In my first example, DVD clip 19, Harry is outside the classroom chatting with a friend about football. Both Harry and the other boy are trying to convince each other that a certain team will win the league. The other boy initiates the conversation by saying ‘Man United .. to win the league, yeah?’ By making it a question, raising his pitch of voice at the end, he is looking for agreement from Harry. Because they are in an informal situation the boy is not attempting to use complex vocabulary and he is just focusing on getting his point across. It could be argued that he isn’t thinking much before speaking – shown by him starting a word at the beginning again (Man U – Man United). ‘To win the league’ is not a grammatically correct sentence standing alone, so would not be used in a formal situation e.g. an essay written for a teacher. However, the boy clearly thinks that it does not matter in a casual chat, as his friend Harry speaks in a similar way and will not chastise him for using improper grammar, unlike a teacher. By putting ‘yeah’ at the end of each phrase the boy is looking for agreement with his opinion. The word could be considered slang and is frequently used by teenagers as a less formal substitute for the word ‘yes’.

When Harry disagrees, the boy retorts with the word ‘no’ repeated. This emphasises how wrong he think Harry is, trying to convince him of his original point. Harry then tries to justify his opinion by claiming his team have ‘so many easy games to play’. Again, the word ‘yeah’ punctuates his sentence, probably to fill the gap while he decides what to say next. He does not precede the sentence with a phrase like ‘I think’, showing he believes it is almost a fact, not an opinion. This would perhaps encourage the other boy to ‘take his word for it’ and agree.

At the end of Harry’s speech, he is interrupted by the other boy who remembers the two teams more quickly. This hastens the conversation. Harry affirms what the boy said, reeling off a long list of teams to sound impressive.

The other boy struggles to think of a retort and resorts to using ‘yeah’ like Harry did as a filler. This shows that teenagers match their language and way of speaking to each other as well as the situation. The boy cannot finish his sentences, frequently starting again (‘-if we-‘) This reinforces the point that he does not think to formulate a proper sentence before he speaks, which he would probably avoid doing in a formal situation as he would need to be more clear and concise in getting his point across.

Despite an insult from Harry, a swear word that would certainly not be acceptable in a formal situation (e.g. speaking to a teacher, his respected elder), the boy does not get angry, he sim0ply brushes it off by saying ‘nah’. This is the negative equivalent of ‘yeah’, so it is a less formal way to say ‘no’. Because of his lack of reaction, we are inclined to think that swear words are used often between teenagers without being considered offensive – they are simply used for emphasis (in this case to emphasise how bad a team are.

Harry says ‘Chelsea are going down boy’, which is an extremely informal phrase. ‘Going down’ is a euphemism for losing in this situation. The phrase is widely used by many teenagers nowadays. Putting ‘boy’ at the end could be viewed as an aggressive impersonal address, but between friends it is more likely to be an acceptable term or simply just the completion of the slang phrase ‘going down’.

Harry also uses contractions (technically slang) like ain’t – the recently adopted ‘teen speak’ form of isn’t. The term ‘man’ is a way of addressing his friend that has become very popular among teenagers, and is not taken offensively as you might expect. However, to a person in authority this would probably be considered unacceptable, for example it would be highly rude to call a female teacher ‘woman’! This is definitely a gender specific term.

Thye classic slang word ‘inni9t’ is unsurprisingly found here as well. It is an amalgamation of the words ‘isn’t’ and ‘it’; the words are slurred together to make it faster and supposedly easier to say. The questioning tone is used again to influence Harry to agree – it is as if he is saying ‘You agree, no?’. It could be considered as challenging him to disagree, which is common among teenage boys who are often spoiling for any sort of fight (perhaps to prove their masculinity!)

The boy thinks it is acceptable to leave out words if the meaning is still clear, for example ‘trust’ is evidently meant to be followed by a ‘me’. In a formal situation complete sentences would have to be used.

In the end the boys agree to disagree, having both failed to convince each other with their unimpressive persuasive devices. They both finish with strong conveyance of their opinions, which they consider to be fact (Man United will win’ sounds certain as does ‘Arsenal, I’m telling you’)

The conversation then moves on to individual footballers where the boy is using exaggeration to make Harry laugh (‘van Persie’s gonna die’) and is enjoying making predictions. Yet again, the word ‘yeah’ is used as a filler, insinuating that it is pointless in this context and does not mean anything as apposed to it usually being a positive affirmation. ‘Anyways’ is another slang term, as is ‘gonna’, which is similar to ‘ain’t’ and ‘innit’ (a slurred together contraction of two words). The extract ends with the boy trying to move the conversation forward (‘so then’).

In general, this extract is just some banter between competitive friends. It moves quite fast because of the interruptions and instant counter arguments.

My second extract is Natasha and Harry in a slightly more formal classroom situation. However, it is not as formal as a written exam or meeting with the headteacher for example, so there is not a huge contrast. This is because teachers want lessons to seem more accessible to pupils, so make it more informal. This prevents alienating the pupils and encourages them to be forthcoming.

We do however see a dramatic contrast in the language used when addressing the teacher. In her response Natasha uses more formal language and more complex vocabulary than the boys did while chatting, eg ‘utopian society’. Her impressive lengthy response is met with silence by her friends when the teacher asks them to comment on it. This may be because it is seen to be ‘uncool’ to willingly participate in a class, or they may not have been accustomed to her more formal language.

Natasha is keen for the teacher’s approval so makes the end of her speech a question, prompting the teacher’s affirmation that it was a ‘fantastic response’. She does not use the filler ‘yeah’ as it would seem too casual, so when she is pausing she often says ‘um’ while she thinks. When she can’t think of a particular word she replaces it with ‘and stuff’ to avoid embarrassment or interjection from somebody else.

Natasha tries to use interesting adjectives such as ‘excited’ and ;mysterious’. These are not hugely imaginative, especially as she has already mentioned mystery, but are certainly more thoughtful than words the teenagers use in everyday conversation. This shows how she has adapted her language to suit the situation – an English lesson where intelligent use of the language is required. Because the teacher is a person of authority, she does not use the colloquial terms to address her such as ‘man’ (which would be offensive in many more ways than one) or another popular slang term, e.g. ‘blud.’

Harry struggles to remember everything Natasha said, showing her language perhaps did not have a great effect on him. He does however pick out some key points that sound impressive, e.g. rhetorical questions. This may be because he is trying to impress the teacher or the others around him, so he is keen to say something. In front of a teacher he is less sure of himself knowing her intellectual superiority, so he begins with saying ‘I can’t remember’ as an excuse in case he is incorrect. This may have been said to avoid being embarrassed or teased by his friends from getting something wrong. He only speaks after the teacher is prompting, showing he has less confidence in a formal situation than he does in an informal one – with his friend he spoke freely and confidently. He also manages to leave out most fillers like ‘yeah’ to fit the situation and get his point across. The teacher helps him by completing what he cannot finish, before giving her own feedback. Another noticeable difference is the lack of interruptions. In the chat between Harry and his friends they frequently interrupted each other. On the other hand, in this situation the pupils do not interrupt the teacher as they have to be respected and it would be impolite.

Overall, it is evident that teenagers adapt the way they speak to the situation they are in, sometimes even subconsciously. Informal slang is considered acceptable in informal situations, but more careful, thought through language choices are required in formal ones.