

Teaching unit 5: Derya and Kareen – competing stories

Background

Dafne and Nandita agree to share telling the interviewer the story of Goldilocks and the three bears, but neither of them is very happy about the way their friend tells the story. There are several overlaps and interruptions in this extract. Nevertheless there are many features typical of storytelling. Derya acquired English as her second language and there are indications here that she is still learning some structures.

Audio, transcript and links to relevant Linguistics Research Digest articles are available at: <http://www.englishlanguageresources.org/TU05>

Discussion points

Clause combining

The most frequent way of combining clauses is with *and*, especially when the girls are launched into telling the story (lines 15, 18, 21, 27, 28, 35, 37, 38, 39, 47, 51, 55, 58, 59, 60, 63, 65, 67, 69, 71, 72, 73, 78, 80, 89, 95, 97, 104, 106, 109, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119).

Discourse markers

Yeah Several of the different functions of *yeah* are illustrated in this extract. Kareen uses *yeah* in clause final position to mark the end of the clause and check that her listeners are following (lines 27 and 37). In lines 6 and 12 she uses *yeah* as an agreement marker and in line 88 to contradict what Derya has just said. The interviewer uses *yeah* as a backchannel to encourage the girls to continue telling the story and show that he is interested and following (lines 20, 54, 55, 67, 68, 59, 77 and 90). In line 62 Kareen may be using *yeah* as a (failed) attempt to take the floor, and in lines 93 and 97 she seems to be using it as both a backchannel and an agreement marker to confirm that her friend is telling the story accurately.

Non-fluency features

The girls use *erm* when they are searching for a word (lines 12, 22, 34, 60, 61, 86, 117). When Kareen does this, Derya sometimes supplies the word for her (lines 12, 34, 86). In line 22 Kareen opts instead for the all-purpose word *thing*. They also use *erm* at the beginning of a clause, after a function word (*they* in line 34 and *then* in line 55) as a sign that they are planning the rest of the clause.

Pronunciation

Like many younger English speakers the girls often use a glottal stop where other speakers would have [t] (e.g. in *getting*, line 56; *little*, lines 103 and 114, and *sat*, line 171). The girls do not make a distinction between the pronunciation of *the* when it comes before a vowel and when it comes before a consonant: for example, older Londoners say [ðə] *three bears* (roughly, 'thuh three bears' but [ði:] *end*, 'thee end' whereas Kareen says [ðə], 'thuh' in both cases. (lines 12 and 49).

Quotative expressions

The only quotative expression used is SAY, which always introduces direct reported speech (lines 95, 100, 103, 107, 109, 112, 114, 118). Perhaps this is because the girls are retelling a familiar story which relies on what the bears said. Unusually for London English, Derya uses *that* between SAY and the quote.

Nonstandard grammar

3rd singular *don't* (*why don't she...* (line 5): 3rd singular *don't* (where standard English has *doesn't*) is one of the most common nonstandard forms throughout the English-speaking world.

Past tense verb forms Derya uses nonstandard *was* on line 93 and Karen has *sitted* as the past tense of SIT on line 22. These are common nonstandard past tense forms in spoken English but since the girls are only 8 years old and Derya has acquired English as her second language another possibility is that they are developmental forms. *Broke* (line 83) and *wake up* (line 117) seem to be slips – these are not common nonstandard forms. Verbs that frequently have nonstandard forms in the local area (and in English generally) are used in this extract with standard English past tense forms (e.g. GO (lines 16, 36, 89, 111, 116); EAT (lines 21, 127); CATCH (116); BREAK (23, 25, 72), COME (27, 91); SEE (37)).

Turn-taking

Despite agreeing to take turns to tell the story both girls are keen to take the floor. There are frequent overlaps (shown in the transcript by / surrounding the overlapping speech). Derya's strategy for taking the floor is to accuse her friend of missing out parts of the story or telling it wrong (lines 19 and 29) and then by asking if she can tell the whole story herself, first indirectly (line 30) and then with a direct question (lines 44 and 52). When Derya has succeeded in taking the floor Kareen closely shadows the telling, checking that the story is correct (with *yeah* in lines 6, 12 and 88), helping out in line 81 and occasionally joining in (lines 100 and 122).