

Courtney and Aimee: How Courtney met her boyfriend

Courtney and Aimee are two girls whose families are from Jamaica. Courtney is 17 and Aimee is 19. Both live in inner London. In this short extract Courtney tells a short narrative about how she met her current boyfriend. Both girls think it is a funny story. Although short, the extract illustrates several typical aspects of narrative structure. It also shows how friends collaborate in making sure that the listener understands the point of the story. Courtney uses two features (preposition absence and a bare infinitive after TRY) that are recent developments in spoken English.

Digest link

<http://linguistics-research-digest.blogspot.com/2012/02/help.html>

Narrative structure

The **abstract** is provided by the interviewer (line 3). Courtney frames her story as ‘funny’ in her opening line (line 4) and sets the scene in lines 4-10 (an **orientation** section). She gives the main story about ‘what happened’ (the **complicating action**) in lines 11, 14-16, 18, 22 and 26-29. In between, Courtney gives plenty of details about how she was feeling at the time (lines 5-7, 12-13, and 29). In lines 30-35 she talks about how their relationship developed. The **resolution** is in lines 35 and 36.

Note that Aimee’s comments (lines 17, and 19-21) support Courtney’s opening comment (line 4) by making sure that the interviewer realises why the story is funny.

Quotative expressions

Courtney introduces direct reported speech (reporting what she said to the boy who is now her boyfriend) with BE LIKE (lines 15 and 26. Aimee uses SAY for this purpose (line 20); note that the subject of SAY is ellipted here.

Intensifiers

Courtney uses *so* (line 13) to boost the force of the adjective *annoyed*.

Hedges

Courtney downtones the force of *funny* (line 4) with *kind of*.

Other features

Prepositions: the preposition *to* does not always occur with verbs that themselves contain the meaning of movement towards somewhere (GO in line 6 and SEND in line 7). This seems to be a recent development in some varieties of spoken English.

Bare infinitive: Courtney says *trying talk*, with a bare infinitive (line 16), not *trying to talk*, with a full infinitive. TRY is one of the verbs that is beginning to be used in this way by some speakers of English (HELP is another).

Vocabulary: *Whagwan* (line 18); this phrase, of Jamaican origin and originally meaning “what’s going on?”, is often used as a greeting by young people in London.