

Worked Examples 219-220

IC feature(s) in focus	
Concise checklist	2. Keep the discussion going over several turns i) Language: Use a range of appropriate language (agreeing...)
Full checklist	8. Use effective functional language for interaction • Use the right phrase at the right time • Use inappropriate formulaic expressions

Example 219: P07

(simplified transcript)

Task: Imagine that a country wants to encourage its people to do more sport. Talk to each other about why the ideas in the pictures might encourage people to do more sport.

1. B: Yeah I totally agree with you.
2. I think that the children should be taught sport
3. since they are very young, so they can improve their skills,
4. and maybe find the their easiest sport,
5. so I think more sports classes are really important.
6. ((pause))
7. Uh I also think that all the international sports events help
8. children and younger guys to approach new sports,
9. uhm would you agree with me?
10. H: Yes. I could- I couldn't agree more,
11. uh but maybe build more sports centres or organize sports
12. competition is expensive for government,
13. but uhm they can give free sports equipment to clubs,
14. maybe they can help the sport club.....

Guiding questions

- In B's turn (Lines 1-9), he first expresses agreement with H's idea of sports classes (line 1). He then explains why he agrees and why sport classes are important (lines 2-5). In the second part of his turn (lines 7-9), B introduces another idea – holding international sports events, and asks if H agrees with him.
- Notice how H responds in the next turn (lines 10-14). Analyse what H does in her turn like the description of B's turn above.
 - (At line 10, H first expresses agreement with 'yes' and a formulaic expression 'I couldn't agree more'.
 - However, she then says 'but' and proposes a reason (cost) that challenges the ideas of international sports events and building more sports centres (proposed by B in the last and another previous turn) – lines 11-12.
 - H then goes on to propose yet another new idea 'giving free sporting equipment to clubs' at lines 13-14.)
- Is the use of the formulaic expression 'I couldn't agree more' natural and appropriate in this context? Why / why not?

- *(‘I couldn’t agree more’ indicates strong agreement with what the previous speaker said. Here, however, it is followed by further talk that challenges the previous speaker’s idea, therefore not being used quite appropriately, as one of the examiners commented. Note that it is not uncommon in conversations for people to say ‘yes, but...’ as a partial agreement or ‘agreement-prefaced disagreement’. What seems unnatural here is a strong agreement ‘I couldn’t agree more’ followed immediately by disagreement.*
- *Examiners commented that this seems to be a ‘learned phrase’ by H and her intonation sounded artificial. Notice also how H has a cut-off at ‘could-’ and has to restart (line 10). The repair also lends support to it being a learned formulaic response.)*

#YesBut
#FormulaicExpressions
#RightPhraseAtTheRightTime

Example 220: P06

(Simplified transcript)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDMAnYt7BKA> (09:41)

Task: Here are some pictures of things that can make living in a city enjoyable. (1) Talk to each other about how these things can help people to enjoy life in a city, (2) then decide which two things you think are the most important.

1. N: I think the most important for this picture is goes to buy
2. flowers. Uhhh because you decoration your house.
3. And goes to the park, for walking, and because in the park
4. you’ve got the X there, and you relax in the park.
5. P: Okay, I agree with you, uh but, I don’t know how buying
6. flowers is important. I think that we’d better have them in
7. our balconies, water them
8. N: I don’t agree with you, because [in] my opinion this thing is
9. important because you decoration you house
10. and you feel different than you haven’t got flowers
11. in your [house.
12. P: [Oh- maybe you’re right.

Guiding questions

- At lines 1-4, N talks about the two things she thinks are the most important – buying flowers and going to the park. How does P respond (lines 5-7)?
 - *(P begins with ‘Okay’ and the formulaic expression ‘I agree with you’. She then goes on to express her view that buying flowers is NOT important and explain why. So, actually, P doesn’t agree with at least one of N’s ideas.)*
- Is the use of the formulaic expression ‘I agree with you’ natural and appropriate here?
 - *(Like Example 219, since the talk that follows is something that diverges from the previous speaker’s view, it seems less appropriate – or it would be better if P says which idea she agrees with and which one she doesn’t.)*
 - *(Notice also the intonation and her gaze direction as P says ‘I agree with you’ in the video, both of which suggest that the use of this formulaic response is a bit unnatural and possibly*

functions as a turn-taking prop that buys P the time to think about the ideas and formulate her upcoming talk.)

- *(Another place where P seems to express 'perfunctory' agreement is line 12 'Oh maybe you're right'. The fact that she looks at the examiner before saying this suggests that she agrees simply because the discussion time is up.)*

#YesBut

#FormulaicExpressions

#SayItLikeYouMeanIt

Lesson learned

We know that there are different phrases called 'formulaic expressions' we can use to do various things in an interaction – to agree/disagree, to ask your partner his/her opinion, to change topics or introduce a new idea, etc. It is very important to remember that the choice and the use of these phrases need to be appropriate for the interactional context – i.e. say the right thing at the right time.

In the examples, we have seen how there are formulaic responses which show different degrees of agreement. You will need to choose the right phrases to express a strong or a weak agreement. The way you say it also matters. The intonation can give away whether you truly agree!