



## Cooking rice

### Activity

The text examined in this unit was recorded in the kitchen of a family home; all the participants are members of the same family. Here are some brief conversational exchanges. Would you expect to find conversations such as this in a family kitchen?:

A: Would you like a biscuit?

B: I beg your pardon.

A: Would you like a biscuit?

B: Oh, yes please. Thank you very much.

A: I didn't know you used boiling water to make rice.

B: You don't have to use boiling water but it is reckoned to be quicker.

Write short notes explaining why you would or would not expect to find such styles of conversational exchange in the text examined in this unit.

### Speakers and setting

<S 01> female (45)

<S 02> male (19)

<S 03> male (46)

<S 04> male (49)

<S 02> is <S 01> and <S 04>'s son

<S 03> is <S 04>'s brother

This extract takes place in <S 01>, <S 02> and <S 04>'s house. <S 03> is visiting them.

### Transcript

1 <S 01> Now I think you'd better start the rice  
2 <S 02> Yeah ... what you got there?

3 [4 secs]  
4 <S 02> Will it all fit in the one?

5 <S 01> No you'll have to do two separate ones  
6 <S 03> Right ... what next?

7 [17 secs]  
8 <S 03> Foreign body in there

9 <S 02> It's the raisins  
10 <S 03> Oh is it oh it's rice with raisins is it?

11 <S 02> [No no no it's not supposed to be  
12 [laughs] erm

13 <S 03> There must be a raisin for it being in there  
14 <S 02> D'you want a biscuit?

15 <S 03> Erm  
16 <S 02> Biscuit?

17 <S 03> Er yeah  
18 [9 secs]

19 <S 04> All right  
20 <S 03> Yeah

21 [10 secs]  
22 <S 04> Didn't know you used boiling water  
23 <S 02> Pardon

24 <S 04> Didn't know you used boiling water  
25 <S 02> Don't have to but it's erm ... they reckon it's erm quicker

26 [5 secs]  
27 <S 04> Tony was saying they should have the heating on by about Wednesday  
28 <S 02> Just gonna put the er butter on

29 <S 04> What you making Ian?  
30 <S 02> Mm

31 <S 04> What's that?  
32 <S 02> Oh er just gonna do some rice  
33 <S 04> Mm

34 <S 02> Doing some rice in the micro  
35 <S 03> So you put margarine with it

36 <S 02> Pardon yeah little bit don't know why cos otherwise it'll  
37 <S 03> Separate it

- 38 <S 02> Mm not sure actually doesn't erm don't have to do it when you put it  
 39 on the er on the stove  
 40 <S 03> How long does it take?  
 41 <S 02> Erm  
 42 <S 01> Oh that'll make a noise  
 43 <S 02> [Takes about thirty-five minutes yeah that'll that  
 44 that'll destroy your tape  
 45 <S 03> Thirty-five minutes  
 46 <S 02> Yeah  
 47 <S 01> Yeah  
 48 <S 03> I thought the microwave did everything in about two minutes  
 49 <S 01> You may as well turn it off now then  
 50 <S 03> Yeah you can do it on the cooker for thir, in thirty-five minutes  
 51 <S 02> Then if you have to watch it ... you just ignore it  
 52 <S 03> Mm  
 53 <S 04> You don't have to wash the saucepan either do you?  
 54 <S 02> You don't have to wash the saucepan after [laughs] [<S 03> mm] you  
 55 don't have to erm don't have to drain the water off either  
 56 <S 03> I didn't know that microwaves ran that long  
 57 <S 02> Yeah you don't have to erm drain the water off either cos er  
 58 <S 03> I'll switch it off when you turn that on  
 59 <S 02> When Sahib used to come out and make rice and your saucepan  
 60 used to be it'd be thick about an inch thick on the bottom it would  
 61 and that was the best part of the rice  
 62 <S 03> [laughs] I'll turn this off

### General commentary

The family are cooking rice for a family meal. Different activities are involved: cooking, helping, or simply acting as an onlooker. But the main focus of the talk at this point in the recording is on the cooking of the rice and on the procedures involved in its cooking. In this respect the language activity is essentially one of **language-in-action**: language used in the execution of a task in which the participants are directly and materially involved. It is noteworthy, however, that during this process the members of the family feel free to introduce other more incidental topics which may or may not be elaborated upon.

### Line-by-line commentary

- 1.2 *What you got there?* In this recording ELLIPSIS is pervasive. The ellipsis takes, as we shall see, many different forms. In this example the main auxiliary verb *have* is ellipitd. Ellipsis is pervasive for a number of reasons: chief among these reasons are that the speakers, as members of the same family, normally conduct conversations with one another which are highly informal. Ellipsis is a linguistic concomitant of informality and easy-goingness in conversation. More specifically, the speakers are performing actions or are making references which are easily visible and apprehensible by all the participants. This kind of grammatical shorthand is perfectly appropriate, therefore, as the speakers have no need to elaborate; indeed, if they were to elaborate, much in their discourse would become unnecessarily redundant.
- 1.4 *in the one*: In most standard written grammars this structure does not occur. *One* is not normally cited as allowing an immediately preceding definite article. Other examples of the same usage from authentic data are:  
 (at an airport check-in)  
 Airline check-in stewardess: Is it just *the one* bag you're checking in, sir?  
 Male passenger: Just *the one*, yes.  
 (woman to man standing waiting outside toilet in a restaurant)  
 Is there just *the one* toilet?  
 In all cases, the object referred to is immediately visible to the speaker and listener. We can only conclude, since the encounters are public and since none of the speakers was speaking in a non-standard dialect, that such examples are examples of standard spoken English and simply have not been observed or codified before. This structure also occurs with other numbers:  
 (supermarket assistant to customer) Is it just the three boxes?  
 1.6 *what next?*: Verbs are ellipitd here: either the verb 'to be' or an auxiliary verb. (e.g. what's next?, what do we do next?).
- 1.7 [17 sec]: Note the long silences throughout the transcript, when people are busy doing things. In the context of interchanges between members of a family silences are common. They are neither as disturbing nor perceived as impolite or as unsettling as they might if a stranger or someone from outside the family were in their company. For your convenience we have omitted some of the longer silences on the tape. This also applies to Unit 1.3, where long silences occur while a customer is having her hair washed at the hairdresser's.
- 1.8 *Foreign body in there*: Another example of ellipsis; on this occasion it is likely that the dummy subject *there* and the verb to be are ellipitd (There's a foreign body in there.). The phrase *foreign body* means here 'strange-looking object that should not be there'.