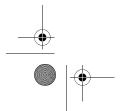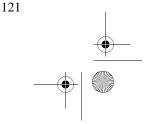# Conversational grammar – bad grammar?
A situation-based description of quotative *I goes* in the BNC

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Abstract

Everyday spoken language has a long tradition of being seen as the poor relation of the written language. The use of certain terminologies in corpus linguistic studies of conversational grammar reveals that this tradition is continuing. This paper argues that an alternative view is possible, a view which recognises the inherent value of conversation, a value which lies in the adaptedness of conversational language to constraints set by the conversational 'situation type' (Halliday 1978). The use of I goes *is examined as a case in point. The form is investigated in terms of its distribution across registers, its morphosyntax, and the discourse and situational factors that bear on its use. The discourse and situational factors are discussed on the basis of a detailed analysis of a sample of 90 occurrences of* I goes *in the context of 100 words each. It is shown that* I goes *acts both as a multi-turn quotative, that is, as a reporting clause in presentations of extended stretches of anterior conversation with frequent occurrences of speaker change, and as a speech-economic device freeing processing resources that the narrator can bring to bear on the achievement of the underlying purpose of storytelling, namely to indicate 'the point' of the narrative (Labov 1972). In this perspective, I argue,* I goes *can be seen as a skilled adaptation to two constraints set by the conversational situation: the fundamental scarcity of time and its relational goal-orientation. In the concluding section, I argue that a situation-based approach may foster a tradition of acknowledging the value of conversational language as adapted language, an acknowledgment which is needed particularly in EFL teaching where the status of Standard English as the unrivalled model for teaching both writing and speech is preventing important corpus linguistic insights from trickling into EFL classrooms. Finally, I also stress the usefulness of relating corpus linguistic findings to theories derived from non-corpus linguistic research.*
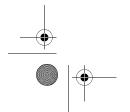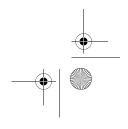
1 Introduction

Summarizing what is probably the most fundamental distinction between speech and writing, Halliday (1985: xvii) notes: "Writing exists whereas speech happens". Speech 'happens', inter alia, because it is invisible and transmitted through the auditory/oral channel, thus constituting a process not a product, as writing does. Speech is therefore fleeting, a property of people who talk to each other rather than an entity in itself. As a result, speech has been seen as unfit to serve as a means of generating enduring records of human achievement or of sacred significance, a task taken over by writing (Carter 2004: 55). Accordingly, writing is valued while speech is given little value among linguists and applied linguists (including teachers) and in the perception of the public (Carter and McCarthy 1995: 142). Given its fundamental fleetingness and its lack in cultural status speech was long "underdescribed and undertheorised within linguistic science" (Carter 2004: 56). Things began to change with the invention of the tape recorder and the advent of spoken corpora which capture and visualize hitherto inconceivably large amounts of speech, thus turning speech into writing, and process into product. Although this change of mode inevitably distorts speech to an extent (cf. Mauranen 2004; Carter 2004), analyses of recent corpora of speech have not failed to advance our 'view' of the workings of speech, particularly of the grammar of conversation. To name only the most ambitious and comprehensive ones among the many corpus-based descriptions of conversation, the *Longman grammar of spoken and written English* (LGSWE) (Biber *et al*. 1999) and the *Cambridge grammar of English (CGE)* (Carter and McCarthy 2006) have portrayed everyday talk in unprecedented detail. So, with the help of advanced technology, linguistic wit is beginning to 'get hold' of speech despite its fleetingness thus surmounting one of the two obstacles to describing it. What of the second obstacle, the lack in status which characterizes public and much linguistic attitude to speech – are linguists beginning to counter that too? There is evidence that prejudices against the spoken language persist even in corpus linguistic descriptions. The evidence comes from analyses of terminologies commonly used in the description of key features of conversation. The terminologies in question can be shown to be based on the written language and to carry negative evaluation of the phenomena observed. An example is the term 'dislocation' used widely in corpus linguistic literature (e.g., Aijmer 1989; Biber *et al*. 1999: 956 ff.; Leech 2000; Cheshire 1999) to label syntactic choices which "involve a definite noun phrase occurring in a peripheral position, with a co-referent pronoun in the core of the clause" (Biber *et al*. 1999: 956), as in *Those Marks and Spencer bags, can you see them all?*. Others reject the term. Miller
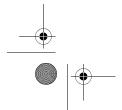
and Weinert (1998: 238) consider 'dislocation' "entirely inappropriate for the analysis of spoken language", Carter and McCarthy (1995: 149) view it as "a misnomer and a misleading metaphor" arguing that it suggests that "something has been pushed out of place to a somewhat aberrant position" and Rühlemann (2006) found that the prefix *dis-,* when used as a productive morpheme to express negation, as in '*dis*-location'*,* forms words that have negative semantic prosody (cf. Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993). Another problematic terminological choice is 'dysfluency', a term commonly used to label conversational phenomena such as silent and filled pauses (e.g., *er* and *erm*), phrasal restarts (or 'false starts') and so forth. Note that Biber *et al*. subsume all of these phenomena under the heading 'Dysfluency and *error*' (1999: 1052 ff.; added emphasis). Rühlemann (2006) found that among the ten most common words with *dys-* in the BNC, the prefix was used exclusively with words denoting pathologies*,* such as *dyslexia, dysfunction, dysplasia*, and the like. This suggests that the term 'dysfluency' depicts pauses, repeats, restarts etc., which are found in almost any stretch of conversational data, as symptoms of a somewhat pathological speech condition. The list of terminologies that reveal a tendency to discard features of conversational language as somewhat degenerate and defective could easily be extended. McCarthy (personal communication), for example, notes that the terms 'ellipsis' and 'stranded prepositions' follow a similar pattern of covert devaluation of their referents. So, in sum, there is good evidence to suggest that the long tradition of viewing spoken everyday language and its grammar as "an ill-formed variant of writing" (Hewings and Hewings 2005: 216) and, thus, 'bad' is still strong in linguistics.

One form that is likely to be judged by many as 'bad grammar' on two counts is the form *I goes*. First, *I goes* will be considered 'bad' because use of quotative GO, similar to the use of quotative BE *like*, is "considered by many people to be non-standard and grammatically unacceptable" (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 823). Evidence for this assumption comes from an attitudinal survey that Blyth *et al*. (1990: 223) conducted among university staff and students: the majority of respondents rated the use of both GO and BE *like* as "stigmatized, ungrammatical, and indicative of casual speech". Second, *I goes* will be considered 'bad' because, similar to the phrase *I says*, the use of the third-person *–s* in disagreement with the subject *I* is a clear breach of the rules of Standard English concord and, hence, "often considered non-standard and bad style" (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 823; see also Biber *et al*. 1999: 20). Nonetheless, use of quotative GO is very common in conversation (e.g., Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999; Stenström *et al*. 2002; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004) and, as will be shown below, use of quotative *I goes* is also not infrequent in conversation. So, as lin-
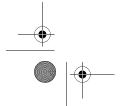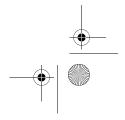
guists we may find ourselves in the dilemma of seeing, thanks to corpus evidence, how frequent non-standard forms actually are in everyday language use and not knowing how to deal with them in any other way than by discarding them as bad grammar. It appears that the high frequency of these forms demands that we rethink our inherited evaluation of everyday language as deficient language.

The overriding aim of this paper is to demonstrate that such a rethink is possible and that even strikingly 'deviant' forms such as *I goes* can be observed to effectively fulfil valuable functions in conversation. Key to recognising these functions will be that we view *I goes* fully in context – not only in the context of its typical discourse but also in the context of constraints set by its 'situation type', a notion closely related in systemic linguistics to the notion of 'register', which is seen as "the fact that the language that we speak or write varies according to the type of situation" (Halliday 1978: 32). While Halliday's three situational components – field, tenor, and mode – are valuable analytical tools to describe any situation type, initial attempts have been made to describe the *conversational* situation type and to capture the factors that constrain language use in conversation. Biber *et al*. (1999: 1041), for example, "identify a spectrum of 'external' (social, psychological, and physical) determinants of conversation"; Leech (2000), co-author of the LGSWE, provides a comparable account of the conversational situation, comprising five parameters, or 'functional characteristics'; see also Rühlemann (2007), probably the most comprehensive attempt to date at delineating the factors and concomitant constraints determining the conversational situation. Two of the factors, addressed in all three accounts, will be particularly helpful in coming to terms with the specific achievements of *I goes* in conversation: the fact that conversation is "typically spontaneous, so that speakers are continually faced with the need to plan and execute their utterance in real time, 'online' or 'on the fly'" (Biber *et al*. 1999: 1048), and what Rühlemann (2007: 45 ff.) refers to as 'relation management', that is, the fact that the overriding goal in conversation is relational rather than informational, conative, or other (cf. also Malinowski 1923: 467). What Biber *et al*., Leech, and Rühlemann have in common, beside similar descriptions of the factors determining the conversational situation, is the conviction that recourse to the extra-linguistic conversational situation is necessary to "identify and explain many of the striking grammatical characteristics of conversation" (Biber *et al*. 1999: 1041).

Quotative GO has been researched extensively in sociolinguistic studies, mostly, however, only as a backdrop for investigating quotative *BE like* and with a focus on its use in U.S. American English (e.g., Blyth *et al*. 1990 and Buchstaller 2002). Its use in British English has triggered far less studies (e.g.,

Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999 and Macaulay 2001) and it has scarcely been the object of large-scale corpus linguistic investigations. To my knowledge, beside a small number of largely qualitative descriptions based on computer corpora (e.g., Biber *et al*. 1999: 1119, McCarthy 1998: 164–165; and Rühlemann: 2007: 134–136), the only large-scale quantitative corpus study of quotative GO is Stenström *et al*. (2002). The form *I goes*, by contrast, is largely *terra incognita*. It has, to my knowledge, only been explored in some detail in Rühlemann (2007: 135–136). Focusing on its social distribution, he shows that *I goes* is heavily gender and age-marked: the overwhelming majority of speakers using *I goes* are both female as well as teenage or in their early twenties. Stenström *et al*. (2002: 123) note in passing that, in the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), virtually all instances of *I goes* are uttered by speakers from the London boroughs Hackney and Tower Hamlets, an observation which suggests that *I goes,* just as quotative GO generally (cf. Stenström 2002: 127), is also marked in terms of (lower) social class.[1]
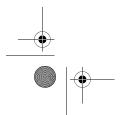
In this paper, I discuss the register distribution of *I goes*, analyse and compare it to related forms in terms of morphosyntax, and explore discourse and situational factors constraining its use by analysing in detail a sample of 90 occurrences of *I goes* in the context of c. 100 words each. The corpus underlying the analyses is the British National Corpus (BNC) XML Edition, a multi-purpose corpus of British English of the first half of the 1990s. One of the features that sets this most recent version apart from earlier releases of the BNC is the fact that a much larger number of subcorpora are already predefined. Note that only some of these subcorpora correspond to what might qualify as registers; there is broad agreement, for example, that the demographically-sampled subcorpus represents conversation as a register (e.g., Rayson *et al*. 1997: 133; Aston and Burnard 1998: 28; Biber *et al*. 1999: 28). Other predefined subcorpora, by contrast, are best seen as collections of roughly homogeneous texts; one such example is the subcorpus labelled 'other spoken material' (cf. Lee 2001).

2   *Register distribution*

How frequent is *I goes* and in what registers or context types is it used? To address these questions a distributional analysis was carried out using the subcorpora predefined in the BNC XML Edition.

The phrase *I goes* has a total frequency of 167 occurrences in the BNC.[2] The occurrences were manually checked to sort out uses of *goes* in a non-quotative function. In (1), for instance, *goes* is used as a motion verb:

(1)   [laugh] [...] cos every time **I goes** out there he's sat and he's sat and
he's sat as much to say hello [laugh]
(KBE)

The corrected results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of *I goes* across context types
(ACA: Academic prose; FIC: fiction and verse; NON: non-academic
prose and biography; NEW: newspapers; OTW: other published writ-
ten material; CON: demographically sampled (conversational) subcor-
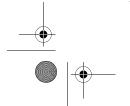pus; OTS: other spoken material)

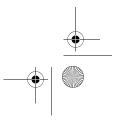|	**ACA** 18m	**FIC** 19m	**NON** 27m	**NEW** 11m	**OTW** 20m	**UNP** 5m	**CON** 5m	**OTS** 7m
RF	7	0	0	0	7	0	129	0
NFpm	0.4	0	0	0	0.4	0	25.8	0

Table 1 suggests that *I goes* is almost non-existing in writing: in some written
context types it does not figure at all, e.g. in fiction and newspapers, while its
normed frequency per million words is below one occurrence both in academic
writing and in 'other written material'. In written texts in which it does occur, as
in (2), its function is as a quotative, introducing presentations of anterior dis-
course:

[From a book entitled 'The rules of disorder' (domain: social science)]

(2)   Then in the third one I had Miss Brown. It was the last lesson of the
day and I couldn't help it, but I come out with a big burp in the middle
of the lesson and she goes, 'Fay, are you feeling all right?' and I says,
'Yes Miss, of course I am,' and then she goes to me when I did it again,
'FAY!' and **I goes**, 'It's all right,' **I goes**, 'Pardon me, Miss. I'll be all
right in a minute', and then she goes, 'I'll let you off this time,' and
then I did it again – a really loud one, and she goes, 'Fay, you're going
to have to go to the Headmistress,' she goes

I goes is not used at all in the various public speech contexts assembled under
the umbrella of 'other spoken material'. Where it does exist is in conversation:
here, it has a raw frequency of 129 occurrences, corresponding to a normed fre-
quency per million words of 25.8 occurrences. Quotative *I goes* thus has its hab-
itat in conversation and is, arguably, part of conversational grammar.
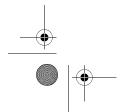
3   *Morphosyntactic analysis*

Before we analyse discourse and situational factors governing the use of *I goes*, it is useful to be aware of the morphosyntactic structure of the phrase.

Obviously, the most striking morphological feature is the *–s* morpheme. This ending is unexpected, at least from a standard viewpoint, because it is typically a third-person ending not a first-person ending. Thus, in *I + goes,* the third-person form *goes* is coupled with the first-person pronoun *I*. *I goes* hence does not follow the ordinary rules of grammatical concord (Biber *et al*. 1999: 191). Note, however, that, as an instance of what would commonly be regarded as 'discord', *I goes* is by no means an isolated phenomenon but in the company of a large number of conversational features. The features include, inter alia, the reporting clause *I says*, as in (3), existential *there +'s* + plural NP, as in (4), and third-person-singular *don't*, as in (5):
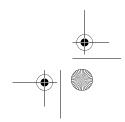
(3)   He says why? **I says** because things go missing. [laugh] (KB1)

(4)   The thing is **there's** millions of books and you don't see all that many people (KBB)

(5)   But if you're not too bad, I mean, **it don't** really matter, does it? (KB1)

Just as *I goes*, the features illustrated in (3)–(5) are far from being isolated lapses occurring here and there with individual speakers but have a wide currency in conversation (cf. Biber *et al*. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006; Rühlemann 2007). A common structural denominator to these forms, including *I goes*, is the fact that they invariably involve forms which do occur in Standard English but are employed for different syntactic and semantic functions (Biber *et al.* 1999: 1123). That is, a hallmark of these forms is that they include Standard English forms that are 'generalized' to non-standard grammatical functions. Seen as generalized forms, *I goes* as well as the other three examples of non-standard subject-verb concord appear to be part of an even larger group of features whose distinguishing feature is 'generalization'. Generalized features include, inter alia, forms such as *me* taking the role of *my*, as in (6), *were* used instead of *was* (and vice versa), as in (7), and past tense forms taking the role of the past participle (and the reverse), as in (8) (for more types of 'generalization' see, for example, Biber *et al.* 1999: 1121 ff.; Rühlemann 2007):

(6)   What's this in **me** hand? (KB8)

(7)   [laugh]   ... **I were** killing myself with laughter! (KB1)

(8)   PS056 >: You've see you've forgotten me already!
       PS052 >: [laughing] you've **forgot** who I am already [].   [laugh]
       (KBG)

We see that simply discarding *I goes* as bad grammar is made difficult by the
fact that the form belongs to a large group of features distinctive of conversation
which would have to be discarded as a whole. The following analysis of factors
bearing upon the use of *I goes* in discourse will make such discarding even more
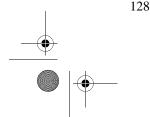difficult.

4   *Discourse and situational factors*

In order to shed light on how *I goes* is used in discourse, all 129 occurrences of
quotative *I goes* in the conversational subcorpus of the BNC were inspected in
the contexts of roughly 100 words each (50 words preceding the node, 50 words
following it). It turned out that the 129 contexts contained a number of largely
overlapping contexts, that is, contexts which were, due to repetition of *I goes*,
largely identical. Overlapping contexts were removed from the sample, thus
reducing its size to 90 contexts, comprising 9,400 words in total or, on average,
104 words per context.

The 90-context sample was subjected to close manual analysis. The hypoth-
esis guiding the analysis was that *I goes* compares to *I says* not only morphosyn-
tactically, as was noted above, but also discoursally and functionally:
discoursally as a 'multi-turn quotative' that has its place in presentations of
extended stretches of anterior conversation with frequent turn-taking, and func-
tionally as a 'speech-economic device' that saves the presenter processing time
needed for the presentation (for a case study of *I says* see Rühlemann 2007: 169
ff.). To test this hypothesis, the analysis addressed the following research ques-
tions: (i) how frequent are quotative *goes* and other forms of quotative GO? (ii)
what subjects is *goes* used with? (iii) what other quotatives co-occur with quota-
tive GO? (iv) how many conversational turns are presented in the presentations
that involve the node *I goes*? and (v) what other, non-quotative, phenomena can
be observed in the wider discourse? The results are presented and discussed in
the following.

4.1   *Frequencies of forms of quotative GO*

Table 2 shows the results of an analysis of the frequencies of the various forms
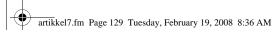of quotative GO in the sample (non-quotative uses of GO were excluded).

Table 2: Number of occurrences of forms of quotative GO)

	VVI (go)	VVB (go)	VVG (going)	VVD (went)	VVZ (goes)	VVN (gonr)	Total
No.	0	14	45	47	324	6	436
%	0	3	10	11	74	1	99

It turned out that by far the most frequent form of quotative GO in the sample is *goes*: it alone accounted for 74 per cent of all forms of the lemma. The role of *goes* as the predominant quotative form of GO in the sample corroborates very similar observations made by Biber *et al.* (1999: 1119), Stenström *et al.* (2002: 118 ff.) and Rühlemann (forthcoming). Table 2 also suggests that the VVB-tagged form *go* (14 occurrences) is very infrequent; that is, maybe surprisingly (at least from a Standard English perspective), there are only very few instances of the form *I go* in the sample. In fact, a query for *I go* in the sample yields 13 occurrences, a very low frequency compared to the frequency of *I goes*, as will be shown in the following section.
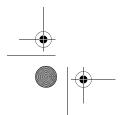
4.2 Subjects of goes

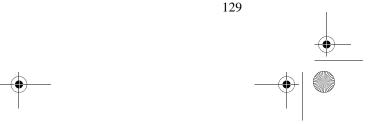Table 3 displays the subjects of all 324 occurrences of the single form *goes* used as a quotative in the sample.

Table 3: Subjects used with quotative *goes*)

	Singular			Plural			Inaudible	Total
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd		
No.	129	3	189	0	0	1	2	324
%	40	1	58	0	0	0	1	100

Not surprisingly, the subjects co-selected with quotative *goes* are mostly third-person-singular (58 per cent). Maybe more surprisingly, the first-person subject *I* accounts for 40 per cent of all uses of quotative *goes* in the sample. All other grammatical persons play no roles or marginal ones. Given that the third person can, in principle, take a number of forms, it was interesting to look into how the third person with *goes* was realized.

Table 4 breaks down what third-person-singular subjects *goes* was used with.

Table 4: Break-down of subjects used with third-person-singular uses of quotative *goes*

	He	She	It	Full NP	Ellipted	Total
No.	121	53	3	10	2	189
%	64	28	2	5	1	100

It can be seen from Table 4 that the two personal pronouns *he*, accounting for 64 per cent, and *she*, accounting for 28 per cent, are by far the most frequent third-person subjects co-selected with quotative *goes* in the sample, jointly accounting for 92 per cent.

4.3 Other quotatives in the sample
Table 5 lists all quotatives but GO used in the sample (quotative uses of THINK were not investigated).
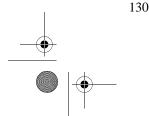
Table 5: Quotatives other than GO

	SAY				other				zero	Total
	said	*says*	*say*	*saying*	*there's me*	*this is me*	*him*	*like*		
No.	50	9	41	13	3	2	1	2		
subtotal		113				8			11	133

Table 5 shows that, among the quotatives other than GO, SAY was by far the most frequent: there were in toto 113 occurrences of this lemma. Further, 11 instances of zero quotative were found and a small number of 'other quotatives', among them *there's me*, *this is me*, *him* and *like* (the latter without preceding form of BE). The total number of occurrences of quotatives other than GO was 133.

Table 6 juxtaposes the totals for GO, SAY, other, and zero quotative.

Table 6: Comparison of totals for all quotatives in the sample

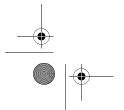|	GO	SAY	other	zero	Total
No.	436	113	8	11	568
%	77	20	1	2	100

It turns out that GO, which, as noted earlier, occurs 436 times altogether (see Table 2 above), accounts for 77per cent of all quotatives and is, thus, more than three times as frequent as all other quotative forms taken together. The only serious rival is SAY; all other quotatives, including zero quotative, account for a mere 3 per cent. This finding corroborates two observations made by Buchstaller (2002: 12 f.) and Stenström *et al*. (2002: 122): a tendency for GO (i) to co-occur with SAY rather than any other quotative and (ii) to cluster with itself.

4.4   Number of presented turns

Table 7 presents the results of an analysis of number of coherent conversational turns presented as part of the presentation involving the node *I goes*, with 'turns' understood in their most basic sense, namely as identifiable on the basis of the occurrence of speaker change (cf. Sacks *et al*. 1974). It is necessary to admit that identifying speaker change in the presentations centred around *I goes* was far from easy due not only to numerous instances of unintelligible speech but also to occurrences of zero quotative and lack of prosodic annotation which would have been particularly helpful in telling quoted speech attributed to displaced speakers from non-quotative additions to the presenting speaker's narrative. Another difficulty was the frequent occurrence of intervening utterances from co-participants temporarily interrupting the presenter's flow. Given these difficulties the figures presented in Table should be seen as approximations. Finally, uses of THINK as quotative were not counted in because, obviously, thoughts do not constitute speaking turns.

(9) illustrates how presented turns were identified and counted:

(9) PS0EB' Helena', 16, student, North-east Midlands, C2, female
       PS0EC' Emma', 16, student, Upper South-west England, female
  1 →   [PS0EB]: **And he goes ... he goes ... yeah well, I do it because she does it!**
  2   PS0EC]: [laughing] Oh that's nice isn't it []!
  3 →   [PS0EB]: And I'll, I thought, **I goes**
  4   [PS0EC]: Go on then!
  5   [PS0EB]: I'll ... I'll
  6   [PS0EC]: Flattery's the way to a girl's heart!
  7 →   [PS0EB]: **No, I go, I I went, oh thanks very much!** I don't think he heard me!
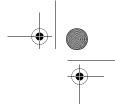 8   [PS0EC]: Yeah. ... Under your breath, something.
       (KCE)

The excerpt comprises eight utterances by two speakers. Only the arrowed utterances 1, 3 and 7 contain presentation of a coherent stretch of anterior conversation. While the presented turn in utterance 1 is obvious, the presentation launched by *I goes* in utterance 3 is abandoned and postponed until utterance 7; so, utterances 3 and 7 jointly construct one presented turn. The speaker change between these two presented turns is evidenced by subject change in the reporting clauses introducing them: the subject *he* in *he goes* (utterance 1) and the subject *I* in *I goes* (utterance 3) and *I go, I I went* (utterance 7).

Table 7 shows how many times one to ten presented turns occurred per context.

Table 7: Number of presented turns

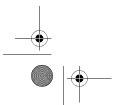| No. of turns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Average
No. of contexts	11	28	16	10	11	9	2	0	2	1	90	3.4

As can be seen from Table 7, 28 contexts contained two presented turns, followed by 16 contexts containing three presented turns and a large number of contexts contained either one presented turn (11 occurrences), four turns (10 occurrences), or five turns (11 occurrences); higher numbers of presented turns per context were rare. The average number of presented turns per text is 3,4. A typical context thus involves at least three presented turns.
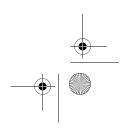
4.5 Other factors

Another striking factor determining the discourse in which *I goes* is embedded is the fact that laughter is recurrent in the contexts. It occurs both as laughter as a vocal event between stretches of speech, coded in the BNC as [laugh], and as laughter as voice quality within a stretch of speech, coded as [laughing]; see Table 8.

Table 8: Laughter as vocal event and voice quality in the sample

	[laugh]	[laughing]	Total
	Vocal event	Voice quality	
No.	128	40	168

In 55 contexts out of 90, at least one instance of laughter was found. The fact that 35 contexts did *not* contain instances of laughter suggests that laughter comes in 'packs', which is not surprising given that, as Jefferson (1979) pointed out, laughter serves as an invitation to 'laugh together'. An illustrative example is (10):

(10) PS0EB   `Helena', 16, student, North-east Midlands, C2, female
      PS0EC   `Emma', 16, student, Upper South-west England, female

    [PS0EC]: Erm ... did I tell you about that Lucy and Ricky?
           When Lucy reckoned Ricky didn't want her any more?
           [laugh]

→   And **I goes**... do this, to Ricky ... go up to Lucy and go ...
           yo, hot chick! **[laugh]** Come over to my place I'll drop my
           trousers and we can have a quickie []!
    [PS0EB]: **[laugh]**
    [PS0EC]: **[laughing]** And he did **[]**!
    [PS0EB]: [**laugh**] ... And what did she say? Er ... sorry [...]
    (KCE)

Even in contexts in which no laughter has been recorded a humoristic mood among the participants is often prevalent. Consider (11) in which a recruit and his/her interlocutors are making fun of recording themselves for the COLT corpus:

(11) PS555   'Josie', 14, student, London, C2, female
      PS556   'Shelley', 15, student, London, female

    [PS556]: Is it recording?
    [PS555]: Yeah.
    [PS556]: Antidisestablishmentarianism.
    [PS555]: Work that one out students, students from Norway! ...
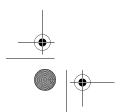
→   That's what I said to Warren, **I goes**, this is going to
           Norway this
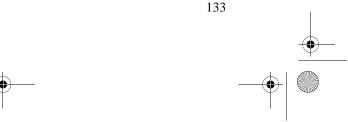
→   him [mimicking] fucking Norway! [] like that down the
           microphone. ...
           Come on then, let's hear your big words. What big word
           have you got?
    [PS000]: [...]

[PS000]: Large.
[PS555]: Autobiography that's my biggest word. Not really. Go on.
[PS000]: Fuck.
[PS001]: [sings]
(KPG)

So *I goes* seems to favour contexts in which humour and language play are prevalent.

4.6   Summary and discussion

It may be useful to summarize the above results. Five main observations were made:

* the predominant form of quotative GO is *goes*
* the subjects used most frequently with quotative *goes* are *I* and *he/she*
* the forms of quotative GO cluster rather than alternate with other quotatives
* there are, on average, more than three presented turns per context
* laughter is recurrent in the surrounds of *I goes*

Do these results support the hypothesis that *I goes* serves as a speech-economic multi-turn quotative?

That *I goes* is indeed used as a multi-turn quotative is suggested by the fact that the average number of presented turns in the sample is 3.4. Although in a number of contexts only one turn was presented, the presentation of three or more turns was clearly the norm. It therefore seems admissible to conclude that *I goes* is preferably used in presentations not of isolated utterances but of multi-turn exchanges. Consider:

(12) PS50D   'Alistair', 15, student, AB, male
      PS50F   'Jimmy', 15, student, male

→ [PS50F]:   What did he say? He goes to me, he goes to me ... he goes, I don't actually ... he goes if there's one good thing about your three weekly Jimmy ... there's never any Ds on it ... [shouting] but there's never ever blooming As either why not []?
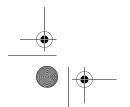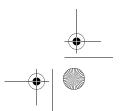   [PS50D]:   [laugh]

→ [PS50F]:   So I goes, I went [[PS50D: Oh my God!] well sir ... tt I think that er I don't think many teachers like marking my work

→   and he goes oh why's that?

→   I said cos it's not very good

     [PS50D]:   [laugh] ...

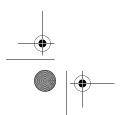→   [PS50F]:   and he starts going yes well I think we'd better try and get a few As on there hadn't we and [...]

   (KP0)

Can *I goes* be said to help the presenter save processing time? And what would such a saving be helpful in? To answer the second of these two questions first, it is useful to bring Labov's (1972) notion of narrative evaluation into play. According to Labov, the essence of story telling is to ward off the question 'So what?'. This is achieved by evaluation, that is, by "means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its raison d'être: why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at" (Labov 1972: 360). In this view, narratives serve a critical interpersonal function: narrators need to involve their listeners – a tall order given the complexity of narratives and presentations in which not only speaker changes need to be 'told apart' but also long stretches of discourse need to be retrieved from memory (or constructed ad hoc) and, most importantly, rendered in a manner that engages the listeners. So, if processing effort can be reduced, this saving would no doubt help the narrator focus his/her resources on the primary task of making his/her point and involving the listeners. It appears that the density of instances of laughter both as vocal event and as voice quality we observed above is good evidence that such an involvement is indeed achieved in many of the contexts examined.

To return to the first of the above questions, can *I goes* be said to help the presenter save processing time, it is useful to be aware that, as psycholinguistic research has shown, processing cost is correlated with linguistic complexity (Baayen 2007): more complex encoding tasks result in higher processing costs; and, the reverse, the 'simpler' the encoding the lower the costs. In Baayen's view, this correlation holds both above and below the word level, the level of morphology. Hence, in principle, reducing morphological complexity reduces processing cost.

Thus, for *I goes* to help the narrator save processing effort this quotative would have to be shown to be morphologically reduced. *Is* it morphologically reduced? The answer depends on the viewpoint from which we look at it. If we look at *I goes* taken out of context, that is, from a purely structural viewpoint, it will appear that, when used with the subject *I,* appending the *–s* morpheme to the root *go* is an unnecessary morphological addition and rather than decreasing
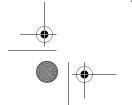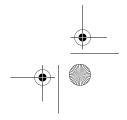
processing cost, *I goes*, with the added –s ending, is more complex a procedure and thus, however slightly, more costly to process. If, conversely, we look at how *I goes* is used in context, that is, from a discourse perspective, we will see that due to the discourse factors identified above *I goes* is indeed a morphologically reduced form.

First, we observed that forms of quotative GO overwhelmingly alternate not with a broad range of other quotatives but with one another; that is, one GO is likely to trigger another GO and so forth. Second, we noted that *goes* is by far the most recurrent quotative form at all; that is, of the lemma GO it is the form *goes* that is most likely to entail another *goes*. Third, we saw that *I goes* overwhelmingly alternates with *he goes* or *she goes;* that is, the first-person pronoun is likely to alternate with third-person pronouns rather than full NPs, thus creating what could be called a 'pronominal symmetry'. So, if a speaker embarks on a presentation of a stretch of anterior conversation they were actively involved in, and chooses GO as reporting verb, the structure [*I* + form of GO] is most likely to frequently alternate with the forms *he goes* or *she goes*. If in this structure the lemma GO were realized as the base form *go*, as we might expect from a Standard English perspective, resulting in the form *I go*, the speaker would have to mark the occurrence of speaker change on two levels: both lexically by use of first-person and third-person pronouns and morphologically by use of *go* for *I* and *goes* for *he* and *she*. If, conversely, the structure [*I* + form of GO] is realized as *I goes,* the occurrence of speaker change is no longer marked both morphologically and lexically: speaker turns are told apart by lexical means alone. Hence, *I goes* can indeed be seen as a morphologically reduced form. The effect on the narrative performance is beneficial: by using the generalized uniform *goes* for both first and third person the presenter can redirect the, however slight, processing effort otherwise required for the morphological distinction of *go* and *goes* to where it is most needed, the engaging telling of the story. So, ultimately, in that it maximizes processing resources *I goes* is an adaptation to the fundamental constraint set by conversing in real-time, the scarcity of planning time; as such, its use is also functional with regard to the narrator's overriding goal of involving his/her interlocutors in the narrative.

6   Conclusion

This paper analysed the use of quotative *I goes* in the BNC. The form was approached from three angles. I investigated its distribution across registers and context types, explored the form in terms of morphosyntax, and discussed factors that bear upon its use in discourse. The distributional analysis showed that *I*
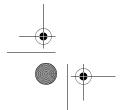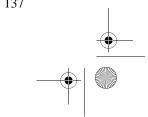
goes is virtually restricted to conversation. The morphosyntactic analysis suggested that the form is a case of non-standard subject-verb concord (or 'discord') and thus in the company of several other morphosyntactic variants such as *there's* with plural NP, quotative *I says*, and third-person singular *don't*. I argued that these features, along with *I goes*, can be seen in an even larger group of 'generalized' features whose distinguishing feature is that they employ Standard English forms for non-standard grammatical functions. The analysis of discourse factors constraining the use of *I goes* was carried out on the basis of a sample of 90 occurrences of the form in the context 100 words each. It demonstrated that *I goes* serves as a multi-turn quotative, that is, as a quotative located in presentations of extended stretches of anterior conversation with frequent speaker changes, and as a speech-economic device that saves the presenter processing time needed for the presentation and the narration in which it is embedded. In view of its contribution to speech economy, *I goes* can be seen as a skilled adaptation to the most fundamental constraint posed be conversing in real-time, the scarcity of planning time. In view of its indirect contribution to the establishment of involvement in narrative it can be seen as an adaptation to the relational goal-orientation, that is, the fundamental need in the conversational situation to establish 'bonds of communion' (Malinowski 1923).

As noted in the introduction, the larger theoretical context which motivated the analysis of *I goes* in the BNC is the dilemma in which corpus linguists find themselves, confronted with massive evidence of non-standard language use in everyday talk and influenced by the long-standing tradition of viewing conversational language as ill-formed and deficient. I have attempted to show that the dilemma can be resolved if conversational language is examined fully in context – with context including not only the linguistic context, the discourse, but also the extra-linguistic context – the situation. Linguists are well familiar with demands that sentence grammars should be replaced by discourse grammars (e.g., Hughes and McCarthy 1998), in which linguistic choices are explained on the basis not only of the narrow co-text but of the larger discourse across clause boundaries (cf. also Biber *et al*. 1998). Linguists are somewhat less familiar though with the view that for linguistic choices to be fully understood it is equally useful and necessary to consider the extra-linguistic situation, a key term in Hallidayan linguistics (e.g., Halliday 1978). In this view, factors determining the situation type entail certain constraints to which language use can be seen as adapted (cf. Cheshire 1999 Leech 2000). The above analysis of *I goes* is a case in point. In explaining *I goes*, we drew on two sources: discourse and situation. In drawing on the discourse in which *I goes* is typically found we saw that its use is made likely by the co-occurrence of certain discourse factors such
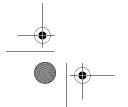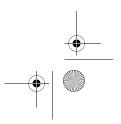
as a preference for quotative GO rather than any other quotative, the frequent alternation with *he goes* and *she goes* and its use as a quotative in multi-turn presentations. One essential aspect that cannot be captured if we consult discourse alone is its function as a speech economic device. This function becomes apparent only if we consider that *I goes* is used typically in conversational-narrative situations. These are determined by essentially two factors, scarcity of planning time and relational goal-orientation. While both factors constrain language use in any conversational situation type, both can be said to be exacerbated in the conversational-narrative situation: (i) the scarcity of planning time is exacerbated in narrative which can be seen as an unusually 'long utterance' and which hence places unusually high demands on planning and processing; and (ii) the relational goal-orientation is exacerbated in narrative because narrators, maybe in order to make up for the suspension of ordinary turn-taking during the narration, need to make, in Labov's sense, 'their point'. So, ultimately, recourse to the situation enables us to recognise the functional values of *I goes* in conversation. Such a situation-based approach to language description bears relevance on two levels.

First, it can foster a tradition which explicitly recognises the value of everyday spoken language, which lies in its adaptedness to situational constraints. Such a tradition would counterbalance the influence of the opposite tradition of viewing the spoken language as deficient and degenerate. That such a tradition gains ground is particularly desirable in EFL teaching: here, the insistence on writing-based Standard English as the model for teaching both writing and speech (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 7) is unarguably one of the major reasons why the manifold insights of corpus linguistics into the workings of conversation have so far not to any significant extent found their way into EFL classrooms. It is hoped that negative teacher attitudes to conversational language can be reversed if descriptions of conversational language "take into consideration its external relation to the social context" (Halliday 1978: 187), that is, its relation to the situation.

Second, the case of *I goes* is a useful reminder that corpus linguistics is "essentially a method for investigating language" (Thompson and Hunston 2006: 1) and that frequencies of occurrence say a lot but not enough. It appears that recent attempts, as in Hunston and Thompson (2006), at exploring the synergy between corpus linguistics and non-corpus-derived theories of language, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics, may open up a path along which the full notion of context, which is key to any endeavour to understand how language is used and with regard to which many critics have seen corpora as empoverished, presents no longer "something of a challenge to the corpus lin-
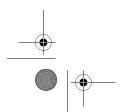
guist" (Thompson and Hunston 2006: 4) but becomes a standard coordinate of corpus linguistic enquiry.
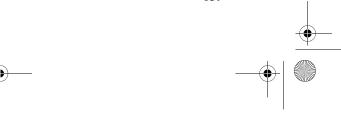
Notes

1. Note that the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), which was collected in 1993 and consists of the spoken language of 13 to 17-year-old teenagers from different boroughs of London, is a constituent of the BNC.
2. The fact that Stenström et al. (2002: 124) found in COLT 74 instances of (quotative and non-quotative) *I goes* – that is, almost half of its total frequency in the BNC – provides additional support for Rühlemann's (2007) finding that the form is clearly 'youthspeak'.
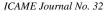
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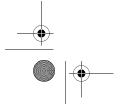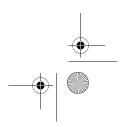Carter, Ronald. 2004. Language and creativity. The art of common talk. London: Routledge.

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