4. Two young people talking (45 minutes)

Study the transcript below, which is of a conversation between two young people. In what ways is the speakers' use of language typical of informal conversation? In your answer you might like to consider: vocabulary; grammar; non-fluency features; turn-taking.

NOTE:
( ) indicates a short pause
underlined utterances indicate overlapping speech

SALLY: so how's your new job going

JOHN: well (.) you know (.) all right

SALLY: what you doing then

JOHN: this week I've just been on the phones

SALLY: what (.) selling

JOHN: no they're doing like a survey (.) what people think of the the service and all that

SALLY: that's a bit off (.) so you've got to deal with all the moaning and complaining all the flak

JOHN: no (.) no it's just like a questionnaire were your goods delivered on time yes or no

SALLY: d'you think you'll stick it

JOHN: next week I'm with the regional manager out on the on the road (.) that'll be all right

SALLY: I was on the phones at the Town Hall (.) dead boring

JOHN: tell me about it

SALLY: so what's your mate doing

JOHN: who

SALLY: you know whatsisface (.) had the Mohican

JOHN: Gizmo

SALLY: yeh
JOHN: he's gone back to college

SALLY: weren't he dead good at computers (. ) I thought he passed everything

JOHN: he got a good grade for computing but he's doing resits (. ) he couldn't get in (. ) where was it (. ) I don't know (. ) Manchester or somewhere

This is an interactional exchange between two young people who have probably both recently left college. Most of the conversation concerns John's new job (a topic introduced by Sally's opening question), though Sally also briefly mentions a job she has had (or possibly still has) and the concluding topic is Gizmo, a mutual acquaintance. The speakers' use of language is typical of informal conversation in a number of ways.

Much of the vocabulary is informal. This includes single words such as 'flack' and 'mate', and colloquial expressions such as 'a bit off', 'stick it', 'dead boring' and 'dead good'. 'Tell me about it' is another colloquialism meaning something like 'Yes, I know only too well' (Sally's response - which is to ask a question about something else - makes it clear that John did not mean he wanted her to tell him more). The large number of contractions is also typical of informal conversation - 'how's', 'I've', 'they're', 'that's', 'you've', ' it's', 'd'you' and so on.

In terms of grammar, the speakers' language does not of course consist of neat, organised sentences. There are some disjointed structures: 'it's just like a questionnaire were your goods delivered on time yes or no' and 'you've got to deal with all that moaning and complaining all the flack'. In places there is ellipsis, with structures that are incomplete: 'what you doing' (instead of 'what are you doing') and 'had the Mohican' (instead of 'the boy who had the Mohican'). Sally also uses non-standard grammar when she says 'weren't he dead good at the computers' (not 'wasn't').

Non-fluency features include a large number of unvoiced pauses and occasional repetitions: 'what people think of the service' and 'out on the road'. John also hesitates at the end: 'he couldn't get in (. ) where was it (. ) I don't know (. ) Manchester or somewhere'. John's responses to Sally's questions also contain several fillers, including 'well', 'you know'. 'and all that' and 'like'.

Turn-taking is largely controlled by Sally's series of questions. There is a regular pattern of adjacency pairs, with a question from Sally being followed by an answer from John:

Sally: what you doing then
John: this week I've just been on the phones

Another form of adjacency pair that is present is a statement being followed by confirmation or agreement:

Sally: I was on the phone at the Town Hall (. ) dead boring
John: Tell me about it

There is one interruption, which occurs when John's 'no (. ) no' overlaps with Sally's 'complaining all the flak'.

It is interesting that this is a mixed gender conversation and that the interruption comes from the male participant. Research into male and female conversational behaviour suggests that men tend to interrupt more than women. More broadly, many theorists argue that women's approach to conversation is more co-operative than men's. They initiate more topics, ask more questions and offer more support and encouragement. This
conversation would seem to confirm this pattern. Sally (who has some difficulty drawing John out) asks all the
questions and initiates the two main topics of conversation - John's new job and their friend Gizmo. She also
shows empathy through such remarks as 'that's a bit off'. In contrast, when Sally mentions her own experience of
working at the Town Hall, John shows little interest.

(Total marks 25)