

Teaching unit 7: Laura – problem at college

Background

Laura is a white British 19 year old from inner London. She is talking here to her friend and the interviewer about a deaf girl at college who had complained that Laura had been shouting in class. As a result Laura was almost expelled from her course. The point of the story revolves around what the girl said and what Laura said and, though to a lesser extent, what the teacher said, so the extract is rich in examples of reported speech, some of which Laura presents in a very dramatic way.

Audio, transcript and links to relevant Linguistics Research Digest articles are available at: <http://www.englishlanguageresources.org/TU07>

Discussion points

Conversational historical present

Laura uses this tense in many of her quotative expressions, adding drama to her story: all the *this is* +speaker forms are in this tense (lines 12, 18, 25, 26, 27, 32) and so is GO (line 20). See the discussion of reported speech, below, for more details.

Discourse markers

like (line 8) occurs before the noun phrase *the older people on that side*. Perhaps *like* draws attention to the picture that Laura is painting of the two groups on each side of the room.

Note that *like* in *it's like* (7, 9, 10) is not a discourse marker; the entire phrase introduces an explanation

hello (line 43) with rising intonation is a recent sense of the word, indicating that Laura can hardly believe what she has just heard

anyway marks a return to the main story, sometimes after a short digression (lines 11, 23) or to introduce a summary (line 21)

well (line 20) may simply fill a pause here

Nonstandard grammar

Laura uses the nonstandard past tense forms of BE that are very common in urban varieties of British English: *was* in a positive clause (line 42) and *weren't* in a negative clause (line 15).

Reported speech

Laura mainly uses direct reported speech but there is also some indirect reported speech (lines 28, 45-47).

She introduces direct reported speech with the new London quotative expression *this is* +speaker (lines 12, 18, 25, 26, 27, 32), and also GO (line 20), SAY (lines 37, 42) and the zero form (line 33).

Interestingly, with some of the *this is* +speaker quotative expressions Laura also uses a previous reporting clause: *I'd said to him nicely* (line 11), *I told him about it* (line 17) *so I said to her today* (line 36 – though there is then an aside when Laura remembers something that happened before this) and 41 (*she admitted*). *This is me* then presents what Laura said as a kind of performance. The first quotative expression is in the past tense and the second (*this is* +speaker) is in the **conversational historical present tense**, which adds to the drama of the story that Laura is recounting.

The point of the story (the ridiculousness of thinking that Laura's shouting had made the girl's arm hurt) is emphasized on lines 44- 47. Here Laura repeats *you made my arm hurt* with a quizzical tone (note that her friend then sniggers), then stresses the reported speech by saying *that's what she said* (line 45) and finally repeats what the girl said, this time using indirect reported speech (lines 46 to 47).