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Rosa Alonso
Marta Dahlgren

Implementing Colloquial Language in the Classroom: Amplificatory Elements, Elliptical Structures and Reported Speech

Roberto A. Valdeón
Universidad de Oviedo
valdeon@uniovi.es

Abstract

This paper aims to scrutinize the teaching of the informal variety of English in the non-native classroom, with particular reference to three features: amplificatory elements, reported speech and elliptical structures. The first section introduces the latest findings derived from corpus linguistics research (notably by Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006). The second section analyzes contemporary textbooks for advanced students to ascertain whether these findings have been incorporated into the curricula or whether they remain outside teaching materials. Finally some suggestions will be made as ways of implementing the features of colloquial English in the classroom.

Keywords: Colloquial English, ellipsis, amplificatory elements, reported speech, text books.

Resumen

En este artículo ofrecemos un estudio de la variedad informal del inglés en relación a su presencia en la enseñanza formal a nivel avanzado, en concreto se estudiará el estilo indirecto, la elipsis y elementos enfáticos en inglés coloquial. En una primera sección se presentan los principales hallazgos procedentes de la lingüística de corpus (especialmente Biber et al. 1999; Carter y McCarthy 2006). En la segunda sección se analizarán doce libros de textos de nivel avanzado con el objetivo de comprobar si dichos hallazgos han sido incorporados en los programas de dichos libros. Por último se incluyen sugerencias para su implementación en aula.

Palabras clave: inglés coloquial, elipsis, elementos enfáticos, estilo indirecto, libros de texto.

1. Introduction

The area of informal English was neglected by reference grammars and textbooks alike until the advent of corpus linguistics and the publication of the

insights gained into the actual workings of the language in authentic and spontaneous everyday situations. Course contents were decided on the basis of traditional notions which regarded both standard grammar and formal (or neutral) vocabulary as appropriate. Authors writing from what Kachru has described as the inner circle of Anglophone countries (1985: 12) have stressed their preference for the standard variety of the language (Quirk, 1990; Widdowson, 1993), arguing that anything else is the consequence of implementing "old-fashioned educational theories" (Quirk, 1990: 10), or underlining that the standard forms will contribute to empower speakers (Widdowson, 1993). Other writers have approached the issue from a more open-minded position (Van Els et al. 1984: 194-195; Goldstein, 1987; Kachru, 1991). Van Els et al., for instance, stressed that language is a continuum with no clear-cut divisions, although they also mentioned that in most cases "the obvious choice will be a formal one" (1984: 196).

The controversy has continued over the past and present decades. Phillipson recognizes the difficulties that may arise from the clash between what he calls "endo-normative" and "exo-normative" positions (Phillipson, 1992: 197-198), in connection with the imposition of norms by the proponents of Standard English as the model (notably Quirk) and those who oppose it. He also argues that the former have clear connections with the teaching business in general, and the English teaching business in particular (2003: 77-78). For instance, the Berlin Wall gave impetus to this industry, as the British champion of capitalism and then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher soon recognized: she immediately saw the opportunities for the rapid expansion of English towards the once Russian-dominated bloc of Eastern European nations. In fact, the disappearance of the old regimes in these countries gave way to a trend that moved away from Russian as the lingua franca of the old system, and closer to English as an international language. English became the means to visibility and acceptance within the international community. Additionally, universities from those nations gradually introduced degrees taught either in their local languages and English, or just in English. This had a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, it provided their nationals with a tool that would open international job markets, and, on the other, it attracted international students to enrol in their programmes. This new situation may have had an effect on the perpetuation of the teaching of the traditional model of the language. These new speakers needed English to interact in the more formal contexts, such as political and educational institutions, and, consequently, Standard English remained very much in the forefront of the teaching business.

2. Recent Findings

Traditionally teachers have expected their students to show the same accuracy in speech as in writing, even though spontaneous conversations abound with verbless clauses, cases of ellipsis that would not be acceptable in writing, false starts, slips of the tongue, etc. McCarthy (1991) suggests that perhaps teachers should change their standards as, until recently, little was known about the grammar of speech. In fact, the only grammars available up to the beginning of the 1990s were those based on the written language. Brazil's *Grammar of Speech* was perhaps the first serious approach, in pedagogical terms, to the peculiarities of spoken English. In his presentation of the spoken variety of the language, Brazil argued for a model which relied more on the dynamics of natural speech and less on the traditional hierarchy of grammatical units (1995). Other researchers followed suit, particularly Carter and McCarthy, as a result of their work with the Cancode corpus, later to become the Cambridge International Corpus (McCarthy 1995, 2003, 2004; McCarthy and Carter, 1997; McCarthy, 1998; Carter, 1999 and Carter, Hugues and McCarthy, 2000).

With their emphasis on a more dynamic descriptive model of the English language, Carter and McCarthy have worked to introduce the grammar of speech, or, at least, a descriptive grammar that also covers spontaneous conversation. In fact, Carter and McCarthy's work concentrates on those grammatical features of spoken language which they feel have been largely neglected by standard grammars. They argue that structures inherent to speech have not been properly studied until the advent of the spoken language corpora, and are consequently absent from the grammars used by learners of English throughout the world. For instance, structures such as "dislocated tags" derive from the fact that conversation constructs itself in a dynamic fashion, where the speaker has very little or virtually no time for planning what to say. Thus, "This little shop ... it's lovely" or of "Oh I reckon they're lovely. I really do whippets" are frequent in speech, but were rarely studied in grammar or course books.

In 1999 the publication of the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* was the landmark of a new era in which the spoken language received some of the attention that it had been denied until then. This monumental work, together with Carter and McCarthy's *Cambridge Grammar of English*, which appeared in 2006, is based on a multimillion-word corpus that has offered insights into the grammatical and lexical characteristics of colloquial English.

The use of corpora for the production of these and other works has given way to heated debates about the convenience and relevance of this type of empirical research. But in spite of the controversy surrounding corpus linguistics

(Seidlhofer, 2003: 77-168), this subdiscipline has yielded significant results in areas such as lexis (Sinclair, 1991) and grammar (Biber et al. 1999, Carter and McCarthy, 2006), and its findings could have considerable influence on the teaching of languages (Johansson, 2007: 301-316). That is, the studies carried out may not have overt pedagogical goals but could be, nonetheless, useful for practitioners. Those findings can make instructors aware of the need to design material or focus their teaching on the production of more authentic language which would serve its ultimate purpose: to communicate efficiently with other speakers, native or non-native (McCarthy, 1991: 143ff).

In the following section, we present an overview of three grammatical points that have received the attention of course books to various degrees, although the tendency has been to emphasize the standard forms. What we present below are those findings that should have clear pedagogical implications for the education business and practice. Whether these findings have made an impact on the design of teaching materials and course books will be tested in section three of this paper.

2.1. Elliptical structures.

Ellipsis has been described as the "omission of elements which are precisely recoverable from the linguistic and situational context" (Biber et al. 1999: 156). That is, the words might not need to be used because the interlocutors are already familiar with the topic. Quirk et al. (1985: 884-887) spoke of five principles for the recoverability of the omitted elements (or "verbatim recoverability"), namely (a) the words should be precisely recoverable, (b) the elliptical construction is grammatically "defective", (c) the insertion of the missing words should result in a grammatical sentence, (d) the missing words(s) should be textually recoverable, and (e) they should be present in the text in exactly the same form.

Most of these principles could be easily applied to elliptical constructions in Standard English, where omission generally affects main verbs. These are left out if the meaning can be easily understood from the context, or if the verb does not need to be stressed, as in the following exchange: "Have you finished? Yes, I have". However, those principles can hardly be applied to other types of ellipsis, since the eliminated elements would not meet one or more of those requirements. For instance, a sentence like "He always wakes up earlier than me" would not satisfy principle (c) and, therefore, could not be considered ellipsis proper.

In fact, most cases of informal ellipsis would not meet Quirk et al.'s criteria at all since the omitted words cannot be retraced from the text, but rather from the context or situation. Quirk et al., like other authors, refer to this type of

omission as "situational ellipsis" (1985: 895-900). Carter and McCarthy, for their part, emphasize that it "is notably present in language-in-action data, where not only the participants but the objects and entities and processes talked about are typically prominent in the immediate environment" (1995: 145).

Among the most common types of situational ellipsis, Carter, Hugues and McCarthy underline (2000: 161-172) that, in the non-standard varieties, verbs are often left out not only in the cases studied in traditional grammars, but also before personal pronouns. Thus, learners are likely to come across interrogative sentences such as "You ready?" instead of "Are you ready?". Besides, subjects are omitted in very rapid speech whenever the personal reference is clear: "Want another coffee?" Additionally, the omission of subjects is almost fossilized in extremely common replies of the type "(I) hope so" and "(I) think so", or at the beginning of evaluative expressions such as "(It) sounds nice" or "(It's a) shame" (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 187). But, in spite of its high frequency, situational ellipsis has been omitted from many reference and pedagogical grammars, even from recent ones (Fowley and Hall, 2003: 330-331; Hewings, 2005).

Authors have related it to contexts characterized by informality (Quirk et al. 1985: 896; Eastwood, 1994: 45-46; Parrott, 2000: 319). For instance, Quirk et al. believe that ellipsis is "restricted to familiar (generally spoken) English" (1985: 896), a view also shared by Swan (1995) when stating that "we often leave out words to avoid repetition, or in other cases when the meaning can be understood without them […] in informal speech" (1995: 172-173). Carter, Hugues and McCarthy also stress that these types are used in informal situations, especially in conversations in which the speakers know each other well, and in conversations which are relaxed and friendly. They also highlight that, as a conversation develops, ellipsis is more likely to occur. When people know what the topic is, and who is speaking, it is not always necessary to repeat words. In this sense, ellipsis can be said to contribute to make conversation more natural (2000: 163-166).

However, Carter and McCarthy argue that it is not so much a question of familiarity. For them, the key factor when using ellipsis is genre. In narratives, for example, no matter how familiar the interlocutors may be, ellipsis is not frequent because it is not easy to make reference to the immediate elements. Thus, explicitness would be necessary. Conversely, face-to-face service encounters, irrespective of the degree of informality, tend to show retrievable information very frequently, which contributes to the appearance of elliptical structures:

> Speaker 1: Wednesday at four be okay
> Speaker 2: Er yeah that's fine … just check the pockets a minute.
> Carter and McCarthy (1995: 147).

This mini-dialogue takes place at a dry-cleaner's. Speaker 2 is leaving a pair of trousers for cleaning, so it is not so much a question of familiarity but, they argue, of precise contexts. For this reason they believe that situational ellipsis could be a useful feature to be taught to learners, with a clear description of the environments in which it can take place, information about when it occurs and when it does not, and about the structural restrictions affecting them, that is, what elements can and cannot be omitted. In the last section of this paper, we shall make a proposal about how to introduce situational ellipsis in the classroom.

2.2 Amplificatory elements.

We use this expression to refer to certain words or phrases that tend to occur either at the beginning or at the end of an utterance, although they do not follow the canonical syntax of the English sentence, as presented in traditional grammar and course books. Amplificatory elements help the speaker cope with the pressures of real life conversation, particularly the lack of time to structure his/her train of thought. They contribute to simplify that structure and provide information and/or emphasis. In the past they were referred to as "left or right dislocations", but Carter (1999) defends the right to use different terms for these structures, because the word "dislocation" implies that they are abnormal or broken in some way.

Over the past two decades, amplificatory elements occurring at the end of a sentence have been labelled amplificatory tags (Quirk et al. 1985: 1310), reinforcement tags (Swan, 1995: 487), noun phrase tags (Biber et al. 1999: 1080-1081) and tails (McCarthy and Carter, 1997; Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 194-196). They are uttered after the clause, are typically noun phrases (although Biber et al. mention that clausal units might also be used, 1999: 1073), and may occur in interrogative sentences:

> They're incredibly nice, our neighbours.
> Are they both at university, your brother's kids? (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 195)

They rarely occur in formal English (Swan, 1995: 487; Biber et al. 1999: 1072). However, McCarthy and Carter (1997) defend, as they do with elliptical structures, a genre oriented approach. In such structures, they argue, the emphasis is obtained through the repetition of the personal pronoun and finite verb. This takes place in contexts in which personal preferences and evaluations are underlined. It is true that these social contexts tend to need an informal register, but they also focus on the fact that the tails are connected with the shared knowledge between the speakers, either established in the course of the conversation or inferred from the discourse context. Thus, tails also enable speakers to

express positive or negative views on particular actions or state of affairs. The choice of not using a tail construction seems to establish a more distant relationship, or, at least, increase the social distance. The choice can also be connected with the fact that speech is unplanned and tails can be a useful resource for maintaining coherence for a listener. In their view "the existence of tails serves to signal above all the essentially reciprocal and dialogic nature of the ongoing interaction" (McCarthy and Carter, 1997: 410). Forms without tails do not necessarily close down the ongoing interaction but these structures would encourage it and keep the communication channels open.

On the other hand, speakers may also resort to a second type of amplificatory elements whose main function is to identify the subject or object in the main clause: they have been called anticipated identification (Quirk et al. 1985: 1310), detached fronted objects and subjects (Swan, 1995: 207), prefaces (Biber et al. 1999: 1074), and heads (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy, 2000: 153) or headers (McCarthy and Carter, 2006: 194). They may precede declarative and interrogative clauses:

Sharon, she plays bingo on Friday night
That picture of a frog, where is it?
They can refer to a subject pronoun, as in the cases above, or to an object pronoun:
That couple we met in Berlin, we don't want to send them a card, do we?

And, in some dialectal varieties, pronouns and possessives can precede the subject. The function in these cases is emphatical rather than identificatory:

Me, I don't care.
Myself, I think you're making a big mistake.

In 1995 Carter and McCarthy considered the reference to this element in grammars up to that moment as patchy and incomplete. For instance, they were critical of Quirk et al.'s definition, which presented it as a "feature of colloquial style" and "for purpose of emphasis" (Quirk et al. 1985: 1416) whereas they found Swan's approach incomplete. Swan regards them as "detached fronted subjects and objects", with no specification of their function. Conversely, Carter and McCarthy find that speakers resort to this phenomenon whenever "items semantically co-referential with the subject or object of the clause are positioned before the subject" (1995: 148) and they explicit that the initial noun phrase may only be indirectly related to the subject, which may not be a pronoun copy, as in

This friend of mine, her son was in hospital and he'd had a serious accident …

Or there may even be discord of person and number between the fronted noun phrase and the subject:

That couple that we know in Paris, I don't hear of her for months then …

That is, the front-placed item may only be topically or pragmatically related to the subject. As with elliptical structures, their approach is genre-based: they state that this feature is especially frequent in spoken narratives. Speakers tend to use an available slot to "flag a variety of items of information that will be helpful to the listener in identifying participants, in linking current topics to already mentioned ones, in reactivating old topics, and generally anchoring the discourse" (Carter and McCarthy, 1995: 150). But although this structure could be quite easy for learners to manipulate, they believe that the correction by many teachers of clauses similar to "My father, he has two brothers and one sister" may be put down to lack of pragmatic motivation rather than to any inherent ungrammaticality (1995: 150-151).

2.3. Indirect speech.

The approach to reported speech in all reference grammars and course books has stayed virtually unchanged over the past three decades in spite of recent insights into the workings of informal English. Data from the Cancode corpus and the British National Corpus has shown that the past continuous is often used in casual speech when reporting someone else's words, and yet this possibility has never been present in textbooks. The following examples are indicative of how speakers use it in spontaneous speech:

Tony was saying they should have the heating on by about Wednesday.
Yes Maureen and Derek were telling me you have to get a taxi.
(Carter and McCarthy 1995: 152)

Carter and McCarthy have observed that "the past simple seems to give more authority to the actual words uttered, while the past continuous seems to report the event of the uttering (exploiting perhaps the basic foregrounding and backgrounding functions of past simple and past continuous, respectively)" (1995: 153). According to their findings, the past continuous appears in casual speech and rarely in narratives where there is a tendency to use the historical present. The continuous tense seems to emphasize message content rather than form, and to report or summarize whole conversational episodes rather than individual utterances. It is true that the conclusions are yet to be made definite and further analysis is required, but the tendency towards the use of the continuous is obvious. The reasons why the use of the continuous is never mentioned in grammars and course books could be that they are often based on written data, and where oral data has been consulted, there has been a preference to use oral narrative and broadcast talk where indirect speech is unlikely to appear (1995: 153). Biber

et al. also indicate that the use of the continuous deprives the utterance of its precise time reference (1999: 1121).

The second major point concerning reported speech is the vast of number of reporting verbs that are presented to students. Most reference and pedagogical grammars provide endless lists of items at the students' disposal (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990: 297-303; Eastwood, 1994: 348; Leech and Svartvik, 2002: 137-138; Foley and Hall, 2003: 114-115; Hewings, 2005: 68-72). However, Carter, Hugues and McCarthy (2000: 145) and Carter and McCarthy (2006: 806-807) stress that in informal language "say" and "tell" are by far the most commonly used reporting verbs. In fact, some reporting verbs such as "exclaim" and "whisper" "are hardly ever used at all" (Carter, Hughes and McCarthy, 2000: 145) whereas the verb "go" is becoming fairly frequent among speakers, particularly among the younger generation (Biber et al. 1999: 1119).

3. Textbooks and the spoken language

Traditionally textbooks have avoided a description of the features of spoken English, even though listings of informal vocabulary have often been included, particularly of phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions. Thus, Bywater's extremely popular *A Proficiency Course in English*, included six chapters devoted to phrasal verbs, with a short introduction stating that "what distinguishes the writing, and above all, the speech of a good foreign student from those of an Englishman is that what an Englishman writes or says is full of these expressions, whereas most foreigners […] avoid them and sound stilted in consequence" (1982: 97), and recommended learners to use masses of them. Bywater also included lengthy list of idiomatic expressions to be learnt by heart. One might be inclined to think that this old-fashioned approach is characteristic of the early 1980s. However, in 1982 Strässler had already analysed idioms in natural spoken language and had stated that idioms are quite infrequent (one per 1,150 words), which seems to stress the fact that for a teacher concentrating on spoken skills, idioms should not become the main concern. Similar conclusions could be reached from the recent work of other writers (Grant and Bauer, 2004). Conversely, McCarthy suggests that idioms are more common than previously thought, but it should be noted that, under this label, he also includes prepositional expressions, binomials and trinomials, as well as some discourse markers and cultural allusions (1998: 129-149), which did not feature in the list of earlier course books.

But, as some authors stress, Standard English is not merely defined by its lexical items but also by its grammatical forms (Trudgill, 1999; Cheshire, 1999). For

this reason, this section is devoted to the analysis of contemporary textbooks and whether they cover the three grammatical characteristics of colloquial English mentioned above rather than groups of lexical items, since these have always been a part of the syllabus.

The textbooks in this section have been selected considering their date of publication and extensive use in Spain, in state-run Schools of Languages, university courses and private tuition. Although little was known about the grammar of colloquial English until the late 1980s, and bearing in mind that research into the workings of the informal variety of the language has given rise to a number of landmark publications from the early and specially mid-1990s onwards, we have assumed that the last years of the decade could be an adequate starting point to perceive some changes affecting the implementation of the informal features of spontaneous English in formal teaching environments. The first four books in Table 1 have been used as "control" texts. Since they are specifically conceived to help learners succeed when taking the Proficiency exams, their content must abide by the syllabus established by the University of Cambridge Esol Examinations board. In fact, according to the webpage of the university, the exam is aimed at those "approaching a standard of English similar to that of an educated native speaker" (http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/cpe.htm), the word "educated" being the key to understanding the choice of contents. The eight course books analyzed include the "advanced" rather than "proficiency" version of *Proficiency Gold* (*Advanced Gold*) and *New Progress to Proficiency* (*New Cambridge Advanced*) as well, so they correspond to Levels C1 or C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The first point to be made about all the textbooks is that learners may occasionally encounter features of colloquial English in some of the reading and listening texts. For instance, in *New Progress to Proficiency* a reading text (Jones, 2002: 35) includes informal salutations ("Hi"), response forms and interjections, ("Oh, yeah?") or declarative questions ("You want to be alone?"), although no information is provided about their form or use. However, all the texts in Table 1 include abundant information, exemplification and exercises on how to recognize and use other more unusual structures, such as "inversions" (Newbrook and Wilson, 2001: 38; Jones and Bastow, 2001: 29; Jones 2002: 39, Gude and Duckworth, 2002: 154). As for emphatic structures, the only reference is to cleft sentences, but never to amplificatory elements (e. g. Gude and Duckworth, 2002: 84-85), and, finally, reported speech is introduced within the boundaries of traditional grammar, with a generous list of reporting verbs and no reference to the use of the past continuous (e. g. Gude and Duckworth, 2002: 126).

Few references are made to stylistic variations between formal and informal English. For instance, passing remarks are made to the use of "were" and "was" in "If it wasn't…" (Jones, 2002: 141) or in the choice of pronoun "who" or "whom" in "The doctor, whom I spoke to…" (Jones, 2002: 171). But even here the authors do not mention that the latter is rarely used nowadays. Another interesting grammatical point that remains unaltered in these books is the distinction between "like" and "as" (Newbrook and Wilson, 2001: 16), which has become rather blurred in recent decades, with speakers being influenced by the American trend to use "like" in sentences like "Like you said". And when a reference to the spoken and written "registers" is made (Newbrook and Wilson, 2001: 57), it is to emphasize the use of contractions, the preference for the active voice rather the passive, and the use of specific lexicon.

Colloquial English in Contemporary Textbooks

	Elliptical structures	Amplificatory elements	Indirect speech
New Proficiency Gold	No	No	No
New Progress to Proficiency	No	No	No
Proficiency Masterclass	No	No	No
Proficiency Passkey	No	No	No
Advanced Gold	No	No	No
New Cambridge Advanced	No	No	No
Changing Skies	No	No	No
Inside Out	No	No	No
Initiative	No	No	No
New Headway	No	No	No
Pathfinder 5	Yes	No	No
Cutting Edge	Yes	No	No

As we turn to the textbooks without the Proficiency label, the approach to the grammar of informal English is quite similar to the one encountered in the "control" books. The peculiarities of spoken English are not covered, and if references are made they tend to be brief and unsystematic. For instance, in the *New Cambridge Advanced English* Jones mentions that "in a spoken narrative, we usually explain the events of a story in fairly short sentences […] using *and* or *then*" (1998: 10). He also includes some common exclamations of surprise (1998: 20) and texts with several types of what Biber et al. have labelled as "inserts" (1999: 1082-1099), that is, a type of non-clausal items. The book also features one listening comprehension task where the speaker notes some of the differences between spoken and written English (1998: 64), but no reference is made to the three grammatical features mentioned in the previous section.

Advanced Gold, although a non-Proficiency version of one of the control books, still caters for those learners wanting to take one of the official advanced exams. The scope is broader but the contents remain closer to those found in *Proficiency Gold*. The section on ellipsis provides information on Standard English forms (Acklam, 2001: 84). The reference to emphatic structures only includes cleft sentences (2001: 108), with exercises asking the learners to make transformations of the type "rephrase starting with the word *what*". Finally, no reference is made to the most common forms and verbs used in spontaneous speech to report someone else's words. The author underlines, though, that "in informal speech we often drop *that* after common reporting verbs" (2001: 196).

As for *Changing Skies*, the course offers a rather fresh approach in that English is taught within a European framework, placing special emphasis on European culture. However, the only points characteristic of informal English can be found, once again, in the texts used for practice. The course does not offer any formal presentation or exemplification.

The *New Headway Advanced* is part of a very successful series first published in the 1980s. The authors have introduced several features of the informal variety, scattered throughout the book. There is some attempt to present them systematically by means of a section labelled "The last word", complementing the "Language focus" or grammatical section. "The last word" offers some insights into how speakers actually use the language, with exercises on questions tags (Soars and Soars, 2003: 46) or exclamations (2003: 62). However, when the "Language focus" section deals with ways of adding emphasis, negative inversions and cleft sentences are covered (2003: 51), but amplificatory elements are altogether omitted. Similarly, the information on reported speech lists some of the verbs traditionally included in reference grammars, such as "congratulate", "urge", "complain" or "boast" (2003: 89) but omits emphasizing that "say" and

"tell" are the most commonly used, that "go" can also be used, and that speakers often opt for the past continuous when reporting another speaker's words.

Pathfinder 5 is a booked aimed at Spain's EOIs, the state-run Schools of Languages, which were created in the 1980s throughout the country in an attempt to boost the learning of foreign languages. Colloquial lexicon is covered in the "Function File" and "Chatroom" sections (Harris, Mower and Sikorzynska, 2003: 17, 19, 44, 54, 78) but grammatical features received little attention. It should be noted, however, that this course book is the only one that provides learners with some information about situational ellipsis, that is, the type that is labelled as non-standard in reference grammars:

> Ellipsis
> In spoken English, people often miss out words. What words are missing from these extracts from the dialogue?
> 1 Been here long?
> 2 Yeah, been waiting ages.
> 3 Tried hitchhiking?
> 4 No, wouldn't risk it.
> (…)
> (Harris, Mower and Sikorzynska, 2003: 92)

But, as can be seen, students can merely have a taste of how ellipsis functions in colloquial English. As regards the other two points, neither of them is introduced in the syllabus. For instance, the reported speech section (2003: 96-97) also includes a long list of reporting verbs and a presentation of the standard structures.

As for the remaining three books, only *Cutting Edge* offers the learners scant information about one of the points, ellipsis. Even in this case, the presentation does not feature prominently in the syllabus, since it is relegated to the grammar section at the end of the book. Here students are told that "in informal speech, it is common to miss out the beginning of certain phrases when it is clear who or what is being referred to" (Cunnigham and Moor, 2003: 153), with short sentences to exemplify the point. No exercises or contexts are provided.

4. Implementation of elliptical structures and amplificatory elements

Bearing in mind the findings of corpus linguistics and the information provided by the survey of these contemporary course books, it seems obvious that practitioners can only hope for more complete textbooks. However, in this sec-

tion we aim to suggest an approach for the introduction of elliptical structures and amplificatory elements in the classroom. This presentation is fundamentally pedagogical. It can be taken as a starting point for the preparation of materials that may allow instructors to introduce these features in the classroom. As for reported speech, the introduction of the colloquial forms should not pose many problems, since, as can be seen in the previous section, the findings are rather brief. Thus, the teacher can implement the information found in textbooks in a rather straightforward manner.

4.1. Elliptical structures

A. In colloquial English, subjects are often omitted. This clearly contradicts the conventions traditionally presented in Spanish (and, more generally speaking, non-native) classrooms, which overemphasized the fact that the English language never lacks this element. The omission of the subject affects all persons:

A.1. The first person, normally I.

∇Beg your pardon.
∇Don't know what to say.
∇Haven't heard of it.

Many of them usually take a clause as an object:

∇Think I'll go now.

A.2. The second person. Omission is very frequent in questions, such as when offering something or in combination with tag questions:

∇Want a drink?
∇Had a good time, did you?
∇∇Think that's funny, do you?

A.3. Third person pronouns "he", "she" and "they" are often left out:

∇Doesn't know what she's saying
∇Doesn't look too well
∇Can't play at all

But "it" is by far the most frequently omitted, especially in some short sentences, some of which are so frequently repeated that have become fossilized:

∇Serves you right
∇Doesn't matter
∇Looks like rain
∇Depends

A.4. Existential "there", also called introductory "there" because it is devoid of true semantic connotations, can be omitted in rapid exchanges in spontaneous conversation. In fact, "there" merely introduces the real subject of the sentence (Leech and Svartvik, 2002: 298), which may render it unnecessary in everyday conversation, where irrelevant items tend to be left out:

∇Ought to be some coffee in the pot
∇Must be somebody waiting for you
∇Appears to be a big crowd in the hall

B. Apart from subjects, verbs can also be left out by speakers, normally auxiliaries in interrogative sentences:

∇You expect me to believe that?
∇You been eating textbooks?
∇You get that? Good. Cos you'd better get used to the idea.

C. Additionally, both the subject and the copula can be omitted: the information provided by the former can be retrieved from the context whereas the latter does not convey relevant information.

C.1. This occurs in declarative sentences:
∇Sorry I couldn't be there
∇Afraid not
∇Good to see you
∇No wonder she's late

C.2. But once again the omission of the subject and the copula is very common in interrogative sentences:
∇Happy?
∇Hot?
∇Any coffee left?

The second example would be difficult to interpret without the context. The speaker may be enquiring about the interlocutor ("Are you hot?") or about something else (such as the weather or a cup of coffee: "Is it hot?"), which comes to emphasize the reason why authors have come to define this type of ellipsis as "situational". However, the subject may remain if necessary to avoid confusion:

∇You hungry?
∇Anybody need a lift?

D. In some common noun phrases, often performing an introductory function, the article is omitted:

∇Trouble is there's nothing we can do.

∇Fact is I don't know what to do.
∇Thing is I don't want to see you ever again.

E. Finally, the articles are omitted together with subjects and auxiliaries:

∇Drink?
∇Shame!
∇Pity he won't help.

And in the most extreme cases the auxiliary verb, the subject, the main verb and the article can disappear:

Mary, ∇quick word, please.

Finally, it should be noted, as Carter points out (1999) that in sentences like "It must be right" the modal verbs are rarely omitted so that the force of the modal remains. The speaker might say "must be right" but never "be right". This ellipsis, like the rest of the examples examined, is situational but it is not random. It implies a degree of informality and social symmetry among the speakers though it may appear across most genre types (Carter, 1999: 155).

4.2. Amplificatory elements

We suggest a two-fold presentation of amplificatory elements: forms and usage. As regards those anticipating the information, the instructor might underline the fact that they tend to take the form of a noun phrase whose function is basically to identify the subject or object of the sentence. More complex is the case of postponed identification. In this case, it is advisable to distinguish the three main types identified by researchers (McCarthy and Carter, 1997, Biber et al. 1999: 1080-1081, Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 194-196):

A. Forms

A.1 Postponed identification can be present as a repeated subject and auxiliary verb:

You've gone mad, you have.
I'm getting fed up, I am.

A.2 The speaker can repeat only the subject, although expliciting the reference:

They're very polite, your children.
She's a clever girl, your Ann.
I didn't think much of the movie, myself.

As can be seen, other features of colloquial English can also be traced (such as the use of the possessive preceding a proper noun or the use of the reflexive).

B. Use. Speakers may resort to these structures for three main reasons:

B.1. The tag can provide the utterance with a certain evaluative tinge, as in:

You're really silly, you are.

B.2. In other contexts, the structure is combined with other features, for example ellipsis. Here some information is known, but the tag adds emphasis:

Getting in my way, you are.

B.3. In these and other examples, the speaker might use the tag not merely for emphasis but also for identification purposes:

Likes his food, Peter does.

Once students become familiarized with these points, the problem arises when trying to use authentic examples in the classroom. Corpora are not readily available to the instructor and schools or even universities might not afford a subscription. However, teachers can avail themselves of contextualized examples than can be adapted for their classroom use. Fictional English currently offers the possibility of extracting short video clips with abundant examples of the colloquial variety in authentic use. This is language edited for the purpose of commercial cinema and television, but even so most of the main features of informal English can be traced in contemporary drama and comedy production. It is true, nonetheless, that the teacher must be particularly attentive to the content of the programmes and the situations in which the language occurs so that the selected extracts provide nearly authentic instances of the points being practised.

Our recommendation is to resort to mainstream productions rather than fringe films or television series. Anglophone audiovisual fiction, unlike its Spanish counterpart, makes a clear distinction between the two, with the latter more inclined to rely on expletives and taboo language and the former on the other features of colloquial English. Thus, a drama series like *Queer as Folk* excels in expletives, which should be handled with care in the second language classroom. However, most other series do not resort to taboo language, despite the tendency in the Spanish versions of the same films and programmes to adapt the source texts and vulgarise them for the Spanish audience (Valdeón, 2006). This problem would not affect the foreign language classroom since teachers would be working with the original versions of the material. In fact, contemporary sitcoms like *Will & Grace* or dramas like *House* and *The Practice*, which combine professional settings with scenes of the private lives of the protagonists, provide us with good examples of informal English.

The following scene from *Will & Grace* offers several features of the colloquial variety:

A Restaurant
(Will is waiting for his blind date.)
Waiter: Can I get you anything to drink?
Will: Uh, yeah, let me have a martini. Oh, and look— since you're going to be our waiter, could you do me a favour? Could you be extremely rude and rush us through our meal? Interrupt us, and don't offer us any dessert.
Waiter: Blind date?
Will: Oh, yeah.
Waiter: No problem.

The students would become familiar with the use of hesitators ("Uh"), response forms ("Yeah") and interjections ("Oh"). Two instances of situational ellipsis can also be traced here: the fossilized "no problem" and the question "Blind date?" The scene is also interesting in that it does not only exemplify the use of ellipsis in conversation, but, perhaps more significantly, in a context which does not reflect familiarity between the speakers, and, thus, supports McCarthy and Carter's genre-based approach to the study of this characteristic of spoken English. A longer video clip could be used as a listening exercise before covering the linguistic aspect already mentioned, combining practice in two language areas.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have identified a number of shortcomings as regards the introduction of colloquial English in the formal teaching of English. Firstly, the points covered in the previous sections are not found in traditional descriptions of Standard English because of the influence that formal written Standard English has had on these descriptions. Additionally, there is a clear lack of metalanguage to refer to these features. Authors use different terms to refer to the same points, making it difficult for the instructor to compare data from various sources. However, teachers could limit themselves to those articles and reference grammars that have given greater prominence to the features commented upon, and simplify the terminology for classroom use. Since the information is often obscure and difficult to access, the instructors might opt for making a selection that should shed light rather than confuse the learners. For instance, the use of "headers" and "tails" for amplificatory elements are visual enough to increase awareness of their positions, functions and use. In this sense, it might be reasonable to support Savignon's view that practitioners should be empowered not only as teachers but also as researchers and decision-makers in the classroom (2007: 218).

Secondly, real spoken data is often difficult to obtain by teachers, and course books do not seem to offer material where everyday informal interactions are

reflected. Access to spoken corpora is not easy or inexpensive and might not even suit the needs of the learners. But, as Cheshire remarks, "the best course of action would seem to be to expose learners to natural spoken data wherever possible and to help them become observers of the grammar of talk in its natural contexts and in different genres" (1999: 155). Thus, examples of structures common in speech can be useful to boost the communicative abilities of the learner.

However, instructors might make use of a certain type of "edited" spoken English that is readily available to them. Over the past two decades, fictional English has made a clear move towards the conversational mode, including textual, grammar and lexical features that can exemplify the points mentioned in the previous sections without the difficulties of authentic interaction, usually replete with other non-linguistic elements that impede clear understanding and might render a listening text unpalatable. Film and television scriptwriters opt for those features that make their dialogue more natural, but deprive them of those elements that would prolong a conversation unnecessarily. Instructors would need to be attentive to the variety used in the programmes or films selected, since Anglophone scriptwriters tend to make a distinction between adult and fringe audiences (Valdeón forthcoming), the latter far more inclined to use expletives than the former.

As Cheshire points out, educational syllabi might still have a long way to go before fully understanding the nature of spoken/written Standard English, between the formal and informal (1999: 145-149), but the complementary actions presented in this paper could be a starting point for the non-native classroom, much in need of drawing the language closer to authentic communicative situations.

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4. All correspondence should be addressed to:
   Rosa Alonso (*ralonso@uvigo.es*) or Marta Dahlgren (*dahlgren@uvigo.es*)
   Universidade de Vigo
   Facultade de Filoloxía e Traducción
   Lagoas-Marcosende
   36200 Vigo Spain