

**Saying 'yes' is not enough:**  
**What conversation analysis tells us about language**

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**'The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity'**

(Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*)

**1. An initial case-study: positive and negative responses in conversation**

a)

1A This- chemotherapy (0.2) it won't have any  
2 lasting effects on having kids will it?  
3 (2.2)  
4A It will?  
5B I'm afraid so.

b)

1A I mean can we do any shopping for her or  
2 something like that?  
3 (0.7)  
4B Well that's most kind Jonathan hhh at the moment  
5 no. Because we've still got two boys at home.

c)

1A W'd you like t'meet now,  
2 (0.3)  
3A [or late-  
4B [Well, not just now. (0.1) Maybe in 'bout ten  
5 minutes?

d)

1A Uh if you'd care to come and visit a little while  
2 this morning I'll give you a cup of coffee  
3B hehh well that's awfully sweet of you, I don't  
4 think I can make it this morning. .hh uhm I'm  
5 running an ad in the paper and- and uh I have to  
6 stay near the phone

e)  
1A What is she, small?  
2B Yes, yes, she's small, smallish, um, not really  
3 small but certainly not very big.

f)  
1A Can I have two pints of Abbot and a grapefruit  
2 and whisky?  
3B Sure. (*Turns to get*)

g)  
1A Do you have any glue?  
2B Yes. What kind do you want dear?

h)  
1A Why don't you come and see me some[times  
2B [I would like  
3 to

Negative responses in English are done with:

- 1) **delays**, such as pauses, or by prefaces
- 2) **prefaces**: the use of markers such as *uh, well*; token agreements before disagreements; appreciations or apologies if relevant
- 3) **accounts**: careful explanations for why you're producing this negative response
- 4) **declination components**: of a form suited to the first part: characteristically indirect

...positive responses are done without these.

There is one exception....

## 2. *Agreement in conversation*

a)  
1A T's- ts a beautiful day out isn't it?  
2B→ Yeh it's just gorgeous...

b)  
1A Isn't he cute  
2B→ Oh he's adorable

c)  
1A She seems like a nice little [lady  
2B→ [Awfully  
3 nice little person.

d)

1A It's really a clear lake, isn't it?

2B→ Oh, it's wonderful

### 3. Data exercise

1.

1 Les: Well I'll come with you in the evening shall I?

2 (.)

3 Les: to pick him up?

4 Mar: Sorry?=  
5 Les: =.hhh Sh'l I come with you in the evening to pick him up?

6 Mar: Oo:: ye- I mean I- (0.2) Yes I thin:k- I mean we'll see

7 how busy it is.

2.

1 Eve: Are you coming with her

2 Gor: Yahh!

3 Eve: So she'll be able t'fi[:nd it alright]=

4 Gor: [.t.h h h h h h]=

5 Gor: =Mh[m?

6 Eve: [W't time then.

7 Gor: .hmm Pod'n?

8 (.)

9 Eve: W't ti:me.

10 Gor: .p.t.hhhhhhhh blp After we've eaten.

3.

1 Dee: ..w'l I: so I said to Dee I'ope Mike 'eard that,

2 Mar: neh:hehh

3 (0.3)

4 Mar: .hhhh

5 (.)

6 Mar: Yeah are there any others in the family the[n

7 Dee: [Pardon?

8 Mar: hAre there many others in the family?

9 Dee: -No it's only him 'n iz sister

4.

1 Ski: 'ell I've: I haven't seen any of'm there for yea:rs,

2 (0.4)

3 Car: W'l how wz Sam al-right?

4 (.)

5 Ski: .hhh Pod'n?

6 Car: How wz Sam [alright, ]

7 Ski: [.hhh Oh'ee]wz bou:ncin' about as usual

5.  
1 Cla: hhhh]hhh But I mean it's jis something theh you  
2 [f e e l]like]they-]  
3 Mar: [B't see] I d]idn' ]ev'n know it was sli:ced.  
4 Cla: e-Hu:h?  
5 Mar: I din'ev'n know it was sliced I wz so shocked when I put  
6 the knife in ennit jus'fell o:ff?=

6.  
1 Bee: He asn' been there sih-since Christmas [so. hHe's going.  
2 Ava: [Mm.  
3 (0.5)  
4 Ava: Yeh w'l I'll give you a call then tomorrow.when I get in  
5 'r sumn.  
6 (0.5)  
7 Bee: Wha:t,  
8 Ava: I'll give yih call tomo[rrow.]  
9 Bee: [Yeh: ] 'n I'll be ho:me t'morrow.

7.  
1 Les: .hhh Well(g) (0.2) jus' give me a ring later 'n see-  
2 see if I'm still in the land a' the living will you,  
3 (0.6)  
4 Ski: Oh  
5 Les: In case[ 'e r e t u - : r n s]  
6 Ski: [(-----) be going]somewhere then  
7 (0.4)  
8 Les: Sorr-y  
9 Ski: You think you'll be going somewhere  
10 (0.3)  
11 Les: No no...

### ***Transcription conventions***

- [ overlapping talk
- (0.4) silence in tenths of a second
- (.) micropause of less than a tenth of a second
- hh outbreath
- = talk follows on by the same speaker on a previous or upcoming line where a line by another speaker intervenes (see, e.g. example (k))
- ↑ particularly high pitch

