

Teaching unit 2: Angela – street trouble

Background

Angela is a 16-year-old mixed race White British/Afro-Caribbean girl from inner London. In this extract she talks about some trouble she got into a couple of years ago – first an argument with a woman on a bus, and then with a man in the street. The extract is interesting because Angela uses some slang vocabulary typical of young people's Multicultural London English.

Audio and transcript are available at: <http://www.englishlanguageresources.org/TU02>

Discussion points

Conversational historical present

Aimee switches in to the conversational historical present tense to describe what happened when she got off the bus and met the man who asked them for money (lines 11- 15). This adds drama to the event, presenting it to the listeners as though it was happening here and now.

Discourse markers

do you know what I mean (line 17) seems to seek understanding from the listener.

like (line 16) is intentionally vague, stressing that what is important is not Angela's precise age at the time but that she and her friend were young (yutes).

innit (lines 7 and 18). Innit seems to be used here to appeal to the listener for understanding and perhaps sympathy. In line 18 innit comes after we got shook and so it may simultaneously emphasise the fact that Angela and her friend were scared.

see (line 20) introduces a new section of Angela's story and checks that the listener understands the structure of the discourse.

yeah is frequent at the end of a clause (lines 1, 9, 12, 15,16, 19, 24, 28, 33). In this position it punctuates the discourse, clearly separating out the clauses. At the same time Angela checks that the listener is following and understanding what she is saying.

General extenders

and reh teh teh (line 14) signals that the man said more than this but that Angela assumes she doesn't need to give details because the listeners will know the kind of things he is likely to have said. In this way the general extender creates solidarity by drawing attention to Angela's expectation that her listeners have encountered this kind of person before and perhaps been in this kind of situation themselves.

and all this (line 15) again the general extender signals that there was more of the same kind of talk from the man and that Angela assumes her listeners will understand the nature of the situation.

or something like that (line 6). By using this general extender Angela shows that the particular racist term she has just used was not necessarily the one that the woman actually said. In this way she stresses that the point is not the actual term that was used but that the woman was behaving in a racist way.

Nonstandard grammar

Angela uses the past tense verb forms *come* (line 10) and *see* (line 25). Both these nonstandard forms are extremely frequent in urban varieties of English.

Quotative expressions

Apart from SAY (line 6), Angela consistently uses BE LIKE to introduce direct reported speech (lines 8, 13, 23, 29, 31 and 32).

Slang

Angela uses several words that are typical of Multicultural London English, including:

beef, 'argument' or 'fight'; this occurs as a noun (line 5) and also as a verb (line 9)

bredrens, 'good friends', sometimes also 'brothers' (line 20)

crackhead, 'a person who takes too many drugs', or, more generally, 'a person who does stupid things' (line 11)

ducked out, 'escaped' (line 24)

feds, 'police' (line 13)

jills, 'steal, usually by mugging' (line 29)

my ends, 'my area', 'my part of town' (line 12)

score, 'twenty pounds' (lines 14 and 22)

turn, 'jewellery' (lines 29 and 30)

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we got shook, 'we were frightened' (line 18)

yutes, 'young people'; often 'young men', though here Angela includes herself as a *yute* (line 16)

swear down, 'that's the truth' (line 37)

Other points

Prepositions: Angela does not use the preposition *to* with GO, a verb that itself contains the meaning of movement towards somewhere. Omitting *to* with verbs like GO and COME seems to be a recent development in some varieties of spoken English (it can also be seen in the extract from Courtney and Aimee).