

At the heart of conversation,  
on the periphery of language.  
Sounds and  
actions in  
conversation



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

At the heart of conversation,  
on the periphery of language.  
Sounds and actions in conversation.

Richard Ogden  
[richard.ogden@york.ac.uk](mailto:richard.ogden@york.ac.uk)  
University of York  
Centre for Advanced Studies in Language and Communication  
Department of Language & Linguistic Science

# ‘Linguistic sign’

The commonest form of linguistic behaviour is communicative behaviour which uses the dual-level code of spoken language made up of [..] phonological and grammatical units [...].

Laver (1994: 21).



En: /tri:/

Ge: /baum/

Fr: /arbr/

swallow

snore

laugh

lipsmack

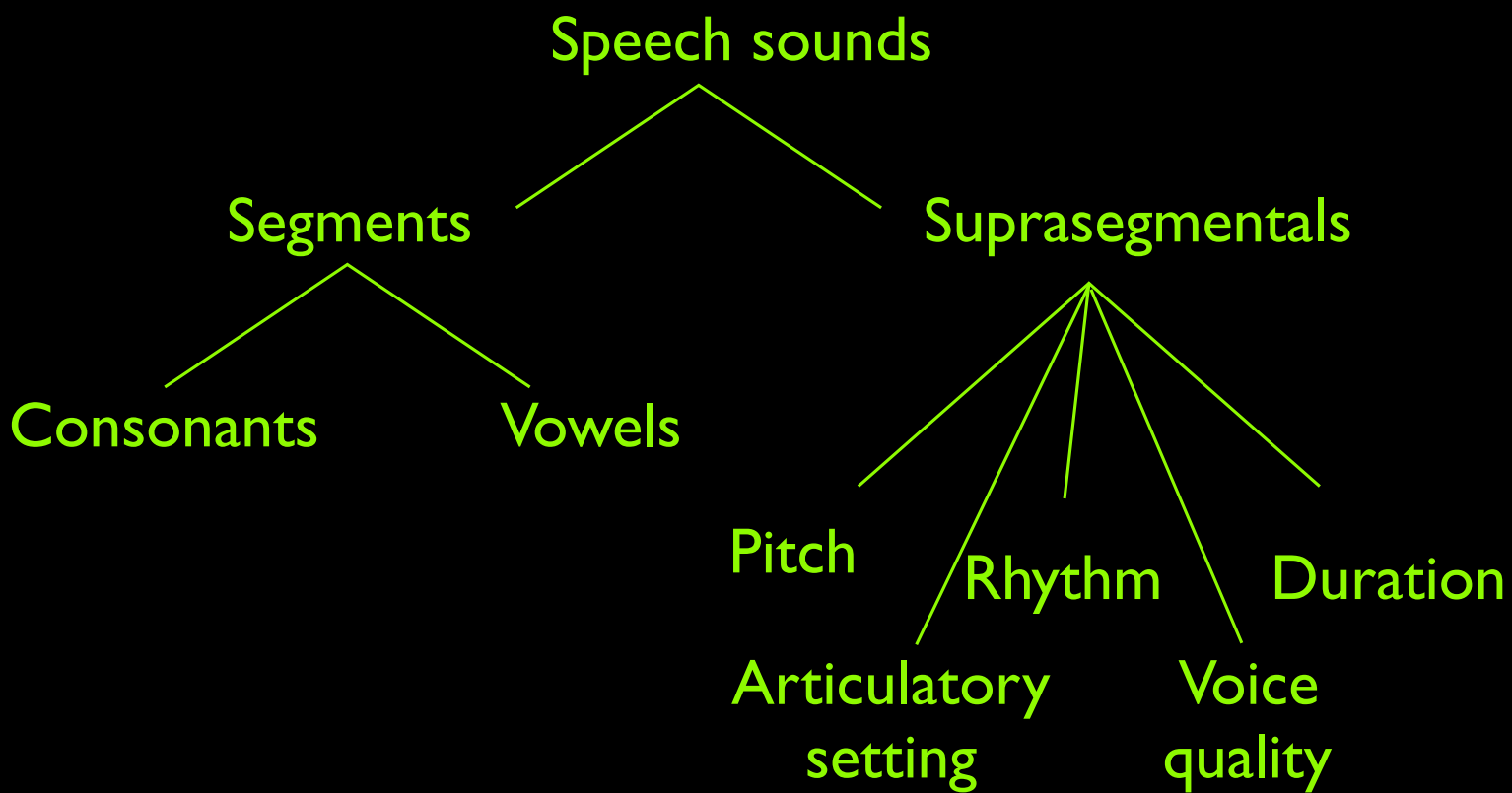
consonants

vowels

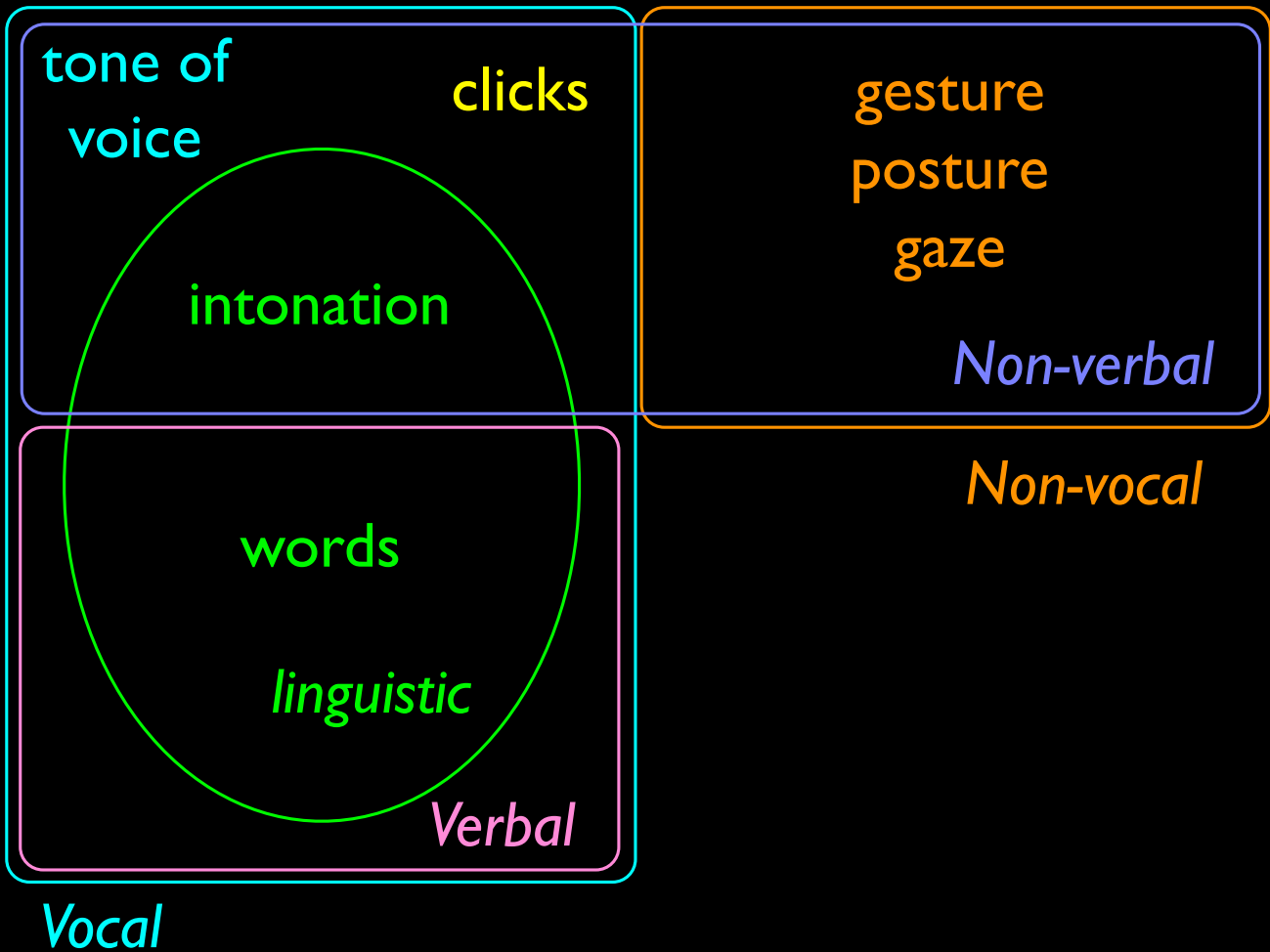
intonation

Sounds made in  
the vocal tract

Linguistic Phonetics



|| {f} ↑ðə /leɪdi 'nɛks ↑\dɔ:ɪ | əv /kɔ:s f} ||



Based on Laver (1994)

# This talk

- Most studies of non-lexical sounds (even in CA-oriented work) focus on the forms and functions of ‘suprasegmentals’ or long-domain features
- This study: **punctual, momentary** sounds which have no place in standard descriptions of English phonology
- **Some non-lexical sounds exhibit features of dual patterning, just like lexical ones**

# What are clicks?

Conventional  
click



# Nama

## A language that 'has' clicks

	DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	PALATAL	ALVEOLAR LATERAL
VOICELESS UNASPIRATED	k $\text{ɔa}$ 'put into'	k $\text{!oas}$ 'hollow'	k $\text{ʈais}$ 'calling'	k $\text{ɭaros}$ 'writing'
VOICELESS ASPIRATED	k $\text{ʰo}$ 'play music'	k $\text{!ʰoas}$ 'belt'	k $\text{ʈʰaris}$ 'small one'	k $\text{ɭʰaos}$ 'strike'
VOICELESS NASAL	ŋ $\text{!o}$ 'push into'	ŋ $\text{!oas}$ 'narrating'	ŋ $\text{ʈʰais}$ 'baboon's arse'	ŋ $\text{ɭʰaos}$ 'cooking place'
VOICED NASAL	ŋ $\text{lo}$ 'measure'	ŋ $\text{!oras}$ 'pluck maize'	ŋ $\text{ʈais}$ 'turtlet dove'	ŋ $\text{ɭaes}$ 'pointing'
GLOTTAL CLOSURE	k $\text{!}^{\text{ʔ}}\text{oa}$ 'sound'	k $\text{!}^{\text{ʔ}}\text{oas}$ 'meeting'	k $\text{!}^{\text{ʔ}}\text{ais}$ 'gold'	k $\text{!}^{\text{ʔ}}\text{aos}$ 'reject a present'

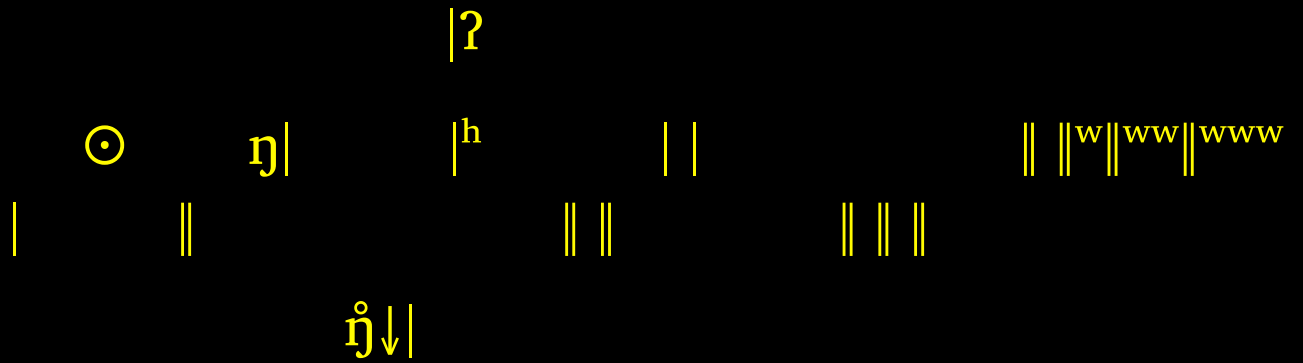
Peter Ladefoged: *Sounds and Consonants*

# English

'ɪŋlɪʃ ə 'læŋwɪdʒ ðæt 'dʌzənt 'hæv 'kɪks

a language that 'doesn't have' clicks

p		t		tʃ	k
b		d		dʒ	g
f	θ	s		ʃ	h
v	ð	z		ʒ	
m		n			ŋ
w		l	r	j	



# Clicks in English

Extracted from their natural environment  
like fish out of water.

# 'Tutting'

*vegtalk 19.12.03.03:33*

01 E    there was another British family there  
02       who were really embarrassed  
03       `cos I got up and made a spectacle of myself  
04       and they were all looking [.hhh   [ahaha  
05 P →                                    [[CLICK]][[CLICK]  
06 E    <<laugh> down at the[ir>  
07 P →                                    [tutting and  
08       pretending to disown you  
09       I know [how it is Ellie yes yes]  
10 E                   [<<laugh>----->]

# Some functions of clicks

- To mark the **boundary between two sequences**
- To display **incipient speakership**
- Part of a **word search**
- Part of a display of **stance** or **feeling**
- As a **metronome**:  
a device for co-ordinating turns at talk

# New sequence indexing

Click + in-breath + talk. Marks incipient speakership.

Holt SO 88.1.9

Call opening

Ken ((placename)) four eight seven two three

Gor hello Ken

(.)

Ken hello[:

Gor [CLICK hh↓ uh:m I just phoned to find out about  
what's happening about tonight

(0.6)

Gor h[hh↓

Ken [I haven't got a clue

Click + inbreath

Reason for the call

Wright (2011).

# Incipient speakership

- In the pre-turn position: **click**, **in-breath**, **speech**  
*CLICK* [hh↓] *I just phoned to see about...*  
*CLICK* [h↓] *well we've got lots of cheeses...*
- This kind of click is probably a result of **gearing up to talk**
- Also possible in this position: **percussives**: [p̄t↓h↓]
- Organic, vegetative sounds (?)

# Word search

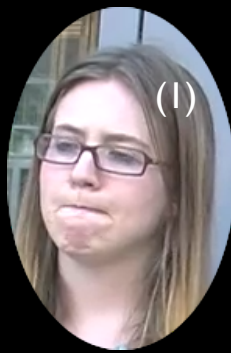
## RCE25 Bench 00.57 library card

01 L and then I went over to the library to-uhm (0.6)  
02 → [!] uh see about that-uh  
03 I can't remember the name of the card now but to  
04 to use other universit[y libraries  
05 R [oh a (sconal) card  
06 L yeah and I asked the woman at the library and she sort of said  
07 yeah you can do that,





# Silence for swallowing



RCE25 Bench 00.57 library card

[(1)(2)(3)]

01 L and then I went over to the library to-uhm [--(0.6)--]  
02 → [!] uh see about that-uh  
03 I can't remember the name of the card now but to  
04 to use other universit[y libraries  
05 R [oh a (sconal) card  
06 L yeah and I asked the woman at the library and she sort of said  
07 yeah you can do that,

# Word search

1. Talk suspended at a **place of maximal grammatical control** (Schegloff 1998: 241):  
*I went to the library to • (see about...)*  
*my • (secondary school)*
2. Suspended intonation
3. Display trouble: **silence, uhm, uh, CLICK**

May include swallowing

Displays of stance or  
emotion

# Meanings of clicks in English

(Wright 2005: 41)

... clicks are said to convey... **disapproval** (Ladefoged 1982: 124; Crystal 1987: 126), **annoyance** (Abercrombie 1967: 31; Ball 1989: 10), **irritation** (Gimson 1970: 34), **exasperation** (Laver 1994: 175), **impatience** (Laver 1994: 175), **regret** (Clark & Yallop 1990: 18), **sympathy** (Gimson 1970: 34) and **encouragement** (Gimson 1970: 34; Abercrombie 1967: 31; Ladefoged 1982: 124; Laver 1994: 177).

# Receiving a compliment

## 11. nrb/01 red hair

1 J 's very red but it's very i[ce  
2 K [it is very red  
3 [isn't it  
4 J [looks in really good conditi[on ]  
5 K → [[ŋ̃ɑː]]  
6 J [thank you]  
[(\*) lovely and] shiny

Compliment

Click + response token *ah* + thanks

# Appreciation of a story

## 10. nrb reluctant lover

1 J he wouldn't stop asking her out  
2 he used to ring her like three times a day  
3 and she'd go "no no"  
4 or she'd say yes and not turn up  
5 and then she just completely fell for him  
6 K → [l<sup>h</sup> (.) ?ɑ:ɪ] that's lovely

Punchline

Click + response token + appreciation

# Preface to 'resistance'

## CallHome 4861.60

01 Mom obviously I didn't do a good enough  
j[ob of rais[ing you]  
02 Deb → [!h↓ [oh s]to:p  
03 tha t

Click + inbreath

Speech starts just where Mom's  
turn is recognisably complete



# Click and pre-turn

‘Resistance’ or ‘incipient speakership’?

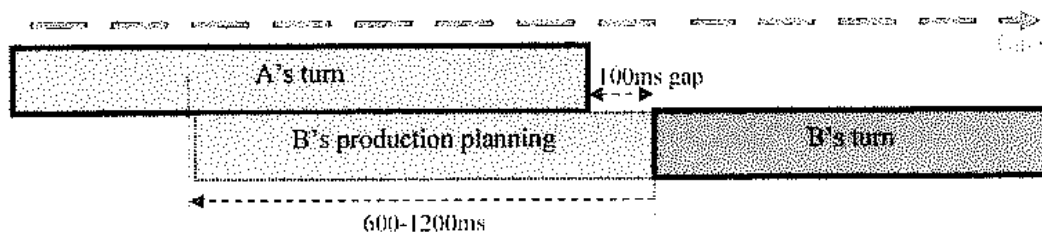


Figure 6.1 Overlap of comprehension and production processes in conversation.

## CallHome 4861.60

01 Mom obviously I didn't do a good enough  
j[ob of rais[ing you]  
02 Deb → [!h↓ 500ms [oh s]to:p  
03 tha:t

From: Levinson (2013).

# A common construction

Prior turn makes relevant a display of feeling or stance, then..

Click + response token (*oh, aw, ah, ow, ooh...*) + words

ŋ̩|ɑ: thank you

|<sup>h</sup> (.) ʔɑ: that's lovely

!h↓ oh stop that

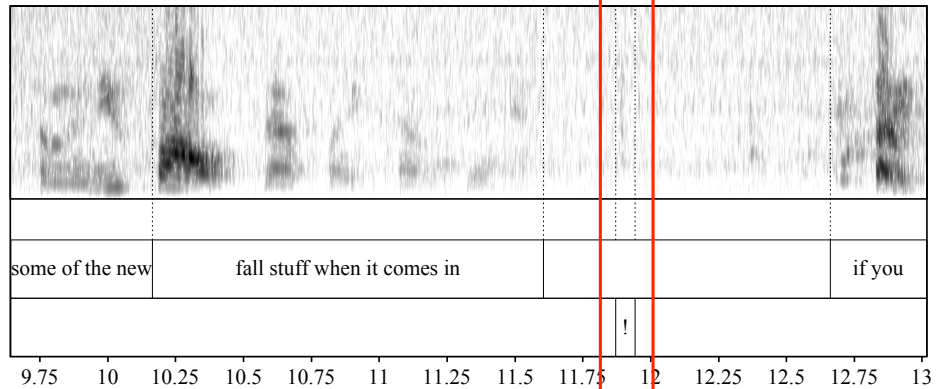
A click by itself is rarely enough to display the speaker's feelings

# Display of affect

## 16. Virginia p.3 01:27

23 VIR: Can I please get that dre:ss, please mom? Lemme g[et that-  
24 MOM: [Dreh(ss)-?  
25 VIR: >You know that [one-<  
26 MOM: [OH VIRginia, we('ve) been through this  
27 befo[RE, you  
28 P??: [hhh! (  
29 VR?:  
30 MOM: =just wait a  
31 in.  
32 VIR: → [!]  
33 (0.5)

01 PRU: I[t's s o|  
02 MOM: [If you s|a

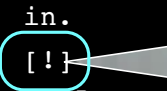




# Click + kinetics



## 16. Virginia p.3 01:27

23 VIR: Can I please get that dress  
24 MOM:  
25 VIR: >You know that [one-<  
26 MOM: [OH VIRginia  
27 befo[RE, you've got enough  
28 P??: [hfff! ((laughter?))  
29 VR?: [hfff! (("pained" sound))  
30 MOM: =just wait an' get- some of the new fa:ll stuff when it comes  
31 in.  
32 VIR: → [!]   
33 (0.5)  
  
01 PRU: I[t's s  
02 MOM: [If you ce,



# Displaying a stance

Click + response token (*oh, aw, ah, ow, ooh...*) + words  
Click + **visible behaviour** (head toss, eye gaze)

**Not necessarily a negative  
stance, despite our intuitions.**

# Clicks as metronomes

A device for co-ordinating talk in time

# Turn-initial click: on-beat and in overlap

CK/SW sympathy #63

1	A	it's just kinda dull				
			*	*	*	*
2	A	God what a miserable	miserable		[weekend	
3	B			[l]	[[g:..... ]	
4	B	that's a shame				

Beats

Display of sympathy

Click + response token



(4) CK/SW #63

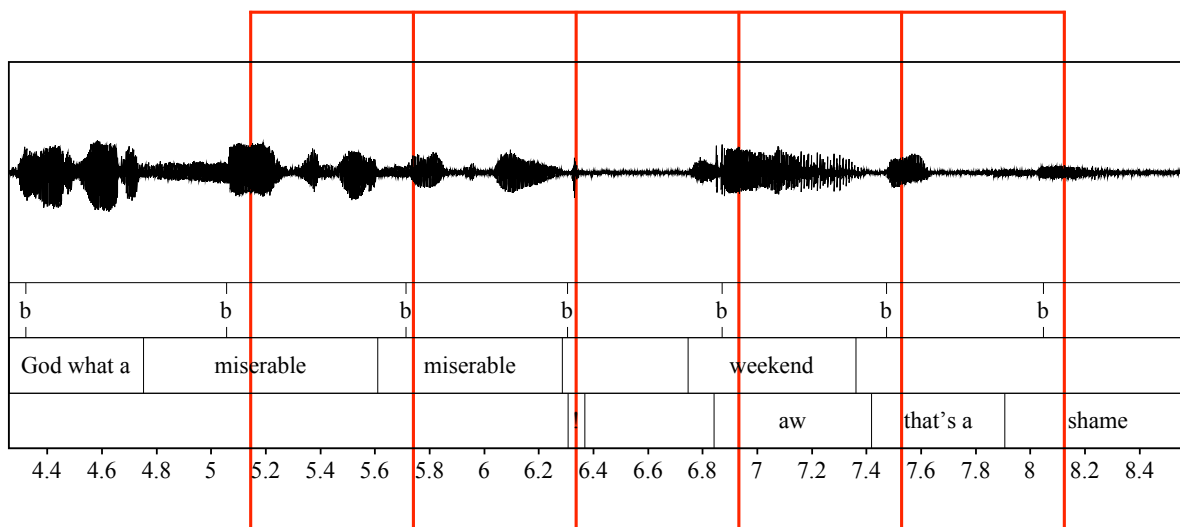
1 A it's just kinda dull

\* \* \* \*

2 A God what a miserable miserable [weekend

3 B [l] [[g:.....]

4 B that's a shame



<http://cspeech.ucd.ie/~fred/beatExtraction.php>

# Clicks + laughter pulses

## 18. Salford A & R lateral click 1654 topless beaches

*Anthony and Ray are talking about places they'd like to go. Anthony would like to go to Australia.*

01 A I'll just go on the topless beaches

02 R yeah (..) you wish

03 A no I know where they are

04 [|| || || [||]

05 R [ <<laugh> \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* ]

06 A and titty bars

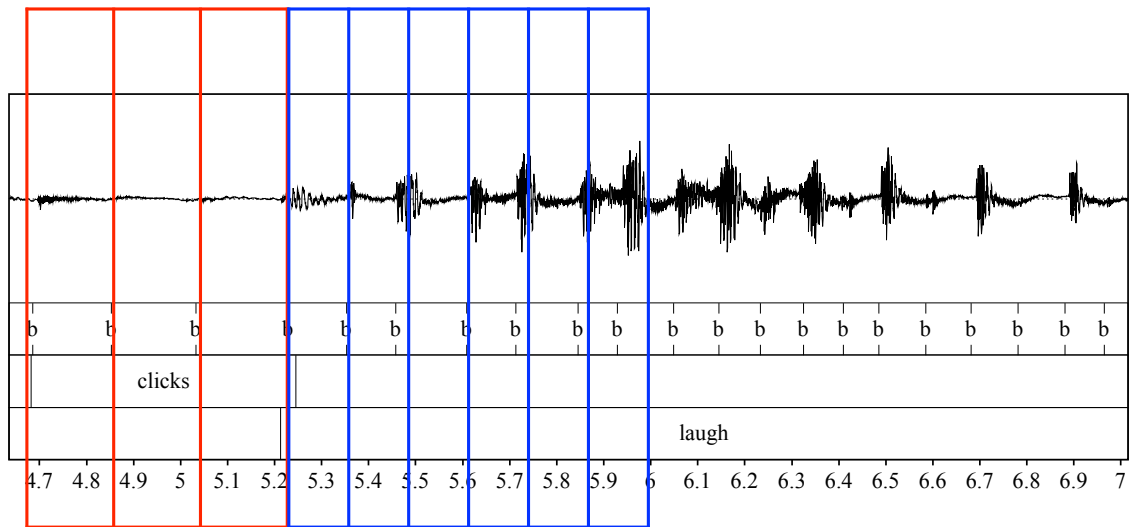
07 R right, anyway

08 A <<laugh>-[----->]

09 R [so where else would <<laugh> you wanna go]

**Salford A & R lateral click 1654 topless beaches**

01 A I'll just go on the topless beaches  
02 R yeah (..) you wish  
03 A no I know where they are  
04 [|| || || [||]  
05 R [ <<laugh> \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* ]  
06 A and titty bars  
07 R right, anyway  
08 A <<laugh>-[----->]  
09 R [so where else would <<laugh> you wanna go]



# Why would this be?

- Coming in on time is a way to display alignment with another person
- This kind of behaviour promotes sociality
- Clicks are momentary so they are well suited to marking a moment in time

# Summary

- Clicks are a part of the **sound system of English conversation**, but **not of English words**
- Clicks are involved in a number of **constructions of conversation**: part of regular, orderly practices for social interaction
- They co-occur with non-linguistic (non-verbal, non-vocal) practices: head tosses, swallowing, laughing...

# At the heart of conversation

- Conversation is a vehicle for social action and interaction; speech is the primary vocal exponent of action and interaction
- Clicks are implicated in some fundamental actions in spoken interaction:
  - ▶ marking incipient speakership
  - ▶ word search
  - ▶ sequence management

# At the periphery of language

- Conversation shapes language in ways which linguists have generally paid little attention to
- The kinds of meanings (actions) clicks are involved are not central to most linguistics
- But clicks have form : meaning relations, and are therefore conventional



En: /tri:/  
Ge: /baum/  
Fr: /arbr/

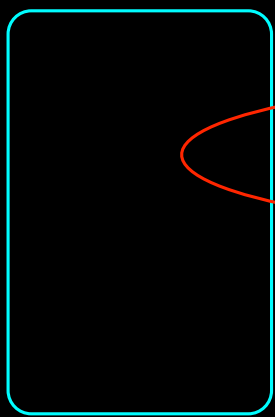
start a new  
sequence

[<seq1 end, {p, ↓}>]  
CLICK  
[<seq2 start>, {f, ↑}]

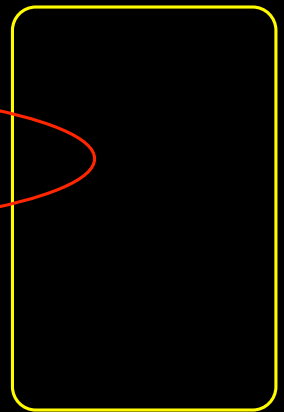
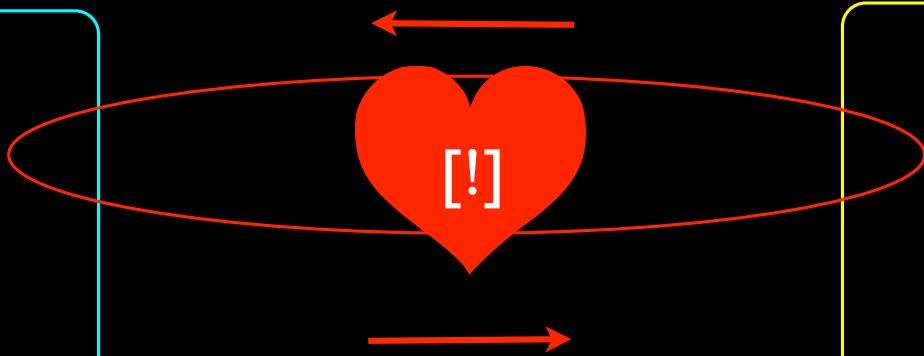
display a stance

CLICK  
h↓  
[response token]  
[verbal material]

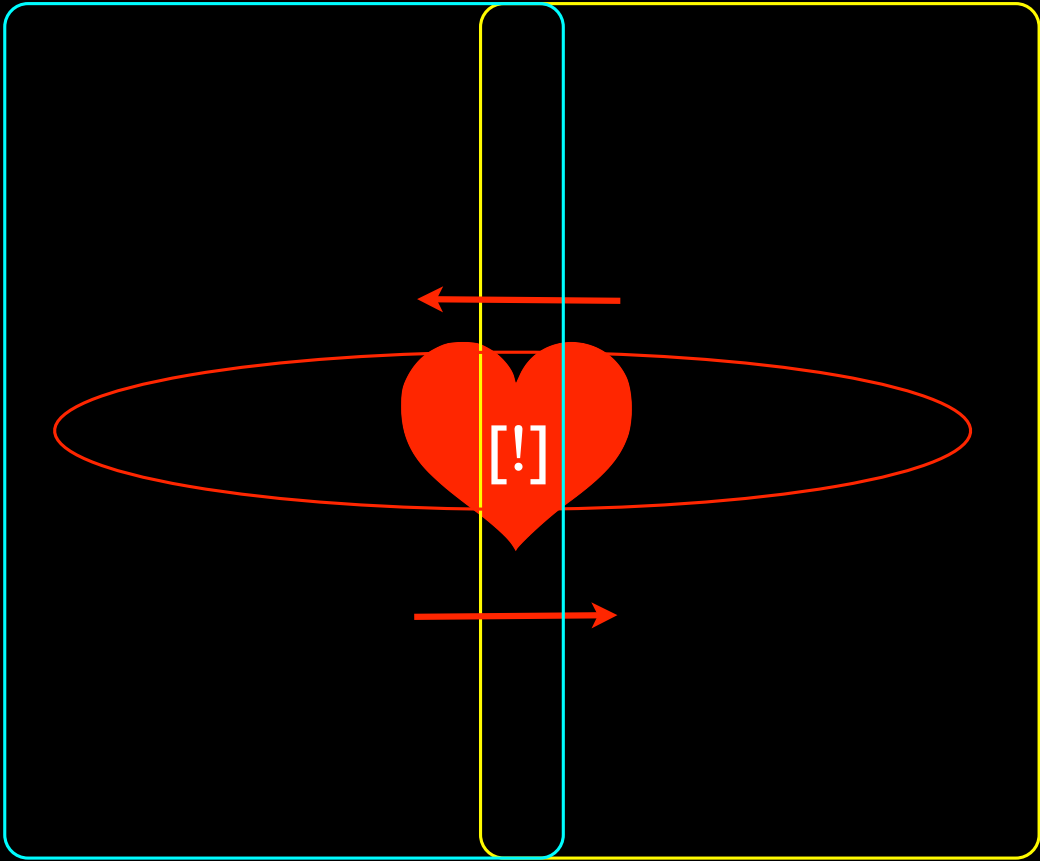




*speaker 1*



*speaker 2*



*Pat*

*Chris*

# Complete details and references:

Ogden, Richard (2012). Making sense of outliers. *Phonetica* 69, 48-67.

Ogden, Richard (2013). Clicks and Percussives in English conversation. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 32(3), 299-320.

At the heart of conversation,  
on the periphery of language.  
Sounds and  
actions in  
conversation

