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Canadian English as a Window To the Rise of *Like* In Discourse

1. Introduction

Both the uses and the users of *like* in discourse have received a growing amount of attention over the past two and half decades. This attention has not been restricted to linguistics, but has appeared in an array of contexts, from mainstream media sources such as internet, television, and radio, to usage guides. What many of these discussions have in common is a finger pointed steadfastly on younger speakers and an insistence that *like* is used fairly haphazardly (e.g. Chapman 1986; Wilson 1987; Diamond 2000; Fought 2006; see also citations in Levey 2003). The question that must be asked is whether it makes sense, linguistically-speaking, to assume that today's "unpliant young" (Wilson 1987, 92) should bear sole responsibility for this putatively random feature of the spoken vernacular? Presumably those who do use *like* did not invent it *ex nihilo*. The issue is all the more interesting when we consider that the discourse functions of *like* are ubiquitous across varieties of English. But why focus on *like* in Canadian English when the lens is generally aimed at its neighbour to the south? The answer is quite simple. The vernacular forms of *like* are shared by both varieties and comparison of past research reveals regular trends across American and Canadian Englishes (e.g. Schourup 1983; Underhill 1988; Blyth, Recktenwald, and Wang 1990; Meehan 1991; Romaine and Lange 1991; Dailey-O'Cain 2000; Buchstaller 2001; Cukor-Avila 2002; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004, 2007; D'Arcy 2005, 2006). Furthermore, the Toronto English Archive, housed in the Sociolinguistics Laboratory at the University of Toronto, allows for apparent-time analysis of *like* across the full age spectrum. This enables detailed examination of the rise of *like* within a well-defined community, one which is representative of contemporary, urban Canadian English. What we find is that *like* has been developing systematically in the vernacular for as long as can be ascertained using apparent-time data, giving us a view of how it has come to its current state of use. In other words, Canadian English provides a window to the rise of *like* in discourse, one that we can use to extrapolate to other varieties and locales.

2. The Forest For the Trees

A central tenet of the variationist paradigm is that heterogeneity is an inherent aspect of the linguistic system, and, like other aspects of the grammar, this variability is structured (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968). This notwithstanding, when used in the ways demonstrated in (1), *like* has eluded traditional linguistic description, appearing more *ad hoc* than systematic.

- (1) a. *Like* if you're doing your undergrad, no big deal. *Like* it's not that bad, but *like* I'm in a professional school. (N/f/26)¹

¹ All examples are drawn from the Toronto English Archive, housed in the Sociolinguistics Laboratory at the University of Toronto. The parenthetical information following each example marks the sub-corpus from which the datum was extracted, followed by the speaker's sex and age.

- b. Like the first hour I was *like* totally fine, like I wasn't *like* drunk. (3/m/18)
- c. As long as they *like* try to *like* merge with Canadian culture [...]. (1/m/22)
- d. I remember there being *like* a solar eclipse. (1/f/29)

Not included in (1) is quotative *be like*, as in (2), or adverbial *like*, as in (3). The former serves the well-defined role of introducing constructed dialogue and can (more than likely) be traced to American English during the late 1970s or early 1980s (D'Arcy 2007; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007). The latter represents a lexical replacement for *about*, functioning as an approximative adverb in the spoken vernacular (D'Arcy 2006; see also Schourup 1983, 30 and Underhill 1988, 234). These two functions do not form part of the following discussion. The functions in (1), comprising the discourse marker (1a) and the discourse particle (1b-d), are the focus of this chapter and are referred to here collectively as (discourse) *like*.

- (2) a. I was *like* "Where do you find these people?" (1/f/19)
- b. When you go there, you're *like* "Hi, how are you?" and talk to them and stuff like that. (2/f/16)
- c. And when I came home I'd *be like* "Yeah, I can't wait to go home."
And she's *like* "You are home, this is your home." (N/f/26)
- (3) a. And usually it takes *like* fifteen minutes to get there. (3/f/12)
- b. They're *like* sixteen feet long. (1/m/32)
- c. He got to high-school when he was *like* twelve. (N/f/72)

Part of the difficulty in assessing possible constraints on *like* is the wide range of surface constructions in which it appears. Media characterizations typically reference discourse uses as random and 'anti-verbal': "[t]o the common ear, the word seems just flung in" (Diamond 2000, 2; see also Fought 2006). In the linguistic literature, *like* has been discussed in terms of "syntactic detachability and positional mobility" (Romaine and Lange 1991, 261) and its ability to "occur grammatically anywhere in a sentence" (Siegel 2002, 64). This is not to suggest that concerted efforts to pin down possible conditions have not been made. Quite the contrary is true, and I am thinking in particular of work by Ross and Cooper (1979), Underhill (1988), and Andersen (2001). Focusing on its functions as focus particle and pausal interjection, Ross and Cooper argue that *like* opens a constituent that dominates the focused element (1979, 349). In a similar vein, Underhill suggests that *like* is "closely rule-governed" because "it always or nearly always introduces a constituent" (1988, 243). Taking a somewhat different approach, Andersen (2001, 275) argues that the position of *like* is dependent on phrase type. For example, *like* is more likely to occur before a determiner than a head noun, but in the case of verb phrases, it typically appears immediately before the head. What all three analyses hold in common is the view that *like* is associated with the left periphery of the element over which it scopes. I return to this point below. However, as a syntactic category, the constituent is generic and vague (see, e.g., Adger 2003, 64), while Andersen's Principle of Lexical Attraction seems stipulative rather than systematic. Moreover, in the case of Underhill (1988) and Andersen (2001), no consideration is given to the places where *like* does not occur; the focus is strictly on those in which it appears. The end result is a compilation of syntagmatic combinatorial possibilities (e.g. *like* can appear before or within a noun phrase, before or within a verb phrase, before or within a prepositional phrase, before an adverb, etc.). Such an

approach places emphasis on token types, but provides neither a motivation nor an explanation for the patterns – attested, unattested, and even unattestable² – found in natural language data. At the same time, it brings descriptions of *like* full circle in that we are left with a snapshot of the places *like* appears in sentence structure, the same apparently unsystematic view with which we began.

The possibility of order and systematicity in the discursive uses of *like* has been further obfuscated by concentrated attention on specific subsections of the population, generally preadolescents and adolescents, or, in the rare case, young adults (e.g. Underhill 1988). Miller and Weinert (1995), for example, considered the use of *like* by preadolescents in the 8 to 13 year old age-bracket, Siegel (2002) used her 15 year old daughter's high-school friends as informants, and Andersen (1997, 1998, 2000, 2001) relied on the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), which consists of data from teenagers aged 13 to 17. Thus, while a number of researchers have considered quotative *be like* (2) from a generational perspective (e.g. Ferrara and Bell 1995; Cukor-Avila 2002; Buchstaller 2004, 2006; Barbieri 2007; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007) and D'Arcy (2006) examined approximative adverbial *like* in apparent-time, analyses of *like* as a discourse marker and particle have largely ignored older speakers. A notable exception to this trend is Dailey-O'Cain (2000), though her focus was attitudinal rather than distributional. Even Buchstaller (2001), which provides a perspective on the use of discourse *like* within a single family, is limited to one college-age woman and three middle-aged adults (late 40s to mid 50s). In sum, the investigative focal point has been speakers who are believed to be the primary – if not the sole – users of *like*. The underlying assumption seems to be that *like* is simply age-graded slang that disappears from the vernacular when it is no longer age-appropriate. The drawback to this perspective is that until adolescents are seen in relation to older segments of the population, patterns of use among those who are purported to use *like* cannot be contextualized. This is a point that bears directly on issues of language change, stability, and age grading, as well as those surrounding our understanding of the genesis of *like* in discourse.

Discourse *like* is not, in fact, a recent innovation. Grammarians and language commentators have been remarking on *like* since at least the first half of the nineteenth century (e.g. De Quincey 1840-41, 224; Robinson 1876, 76; Jespersen 1942, 417) and it was used by the first generation of native New Zealanders born in the period from 1851 to 1919 (D'Arcy 2007). Today it is used by septa- and octagenarians living in isolated, rural towns and villages in England, Ireland, and Scotland (D'Arcy 2005, 2007; Tagliamonte to appear). In North America, *like* has been associated with both the jazz, cool, and Beat groups of New York City during the 1950s and 1960s (see Andersen 2001, 216, and references therein; also Chapman 1986, 259) and the California Valley Girls of the 1980s (Dailey-O'Cain 2000). Thus, despite the perception of newness, *like* is anything but.³ Contemporary youth have not invented discourse *like*; they got it from somewhere and they learned to use it from someone.

2 For this distinction, see Hyman 2001.

3 See Buchstaller and Traugott (2006) for discussion of adverbial *all* (e.g. John is *all* wet), another long-standing feature of English that is considered new due to its association with the genuinely innovative form quotative *be all*. The same process is likely at work here, with quotative *be like* drawing a perceptual generalization of recent innovation across all discourse uses of *like* (see D'Arcy 2007).

As such, let us assume orderly heterogeneity (Weinreich et al. 1968, 100). There is a variable grammar for *like* and speakers who use *like* have acquired that grammar. In short, it is time to stop looking at the trees and figure out where the forest came from. How did *like*, in its present state, come to be?

3. Methodological Considerations

3.1. Data and Method

The current discussion draws on corpus data from a large archive of informal, spoken English. The materials were collected in Toronto, Canada in the period between 2002 and 2004, using a combination of quota-based random sampling and social networking.⁴ The full archive comprises over 350 hours of casual conversational data with speakers between the ages of 9 and 92, all of whom were born and raised in the city; the sample used for the current analysis is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: *The Toronto English Sample*

Age	Male	Female	Total
10-12	5	5	10
15-16	4	4	8
17-19	5	5	10
20-24	5	5	10
25-29	5	5	10
30-39	5	5	10
40-49	4	4	8
50-59	4	4	8
60-69	4	4	8
70-79	3	4	7
80+	4	4	8
total	48	49	97

Toronto presents an ideal context in which to examine contemporary urban vernacular usage. The city has the largest metropolitan population in Canada. In the broader North American context, it is fourth largest: in the U.S. only New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago have larger populations (WorldAtlas.Com 2006). Although the national varieties of Canada and the U.S. differ in a number of respects, the Toronto English Archive is taken here to represent North American English more generally on the basis of two factors. One, as noted in the introduction, there is striking consistency across observations about discourse *like* regardless of geographic locale (e.g. Schourup 1983; Underhill 1988; Meehan 1991; Romaine and Lange 1991; Dailey-O'Cain 2000; D'Arcy 2005, 2006). Two, models of spatial diffusion highlight the crucial role of cities in the spread of linguistic features (Trudgill 1974; Bailey, Wilke, Tillery, and Sand 1994; Labov 2003). It is typically the case that new forms spread hierarchically from an originating centre. Although some changes are seemingly arrested by national boundaries (e.g. the Northern Cities Shift), others are not (e.g. uvular (r) in Europe;

⁴ For discussion of the design and construction of the individual corpora within the Toronto English Archive, see Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2004) and Tagliamonte (2006).

Trudgill 1974). Discourse *like* belongs to this second category.

Methodologically, the analytical approach of the current discussion differs from previous research on *like* in three crucial respects. First, the age range in Table 1 enables an apparent-time perspective of *like* use in which not just younger speakers are accounted for, but rather, all age cohorts from age 10 through 87 are included. Second, I carefully circumscribe the variable context according to structural diagnostics within functional domains. That is, rather than looking only at those places where *like* appears (e.g. before a noun phrase), the structure of individual syntactic complexes becomes the key heuristic. The question then becomes: What does it mean for *like* to be before a noun phrase as opposed to being within one? As will be shown, examining *like* in this way has important ramifications for uncovering its developmental trajectory in the vernacular. The third methodological difference falls out from the third: both contexts where *like* does and does not appear are considered. The net result was analysis of more than 20,000 tokens comprising seven syntactic contexts; the details are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary *Of Data* (D'Arcy 2005, 205)

Syntactic Domain	Projection	N
clausal: clause-initial	CP, TP	5,737
nominal: determiner phrase	DP, NP	4,408
adjectival: (predicate)	DegP, AP	4,298
verbal: (light) verb phrase	vP	5,843
total		20,286

This methodology has been described in detail in D'Arcy (2005) and is too elaborate to repeat in full here. The crucial point is that the delimitation of the envelope of variation along syntactic parameters allows for objective analysis of *like* following the principle of accountability (Labov 1972, 72). Occurrences of *like* are contrasted with whatever form with which they may alternate in any given context, including other discourse markers (*you know, well*) as well as nothing. Exemplification is provided in (4), which illustrates the matrix level, clause-initial context.

- (4) a. \emptyset Nobody said a word.
Like my first experience with death was this Italian family. (N/f/82)
- b. \emptyset I love Carrie.
Like Carrie's like a little like out-of-it [...]
Like she's a space-cadet. (3/f/18)
- c. *You know, like* the people were very, very friendly.
You know, \emptyset we'd sit out in the park [...]. (N/f/60)
- d. \emptyset We used to go to these crazy after-hour bars.
Like you know, transvestites and all the strippers were there. (N/m/26)
- e. And \emptyset my other cat always sleeps,
and *like* we almost never see him. (3/m/11)
- f. *Like* it's not that bad,
but *like* I'm in a professional school. (N/f/26)

This approach offers a unique perspective on the use of *like* in the community and exposes details previously unavailable for consideration.

3.2. Discourse Markers vs. Discourse Particles

Before continuing, it is important to clarify what is both a theoretical and terminological distinction between discourse markers, as in (1a) and (4), and discourse particles, as in (1b-d).

Markers tend to occur in clause-initial position where they bracket elements of talk (e.g. Schiffrin 1987, 31). Such bracketing may be local, linking contiguous utterances (1a), but discourse markers can also function globally, linking non-contiguous stretches of discourse (see Schiffrin 1992). Their function is thus textual, as they relate the current utterance to prior discourse by signaling exemplification, clarification, elaboration, etc. (see Fraser 1988, 1990; Traugott 1997 [1995]; Brinton 1996, 2006). In this respect discourse markers are "essential to the rhetorical shape of any argument or narrative" (Traugott and Dasher 2005, 154) and because they are interactional signposts, Schiffrin (1987) refers to them as *discourse deictics*. Other English markers include *so*, *then*, and *well*, as well as parentheticals such as *I/you know*, *I guess*, and *I think* (Traugott and Dasher 1995; Brinton 1996). In fact, as exemplified in (5), these last can often be felicitously substituted for *like* without affecting the epistemic stance of the utterance.

- (5) a. *Like* one of my cats meows so much,
'cause *like* he's really picky and everything. (3/m/11)
b. *I mean* one of my cats meows so much,
'cause *you know* he's really picky and everything.

Structurally, both Kiparsky (1995, 140-141) and Traugott (1997 [1995], 6) have argued that markers occupy a specific syntactic slot: they adjoin to the left periphery of CP, the functional projection that dominates the clause (i.e. clause-initial position, (1a), (4) and (5)). In other words, discourse markers are considered to be adjuncts. Treating them in this way (as opposed to, for example, the head of their own functional category) has repercussions for the analysis presented here. In the architecture of the Minimalist framework (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001), adjunction occurs at the phrasal level (i.e. XP). By defining the variable context for *like* along structural parameters, for example AP or NP, the adjunction site is implicational assumed to be the maximal projection heading each structure.

Particles have functions that are primarily interpersonal, such as marking focus or the speaker's epistemic stance toward the utterance, aiding cooperative aspects of communication (e.g. checking or expressing understanding), and generating a sense of sharing or intimacy between interlocutors (Östman 1982; Schourup 1983, 1999; Schiffrin 1987; Andersen 1997, 2001). Indeed, given that interactions in which particles are not used can be perceived as unnatural, awkward, dogmatic, or even unfriendly (Brinton 1996, 35), their discourse saliency is quite high.⁵ Among the pragmatic functions proposed for *like*, the most frequent include pausal interjection (Schourup 1983), focus (Underhill 1988), and non-equivalence between form and intention (Schourup 1983; Andersen 1997, 1998, 2001). Structurally, *like* as a particle occurs in clause-

5 See also Dailey-O'Cain (2000) for positive solidarity ratings for *like* guises as opposed to non-*like* guises.

internal positions.

In sum, discourse markers and discourse particles are differentiated here with regard to both pragmatic function and syntactic position: markers have textual functions and occur in clause-initial position, particles have interpersonal functions and occur in positions other than clause-initial. A similar distinction is made by Andersen (2001, 275), who differentiates between clause-external contexts (i.e. the marker) and clause-internal contexts (i.e. the particle). Why is this important? That is, why not collapse the marker and the particle as a monolithic entity? There are two reasons. One, a growing body of work concentrates on the development of discourse markers (e.g. Traugott 1997 [1995]; Brinton 2005, 2006, and references therein), and two, as will be seen here, there is evidence that long before *like* functioned as a particle, it was a marker (see D'Arcy 2007 for more elaborated evidence to this end). The basic argument is that the starting point for discourse uses of *like* was the left edge of CP, where *like* functions as a discourse marker, and lower projections, where *like* functions as a discourse particle, gradually came available through generalization. If we follow this through, we find that the current state of *like*, where it appears in a variety of syntactic positions, has arisen systematically. In other words, there is nothing haphazard about *like* use at all.

4. Looking Through the Apparent-Time Window

As just discussed, there has been a recent focus on discourse markers as well as claims that they adjoin to syntactic structure in a specific (and historically long-standing)⁶ position. Moreover, a number of authors have noted that *like* is highly frequent in clause-initial position (e.g. Underhill 1988; Romaine and Lange 1991; Andersen 2001). In Andersen (2001, 273), for example, one third of all tokens occur in this position. These points combine to make the marker, and therefore the CP context, an appropriate point of departure for an accountable, and structurally delimited, analysis of discourse *like*.

An analytical advantage of examining *like* from a syntactic perspective is that it allows for distinctions between different levels of structure. In the case of the CP, this means that matrix and subordinate clauses can be treated separately. The examples in (4) illustrate matrix structures. There are two types of subordinate structures: embedded complement clauses, as in (6), and various types of adjunct clauses, such as those in (7) and (8).

- (6) a. He couldn't believe [that *like* he's held all this animosity]... (I/m/22)
 b. I think [that *like* there's been a desire instilled in me]. (I/f/21)
 c. But then I was really lucky [that *like* it was starting to go down].
 (3/m/15)
- (7) a. Like one of my cats meows so much ['cause *like* he's really picky and everything].
 (3/m/11)
 b. I'm going to go buy Canadian stuff ['cause *like* I'm proud to be Canadian]. (2/m/15)
 c. It's weird [because *like* you didn't really fit in the Black group]. (I/f/21)
- (8) a. [*Like* when I first heard that] I was still teaching. (N/m/64)
 b. So I get it all done [*like* when I get home]. (3/f/17)

6 See Kiparsky (1995).

- c. [*Like* if you drive up Elgin or Arnold or whatever] there was just always these big monster homes. (I/f/21)
- d. There's still some [*like* if you go up on Kipling]. (I/m/40)

Note the position of *like* relative to the left periphery of the clause in these examples. In (4) and (8), *like* is adjoined immediately on the left edge of the clause. This is canonical CP-adjunction.⁷ In (6) and (7), however, a different pattern is exhibited: *like* cannot be adjoined to CP because it appears to the right of the element in the head of CP (i.e. *(be)cause* and *that*), on the immediate left of the subject. That such should be the case at first seems odd: *because* and *that* occupy the same slot as do *if* and *when* (also *after*, *while*, *until*, etc.). Moreover, these are categorical patterns in the data.

This is where the perspective afforded by apparent-time is particularly helpful, as it helps shed light on what has happened. Figure 1 tracks the frequency of *like* as a discourse marker in the three contexts illustrated above: on the left periphery of matrix CPs (4), on the left periphery of subordinate CPs (8), and in the position illustrated in (6) and (7), which I suggest is the left periphery of TP, the functional projection that hosts the subject and which dominates all verbal projections (Pollock 1989).

The results in figure 1 reveal that *like* is already established on matrix clauses among the oldest generation of Torontonians sampled here, speakers in their eighties. In contrast, neither the subordinate CP context nor the other subordinate context is established among this same group of speakers: *like* never occurs in these positions. In fact, *like* does not occur on subordinate CPs until the 60 year olds, while the first time *like* is used in the other subordinate position, what I suggest is TP, is among the 40 year olds. In all cases, the apparent-time trajectory is one of regular, incremental increases in frequency among subsequent age groups.⁸

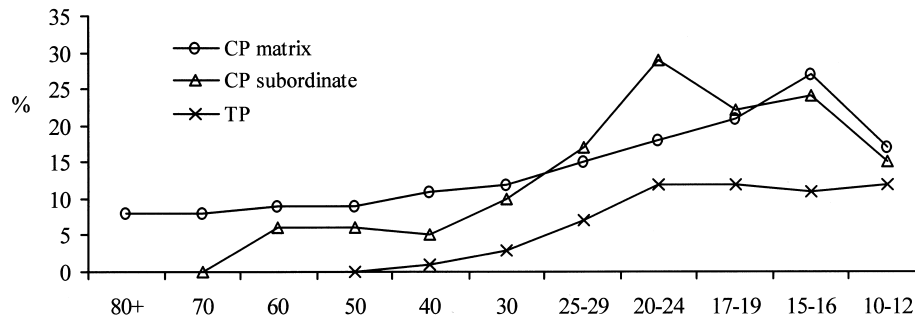
In sum, figure 1 suggests that as a discourse marker, the use of *like* with subordinate clauses is a later development, one that follows its use with matrix clauses by a number of decades. Among eighty year olds, *like* occurs on matrix CPs at a rate of 8% overall (N = 299). To put this in context, the overall distribution of all other discourse markers combined in this age group is just 11%. In other words, *like* accounts for nearly half of discourse marker use by the octogenarians in this data set, providing compelling evidence that it is already fairly robust on matrix CPs among the oldest speakers in the community. That *like* should first target matrix clauses is consistent with what is already known about the development of discourse markers more generally (see, e.g., Traugott 1997 [1995]; Brinton 2005, 2006): the first place they appear is on the left edge of sentences, adjoined to CP. Since most matrix clauses are initial, it

7 Adjunction can apply iteratively, but unlike adverb interpolation, it is not required to follow a fixed hierarchy. As such, when *like* co-occurs with other discourse markers, as in (4c,d), the linear relationship of the markers vis-à-vis one another is not predicted to follow any particular order. That is, *you know like* (4c) is no more probable than *like you know* (4d), a fact that is reflected by the marker collocations in the current data set (e.g. *I mean like/like I mean*, etc.). In contrast, the syntagmatic order of *like* and conjunctions is fixed: *like* categorically follows the conjunction (see also Andersen 2001, 285). This too is predictable from structure, since in coordinate constructions, the conjunction is situated above the projection it conjoins. When CPs are conjoined and *like* marks the lower clause, as in (4e,f), *like* will necessarily occur after the conjunction because the conjunction is hierarchically located above the CP level.

8 In contrast, the frequency of other discourse markers is constant across the sample (see D'Arcy 2005, 85-86).

follows that the earliest and most established context for *like* as a marker will be matrix-level CPs. From here, *like* subsequently generalized to subordinate clauses, but it did not target all embedded clauses evenly. It first spread to temporal and conditional clauses of the type in (8), where it continues to adjoin to CP, only later spreading to clauses of the type illustrated in (6) and (7), where it targets the lower functional projection, TP. In short, the evidence suggests a developmental trajectory of matrix CP to subordinate CP to TP.

Fig. 1: *Like In Apparent-Time: Discourse Marker*



The question is, how and where do the clause-internal positions fit in, where *like* functions interpersonally as a discourse particle? Figure 2 displays the apparent-time distribution of *like* in four representative positions in the clause-internal context. DP, exemplified in (9), is the functional projection that dominates noun phrases. NP, seen in (10), is the lexical projection that contains the head noun. The light verb, vP, seen in (11), is the functional projection that is located hierarchically between the tense phrase (TP, which hosts auxiliaries and other functional categories in the verb phrase; the subject is located in SpecTP) and the lexical verb projection. DegP, as in (12), is the functional projection that subcategorizes for an adjective phrase (Abney 1987). This latter context, AP, is not included in figure 2 due to the extremely low frequency at which *like* occurs unambiguously on the left edge of the adjective. Nonetheless, a few examples are given in (13), which can be contrasted with those in (12).

- (9) a. Well you just cut out *like* a girl figure and a boy figure and then you'd cut out *like* a dress or a skirt or a coat, and like you'd colour it. (N/f/75)
 b. We stayed at *like* a motel. (N/f/76)
 c. They didn't have windows. They had *like* a box. (N/m/62)
 d. Then there's *like* a guy with *like* a bell and *like* a hood. (2/m/18)
- (10) a. They didn't want to go to like a horrible crappy little *like* Firkin Bar or something like that. (N/m/26)
 b. They have this *like* energy you-know? (I/f/21)
 c. Like there's a lot of *like* house-boaters. (I/f/21)
 d. We um bought some *like* treats for ourselves. (3/f/12)
- (11) a. They were *like* living like dogs. (N/m/52)
 b. And they had *like* scraped her. (I/m/35)
 c. I've *like* grown into that. (3/m/12)
 d. Everyone is *like* calling stuff out. (I/m/22)

- e. They like to *like* intervene a lot. (3/m/18)
 f. As long as they *like* try to *like* merge with Canadian culture. (1/m/22)
- (12) a. I've discovered new reading material which is *like* so interesting. (N/f/52)
 b. Like I just thought it was *like* so small. (1/m/40)
 c. They're *like* really quiet. (2/f/16)
 d. Like my computer's *like* really damn slow. (2/m/15)
- (13) a. I remember certain things that certain staff have done because they were just so incredibly *like* oblivious to their role. (1/f/29)
 b. I get really *like* flabbergasted that they know the things that they know. (1/f/24)
 c. My whole mouth was getting incredibly *like* dry. (3/m/18)
 d. He's in rehab now and he's all *like* humble. (2/f/16)
 e. Like the person who teaches it is really *like* nice. (2/f/12)

Fig. 2: *Like In Apparent-Time: Discourse Particle*

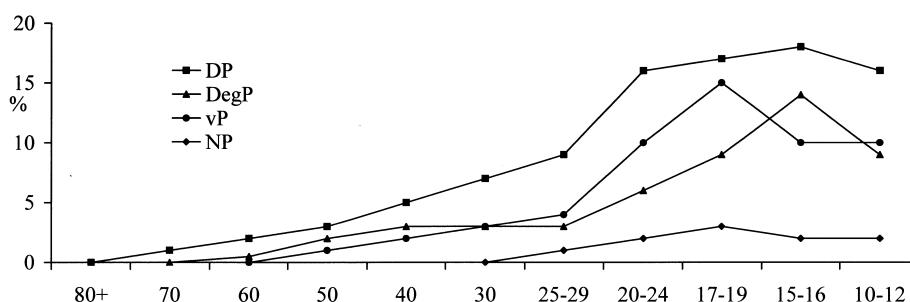


Figure 2 reveals that none of these contexts are attested among the eighty year olds. However, beginning with speakers in their seventies, the first clause-internal position to host *like* is the DP. The next projection to host *like* is DegP, where it first occurs in the speech of the 65 year olds, followed shortly thereafter by the light verb with the 50 year olds. Finally, among the 30 year olds, *like* begins to adjoin to NP. For all contexts, however, regardless of the entry point in the apparent-time trajectory, the frequency of *like* rises consistently across the generations. This same pattern was also evident for *like* as a discourse marker in figure 1.

The perspective provided by apparent-time is thus one that shows quite clearly that *like* did not come to its present state as a spontaneous innovation in the speech of adolescents and young adults. Nor would it be fair to say that it is a strictly age-graded feature of the vernacular: it is not restricted to any particular life-stage. It is true that in all contexts, *like* is more frequent among younger speakers than it is among older speakers, but crucially, its use is not isolated to any particular age group. Instead, we see that once *like* begins to occur in any given context, it continues to do so: there is continuity across apparent-time. In other words, there is a stability here that might not have been expected. Were *like* a fairly *ad hoc* and random feature of discourse, there would be no reason to suspect the kind of systematicity unveiled by the apparent-time windows in figures 1 and 2, let alone the monotonic relationship between use and age that is evident for each context tracked in this data set. The apparent-time data therefore reveal that although *like* may seem random, there has been nothing random about its development as a pragmatic device. It has risen to its current state through regular, step-wise development, consistent with change in progress.

5. The Rise Of *Like* In Discourse

Figure 3 abstracts away from issues of frequency, isolating the point at which each context is first attested in the Toronto materials and after which it continues to occur in the speech of subsequent generations. This layering of adjunction sites, which has developed systematically in Canadian English over the past sixty-five years or so, graphically demonstrates how *like* has arrived at its current state of use.

AP							
NP							
TP							
vP							
DegP							
CP _{sub}							
DP							
CP _{matrix}							
	> 80	70-79	60-69	50-59	40-49	30-39	10-29
	c.1930s	c.1940s	c.1950s	c.1960s	c.1970s	c.1980s	c.1990s

Fig. 3: Generalization of *like* across maximal projections: darker shading = marker; lighter shading = particle (based on D'Arcy 2005, 209)

As discussed above, *like* is firmly entrenched as a marker on matrix CPs among the oldest speakers in the sample, suggesting that this was the entry point for the discourse uses of *like* more generally. From here, the marker generalized to the periphery of subordinate CPs before later spreading to the edge of TP. In the interim, however, *like* began to work its way into the syntactic hierarchy as a particle, adjoining to maximal projections below the clausal level. Its first target was the DP and from this position it continued to spread deeper into the syntax, generalizing across other levels of structure: DegP, vP, NP, AP.

These pathways are interesting in and of themselves, since it is clear that from clause-external positions *like* generalized to clause-internal ones, and it did so incrementally rather than all at once. This suggests that there are grammatical imperatives at work. However, the story is more complex than this. The ordering of the adjunction sites is not random. Note the *types* of maximal projections targeted by *like*. CP, TP, DP, DegP, and vP are all functional categories. NP and AP are lexical categories. There are at least two distinct developmental pathways evidenced in the data. On the one hand, there is generalization from higher functional projections to lower functional projections in the syntactic hierarchy. In the case of the marker, for example, we see generalization from CP to TP. In the case of the particle, we see generalization from DP to DegP to vP. On the other hand, there is generalization from the higher functional projection to the lower lexical projection within a domain. In other words, the lexical projections signify later stages of development. It is not a coincidence that of the contexts examined here, NP and AP are the last two to appear (cf. figure 3). Consider, for example, the nominal domain. DP first appears as a target for *like* adjunction among speakers in their seventies. Unambiguous evidence for adjunction on the left edge of NP, however, does not appear until the thirty year olds. In other words,

there is approximately a 40-year gap between adjunction on the functional projection and adjunction on the lower lexical projection it dominates. Similarly, the difference between DegP-adjunction and AP-adjunction is one of approximately 35 years: *like* adjoins to DegP among speakers aged 65 years and below, but does not unambiguously occur on the edge of AP until speakers aged 29 and under.

This regularity, demonstrated so unequivocally by the pathways that emerge from the apparent-time perspective, provide dramatic evidence that *like* was not a feature that simply appeared *ex nihilo* in the vernacular. Quite the contrary is true. It has been developing gradually and systematically as a feature of Canadian discourse for minimally the period we can track with this corpus, and it has done so following clear grammatical imperatives. Add to this the observation that once *like* shows up in a given context, that particular projection is firmly established as an adjunction site. In other words, after *like* generalizes to a new projection, it not only continues to appear in that position among successive generations, but its frequency steadily increases across apparent-time.

What all of this points to is linguistic change, not age grading, not slang, and not some trendy marker of youthfulness. In short, *like* is not a passing fad of the adolescent years. It is incontrovertible that younger speakers use *like* more frequently than older speakers do (see also Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 66). It is also incontrovertible, however, that adolescents are not the sole users of *like*. Other age groups use it as well, they simply do so at lower rates. In fact, while *like* does not occur in every context for all age cohorts, it is nonetheless frequency rather than position that primarily differentiates a 15 year old from, for example, a 45 year old. This suggests that the *someone* from whom younger speakers acquired *like* consists of older speakers and that the *somewhere* from which they learned to use it was the community's variable grammar.

6. Concluding Remarks

At the outset of this chapter, I had asked if it made good linguistic sense not only to attribute *like* to a narrowly circumscribed sector of the population, but also to assume that its use is haphazard and unconstrained. A fundamental principle of language change is that incoming forms will be most frequent among younger speakers, while the variationist paradigm is based on the assumption that linguistic variability is structured. The apparent-time window of the present study has provided persuasive evidence that the answer to both aspects of this question is a resolute "no". Discourse *like* is a relatively long-standing feature of Canadian vernacular speech.⁹ Despite appearances, it is not an *ad hoc* feature of the spoken language. The problem is that when we take a snapshot of younger speakers alone, we literally cannot see the forest for the trees. To get a true picture of what is going on in speech, it is necessary to step back and take in a more panoramic view. The full community must be considered, oldest speakers to youngest speakers. When we do that with a feature such as *like*, we discover that the current state of affairs represents the results of long-standing developments within the grammar. The synchronic state of *like*, where it surfaces in a broad range of syntactic positions, did not emerge all at once as a fully-fledged system.

⁹ For more elaborated discussions of the history of *like* as a vernacular form in English, see Romaine and Lange (1991, 270) and D'Arcy (2007).

Quite the contrary: it has developed systematically, projection by projection. In sum, *like* has reached its current pattern of use in Canadian English via regular, step-wise development; it is not a random discourse device of the inarticulate. That this is so for this variety suggests that it is also the case for others, which may be at different stages along the trajectory and which may, as a consequence, evidence fewer or possibly more adjunction sites in vernacular use.

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