ~~I'm~~ not sure.
- 1 A How are you?
 B ~~I'm~~ fine, thanks. ~~And how are~~ you?
- 2 A When ~~are~~ you going to Bari?
 B ~~We're going to Bari on~~ Friday.
- 3 A Are you going out tonight?
 B I'm possibly going out tonight. I'll call you.
- 4 A Where are you going?
 B I'm going to the shops. I'm going to the shops to get some bread.
- 5 A Where have you been? You're late!
 B I'm sorry. The bus was late.

Topicalization, orienting, fronting, tailing (*Nice place, this. That bag, who's is it?*)

Fronting

Who it was, I've no idea.

That, I'm looking forward to.

← OBJECT

Tailing

It's difficult, *the exam.*

Great band, *the Kinks.*

SUBJECT →

SHAPING learning TOGETHER

Rephrase the phrases in bold using fronting / tailing / orienting:

A: **This risotto's** really nice. How's your pizza?
 B: Pretty good.
 A: Yeah, **the food here's** always pretty good.

A: I can't find **my keys** anywhere.
 B: Have you looked in the kitchen, next to the kettle?

A: Do you have any of **the jackets in the window** for sale?
 B: I **think we've sold out.** But let me just check.

SHAPING learning TOGETHER

Idea units

... short phrases and clauses connected with *and, or, but* or *that*, or not joined by conjunctions at all but simply spoken next to each other, with possibly a short pause between them ... usually about two seconds or about seven words long, or shorter.

Luoma, *Assessing Speaking*

Look having nuclear / my uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer / Dr John Trump / at MIT / good genes / very good genes / okay very smart / the Wharton School of Finance / very good / very smart /

<https://oupeltglobalblog.com/2016/03/04/its-different-spoken-grammar>