

Teaching unit 6: Howard and Junior – dog story

Background

Junior and Howard collaborate here to tell a story about being chased by a dog. The style is very lively and the boys are enjoying telling the interviewer what happened. The boys' uses of the discourse marker *yeah* are especially interesting. The extract contains the new London quotative *this is* +speaker.

Audio, transcript and links to a relevant Linguistics Research Digest article are available at: <http://www.englishlanguageresources.org/TU06>

Discussion points

Conversational historical present

Howard uses this tense to refer to the past in lines 6, 7, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 62.

Deictic forms

this (lines 47, 51); **that** (lines 9, 45, 51). We can imagine that Howard and Junior use their hands to demonstrate the size of the dog when they say *this big* or *that big*, and *this* and *that* refer to what their hands are describing.

This is is also a deictic in the expression *this is* +actor, when it refers to an action that the speaker is making. In line 14 Howard may mime knocking at the door, or the expression may allow him to simply conjure up the image of knocking at the door. *This is* +actor is closely related to the new quotative expression in London, *this is* +speaker. Howard uses this new quotative expression to introduce a gesture (line 16) and non-lexicalised sound (*woof woof* in line 17). He may also be using *this is me* in line 3 to introduce a gesture: the laughter that follows suggests this.

Discourse markers

Yeah is very frequent in this extract. It is used as a **backchannel** by the interviewer (lines 26, 35, 38, 50, 54, 58, 73) and to reply to a question (lines 57, 59, 66, 75). In line 3 Junior's *yeah* may show that he agrees with what Howard has just said but it is also a cooperative way of introducing his own turn at speaking. In line 34 Junior's *yeah* has the same dual function. Howard sometimes adds *yeah* after introducing new information: *my friend* (line 53) and then the friend's name (line 53). However the main use of *yeah* in this extract is at the end of a clause, to punctuate the discourse and to check that the listeners are following (lines 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 18, 26, 27, 29).

Intensifiers

bare (lines 2, 40)

well (line 23)

Note too the use of *all* to scale up the force of the deictic *here* (line 54) and the noun *blood* (line 62), though strictly speaking *all* is not an intensifier since it does not occur before an adjective or adverb.

Non-fluency features

Generally the boys are very fluent, but there are a few false starts (e.g. lines 31 and 70). *Erm* occurs together with false starts on lines 60 and 61, perhaps indicating that Howard was anxious to take the floor (he overlaps with Junior at line 60) and so begins speaking before he's had time to plan his utterance. There is repetition in lines 4, 6, 7, 14, 71, 72 at the beginning of the clause, suggesting that the speaker is still planning his utterance.

Whether or not Junior's repetition in lines 24, 34 and 36 is due to planning pressures it certainly adds dramatic effect to the story.

Nonstandard grammar

Past tense verb forms

For strong verbs the boys use a mix of standard English past tense forms (*came*, lines 4, 25) and nonstandard forms (*done*, line 1, *stand*, line 11). Junior has *came* as the nonstandard past participle of COME. Junior uses nonstandard *was* in line 74.

Note that some of these nonstandard forms may be developmental: children continue to acquire English past tense verb forms even at the age of 8.

Quotative expressions

In addition to the new *this is +speaker* quotative (lines 16, 17; see above), the boys use SAY (line 22) to introduce direct reported speech and GO to introduce both direct speech (line 22) and non-lexicalised sound (line 28).

Other features

Man is an address term (like *mate*, *love*, *sir*) in line 71, conveying friendliness and solidarity.