

# SAMPLE ANALYTICAL COMMENTARY / DISCOURSE ANALYSIS – ‘PANIC ROOM’

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- *Please note, I have colour-coded this to show you (the key to this is at the end of the commentary)*

1. **Red** = the content foci I have **covered, to address the task’s expectations**
  2. **Green** = my use of specific, **quoted (= used!) examples and line references**, as relevant – **with clear, succinct discussion / identification etc of these, as necessary, before and / or after**
  3. **Purple** – my use of **relevant, precise** metalanguage (not ‘lay’ language!)
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‘Panic Room’ is the transcript of a highly-informal spoken dialogue between (as we are told in the task details) two teenage girls. They are discussing a movie that (again, in the words of the context details provided) ‘one has seen and which the other would like to see’. The audience for this spoken discourse are the interlocutors themselves and the semantic fields primarily relate to horror movies, the interlocutors’ experiences of them, and, to a lesser extent, recent casting issues related to some of the actresses who have appeared (or who are about to appear), in certain of these films (namely Nicole Kidman and Jodie Foster). The primary purpose of the conversation appears to be ‘referential’ – to discuss and express opinions related to the film, ‘Panic Room’, in particular, as well as to others from the same horror genre, to which ‘Panic Room’ can be compared – those in the ‘really scary’ category. Secondary functions for the discourse are less obvious but it could be said that such a conversation (being an exchange of personal, untechnical ideas and responses) fulfils a highly phatic function; that is, such chit-chat conversations also seek to enhance the social connection, or bonding, between the pair - especially if they are conducted in friendly, cooperative and supportive ways, as this one so obviously is.

The discourse does proceed smoothly, with little to no obstruction, in a climate of cooperativeness and supportive turn-taking. It emerges as a harmonious, dialogic exchange that matches all of Grice's Maxims; those things which he deemed necessary for any spoken communication to proceed smoothly. This tells us that these two are friends, who either share a high degree of social closeness, or who are relaxed and easy enough in each other's company so as not to feel that they have to compete for opinion and power in the discussion. The overall patterning of phonological, lexical and morphological, syntactic and semantic features in the discourse supports the conclusion that this is a highly-informal spoken language text, showing all of the characteristics of a spontaneous, free-flowing, unplanned and unrehearsed dialogue; arguably one of the most informal modes of spoken language.

We can see this phonologically via such linguistic features as the presence of non-fluency features and voice noises ('mmm' in Line 12; the numerous 'ums', as in Lines 2, 39 and 46) and even in the paralinguistic laughter (**Lines 5 and 41**) which suggests the interlocutors are comfortable enough in each other's company to let their guard down and not worry too much about their own or others' face needs. Added to this, there are a number of other elements that mark this out as a highly-informal dialogue - the elongation (diphthong-isation) of vowel sounds (**for example, 'We=ll' in Line 10 and 'oh=='** in Line 24); the implied prosody (the added stress and pitch and raised tempo, **for example, in Lines 14 and 48**), and the presence of High Rising Tone in non-interrogative sentences - the declaratives (used here, it seems, as a means of adding further expression) - **for example, in Lines 26 and 47**). There are also a number of devices that aim to maintain the listener's attention, hold the floor, check for listener response and generally maintain a cooperative and supportive dialogue between the two. We see this, for example, when M appears to 'check in' with B, to see if she is following what is being said (**as in Lines 10 and 11 – 'it's about ....that buy a new house? / ...there's what's called a panic room?'**). This example is immediately followed by B's non-fluency, voice-noise responses, **as in her 'mmm', in Line 12**, or her reassuring repetition, **'yeah yeah', in Line 33**. Other 'conversational' phonological markers, as above, also confirm that this is a highly-informal

spoken text – elements of which emerge because this is spontaneous unscripted and unrehearsed – things like hedges (the ‘u=m’ in Line 46 suggests this strategy), pauses, false starts and repairs, which, while often involving lexical and syntactic elements, can also produce particular phonetic effects, such as ‘and ...no one’, in Line 18, or ‘but she um ... /Hurt a knee ...ankle / Yeah-no knee ankle’, in Line 39 to 41 (inclusive).

Syntactically, as one might expect in a highly-informal spoken dialogue (in which the conversational mode naturally precludes any observance of Standard, grammatical syntax, but instead unfolds in spontaneous, unscripted free-form), this discourse is free-flowing, showing the process of ‘thinking on one’s feet’ whilst in spontaneous conversation. We see this in the discourse’s frequent sentence fragments, such as, ‘Um ... lock up’ in Line 2, or ‘I don’t know / her knee or ankle one of them’, in Line 42 / 43. If sentences exist at all in conversation, they are likely to be in long, randomly-connected compound sentence structure, and this is what we see in Lines 44 – 47, when M speaks about Nicole Kidman in loosely-connected but not grammatically Standard ways – ‘She hurt her knee or something / she’d done like two minutes of filming or something and then ...’[my emphasis]. Syntactically, all of these indicators are unmistakably reflective of this dialogue’s high informality.

In terms of lexical and morphological patterning, the register of the discourse is also obvious. That the two interlocutors are personally-close is reflected in their use of slang lexemes and idiomatic phrases, such as ‘once the door’s shut and stuff’ (Line 18), ‘sorta run round the house’ (Line 31), ‘sounds like a pretty dodgy storyline’ (Line 27), ‘got put in’ (Line 46) and ‘drop out’ (Line 47). As the elided / ellipted ‘sorta’ and the prevalence of contractions such as ‘what’s (Line 7), ‘it’s (Line 10), ‘that’ve’ (Line 21) and ‘cos’ (Line 31) show us, morphologically this transcript’s high informality is also confirmed. In a scripted and rehearsed speech, for a more formal context, we would be unlikely to hear such things to the same extent, if at all. Interestingly, we also have another highly-formal lexical feature in the high incidence of the Teenspeak discourse marker, ‘like’ (such as in

Lines 13 'so if anything happens like...' and 17 'it's got like cameras all around the house'). These discourse particles here act not as adverbs, but as syntactic 'fillers' or syntactic 'infixes'.

Given that Teenspeak is semantically one of the most informal sociolects in general language use, we can further ascribe the 'highly-informal' label to this discourse. It also helps us to recognise the crucial influence of context in this example of an informal dialogue. M and B are identified as (as we were told in the contextual details before the discourse) 'two teenage girls'. They are not discussing quantum physics, nor using bureaucratese, or legalese. They are not even operating as Margaret Pomeranz or David Strattan might when they are discussing films for a much more formal context, or adult audience, using, perhaps, the jargon of the media in semi- or highly-formal ways. M and B are two '*friends*' (or at least close acquaintances), loosely and cooperatively discussing their personal responses to and reflections about one film and the genre of 'scary film' in particular, using linguistic expressions and devices they are comfortable with, mutually find accessible and freely understand. As well, a good measure of their 'chit-chat' here clearly performs a phatic role and thus this 'dialogue' may well be more about their own personal bonding, than about the subjects which they have chosen to discuss.

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