**Emerging Talk-Rules: The Mobile Phone**

Suddenly, almost everyone in England has a mobile phone, but still there are no set rules of etiquette governing when, how and in what manner these phones should be used.

Most English people, if asked, agree that talking loudly about banal business or domestic matters on one’s mobile while on a train is rude and **unacceptable**. Yet a significant **minority** of people still do this, and while their fellow passengers may sigh and roll their eyes, they very rarely confront the **offenders** directly – as this would involve breaking other, well-established English rules about talking to strangers, making a scene or drawing attention to oneself.

There are some early signs of **emergence** of the rules regarding mobile-phone use in public places, and it looks as though loud ‘I’m on a train’ conversations or mobiles ringing in cinemas and theatres may eventually become as rude as queue jumping.

However, there are other aspects of mobile-phone etiquette that are even more blurred and **controversial**. For example, there are no agreed rules of etiquette on the use of mobile phones during business meetings. Recent research show that lower-ranking English executives tend to be less courteous, attempting to emphasize their own **importance** by keeping phones on and taking calls during meetings, while high-ranking people with nothing to prove tend to be more considerate.

There are many other social **applications** of mobile phones, some of which do not even involve talking on the phone at all, such as the use of the mobile phone itself as a status-signal, particularly among teenagers.

Many women now use their mobiles as ‘barrier signals’ when on their own in public places, as an alternative to the **traditional** use of a newspaper or magazine to signal that they are **unavailable** and mark personal ‘territory’. Even when not in use, the mobile placed on the table acts as an **effective** symbolic bodyguard, a protector against unwanted social contact.

Until the advent of mobile text messaging, many of us had to live without this kind of small but psychologically and socially important form of communication – a friendly greeting, maybe a scrap of news – but a personal connection, a **reminder** that you are not alone. But this new form of communication also requires a new set of rules. Chatting someone up, flirting by text is accepted, even encouraged, but some girls complain that guys use texting as a way of avoiding talking. ‘Dumping’ someone by text-message is widely regarded as cowardly and absolutely unacceptable.