

Teaching unit 11: Tina – walking home from cadets

Background

Tina, an 18 year old mixed-race White British/Indian, tells a story in this extract about how she avoided being mugged when she was walking home with two friends. Like many of the stories people tell in everyday life, much of the detail lies in what people said and thought, including herself, so the extract is rich in quotative expressions. When the quotative is BE LIKE it is not always clear whether it is introducing what someone said or what they were thinking. This is a typical characteristic of this expression.

Audio, transcript and links to a relevant Linguistics Research Digest article are available at: <http://www.englishlanguageresources.org/TU11>

Discussion points

Conversational historical present

Tina switches to this tense to contrast what her friends wanted to do (lines 11 and 14) with her own thoughts, and to add drama to the moment when she and her friends were confronted by first one and then a group of threatening boys (lines 30 and 31).

Discourse markers

oh (line 4) suggests that Tina has remembered something that happened that she thinks is worth talking about. It therefore marks the beginning of a story. Elsewhere in the extract *oh* occurs at the beginning of reported speech or thought (lines 18, 38 and 42). In addition to marking the start of the quote it shows that the speaker is reacting to what the previous speaker said or did, sometimes offering an evaluation (lines 18 and 42) or indicating that she has just remembered something relevant (line 38). *Oh my god* (line 33) is a fixed expression.

ok (lines 12, 21, 25 and 44) marks the beginning of a stretch of reported thought, and shows that Tina accepts the situation and, sometimes (lines 12 and 21) that she has taken a decision about how she is going to deal with it. In line 41 *ok* marks the end of a short stretch of reported speech, and is used to mean 'alright'.

you know (line 42) involves the listeners in the story, suggesting that they know the kind of thing the boy would have been saying. On this occasion *you know* functions in the same way as a general extender.

right (line 7) at the end of a clause can function in the same way as clause-final *yeah*. Here Tina has set the scene for the events that she is intending to talk about and is checking that the listener is following and has understood.

yeah (line 12), similarly, occurs at the end of a clause (here, a reported speech clause). Tina checks that the listeners have understood and then continues with her account of what she thought.

Indefinite *this*

(lines 7, 9, 36 and 39) Tina uses *this* to introduce new characters in the story. Not that *this* in lines 11 and 14 is **deictic**, referring to places relevant to where the events in the story were happening (*this way and this area*), to the general situation (line 18)

Nonstandard grammar

Tina uses multiple negation (sometimes termed negative concord or double negation) on line 26; and *never* as a past tense negator. She also uses *done* as the past tense of DO. All these forms are very common in vernacular varieties of English around the world (the standard English equivalent of *they never done nothing* is *they didn't do anything*). Note, though, that she uses the standard past tense forms of SEE (lines 9, 29 and 45) and BE (lines 34 and 43) rather than the common nonstandard past tense forms *see* and *was*. Note, too, that most speakers use nonstandard grammar variably: here, Tina uses standard *didn't* on line 47 (*they didn't know it was me*) rather than nonstandard *never* (*they never knew it was me*).

Quotative expressions

Tina introduces reported direct speech with BE LIKE (lines 11, 40, 41, 42, 48, 49, 50 and 52), GO (lines 30 and 31), SAY (line 13) and the new form THIS IS +speaker (line 14). To introduce reported thought (or inner dialogue – in other words, what she said to herself) she uses THINK (lines 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 37, 44) and also BE LIKE (line 33). It is not clear whether BE LIKE on line 33 introduces reported thought or reported speech.

Slang

jack, 'mug' or 'rob' (lines 4, 25 and 46)

bless, as a discourse marker (*oh bless* in line 42) can mean 'let it go, stop'; as an adjective (*they're bless* in line 42) it means 'OK' or, sometimes, 'sweet'.