Like and language ideology: Disentangling fact from fiction

Article *in* American Speech · December 2007

DOI: 10.1215/00031283-2007-025

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38 PUBLICATIONS **688** CITATIONS

LIKE AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY: DISENTANGLING FACT FROM FICTION

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ABSTRACT: The selective attention paid to the language of adolescents has led to the enduring belief that young people are ruining the language and that, as a consequence, the language is degenerating. One feature of contemporary vernaculars that is often held up as exemplification of these ideological principles is *like*, the "much-deplored interjection … that peppers the talk of so many of the unpliant young these days" (Wilson 1987, 92). There is, in fact, an intricate lore surrounding *like*. It includes the idea that *like* is meaningless, that women say it more than men do, and that it is an Americanism, introduced by the Valley Girls. This article systematically addresses ideologically driven myths about the uses and users of *like*. Drawing on empirical data, it seeks to disentangle the facts from the fiction that has been cultivated in the general social consciousness. It is argued that most beliefs about *like* are either false (e.g., meaninglessness, Valley Girl creationism) or too broad to reflect any coherent reality (e.g., the role of women). However, in examining individual beliefs about *like*, it becomes clear that each contributes to the perpetuation of others in important and nontrivial ways.

> Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished. [Campbell 1949, 13]

CAMPBELL WAS REFERRING to traditional mythology, yet there is a link here to language ideology, since it is likely that myths about language have flourished for as long as language has functioned in social contexts, that is, from the beginning. Modern examples include the belief that right-handed people are more proficient linguistically than left-handed people, that double negatives are illogical, that women talk too much, that King Arthur spoke English, and most notably, that the media/America/teenagers are ruining the language. This final grouping belongs to the overarching and timeless gestalt that the language is degenerating.[1] Ideologies such as these are widespread, virtually intractable, and so deeply ingrained as part of one's cultural heritage that they often cease to be recognized for the myths they are (see also Bauer and Trudgill 1998, xvi). As a result, they tend to be accepted, generally unquestioningly, as fact.

American Speech, Vol. 82, No. 4, Winter 2007 DOI 10.1215/00031283-2007-025

From a linguistic perspective, the veracity of individual language myths is often dubious if not fictional. But like traditional myths, language myths reflect the society that produces them, and for this reason they offer important insights into cultural attitudes and mores. For example, ongoing language change is often met with derision. This may reflect a general unease with change in any form, but when considering language, it typically results in the characterization of new forms as sloppy, lazy, ignorant, or vulgar. These are, of course, social rather than linguistic notions, but the recurrence of such comments underlies the poignancy of the sentiment. A particularly interesting aspect of the social context of language change is that from a diachronic perspective, the cumulative effects of change are unexceptional, yet in synchronic time individual changes are synonymous with degradation. As Ogden Nash writes in "Laments for a Dying Language" (cited in Aitchison 1981, 17): "Farewell, farewell to my beloved language / Once English, now a vile orangutanguage."

Inevitably, language change is always most advanced among younger speakers. A peak in the progress of change among adolescent cohorts is a recurrent finding of apparent-time studies (Labov 2001, 454; Chambers 2003, 223; Tagiamonte and D'Arcy 2007b) and has come to be seen as a criterial feature of ongoing change (Labov 2001, 455). Because this peak typically occurs among speakers between the ages of 13 and 17, it is not a coincidence that children and adolescents are singled out as the primary offenders in the linguistic arena. The proposed solution to the "language misuse" of younger generations is often more rigid teaching standards, a suggestion that undoubtedly draws on another folk belief: that children learn the fundamentals of the spoken language at school. As James Milroy (1998, 63) points out, since children have already acquired the basic spoken grammar by the time they arrive at school, complaints about the way young people speak are not about language ABILITY; they are about language VARIETY. And as just discussed, it is adolescent varieties that are at the forefront of ongoing linguistic changes.

One feature of contemporary vernaculars currently subject to widespread condemnation is *like* when used in the ways highlighted in (1).

1. a. He WAS LIKE, "Yeah so I'm going out with Clara now." And then she sounded really disappointed; she WAS LIKE, "Yeah she's really smart." So then he WAS LIKE, "I kind of feel bad, but then again, I don't." [N/f/18][2]
   b. He looks like he's LIKE twelve or LIKE eight. [2/f/16]
   c. LIKE if you're doing your undergrad, no big deal. LIKE it's not that bad, but LIKE I'm in a professional school. I want to be a professional. [N/f/26]
   d. Like the first hour I was LIKE totally fine, like I wasn't LIKE drunk. [3/m/18]

As with all forms involved in change, *like* is associated in popular culture with adolescents and young adults, and perceptual investigations by Dailey-O'Cain (2000) and Buchstaller (2006b) have documented the strength of this belief. Older speakers seldom claim to use *like* themselves, characterizing its occurrence in their vernaculars as rare or nonexistent, while younger age groups stipulate to its regularity in their own speech (Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 69).

There is an intricate and multifaceted lore surrounding *like*. The belief that younger speakers alone are responsible for the propagation of *like* constitutes just one part of the complex. This conglomerate of beliefs is the focus of the current analysis. As with other language ideologies, those surrounding *like* have been cultivated by popular consensus, but such consensus is not necessarily informed by empirical truth(s). Thus, in examining beliefs about *like*, my intention is to disentangle fact from fiction. Many of the commonly held beliefs about *like* will be shown to be false, while others are simply too broad to reflect any coherent reality. In such cases, certain aspects of the myth may bear merit, though as encapsulated the belief itself remains unmotivated. However, in examining individual beliefs about *like*, it becomes clear that each contributes to the perpetuation of others in important and nontrivial ways to create a unified whole.

THE *LIKE* LANGUAGE MYTH

Entwined with the multitude of beliefs about *like* are a number of subjective reactions to the use of this form. These include the feeling that it is an exasperating tic and that it makes those who use it seem less educated, intelligent, or interesting (Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 73; Buchstaller 2006b, 371). Indeed, general attitudes toward *like* are overtly negative (De Quincey 1840–41, 224; Jespersen 1942, 417; Schourup 1983, 29; Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 69–70). It is not the aim of this article to address or to change such attitudes, though such consequences may inadvertently result from the discussion. Rather, the focus is centered on those aspects of the myth that can be dispelled objectively, drawing on empirical data. Thus, the beliefs to be examined are those listed here, for which there is evidence of the ways in which the folklore either reflects or obscures actual usage:

Like is just *like*, that is, there is one *like* that is recycled repeatedly.
Like is meaningless; it simply signals a lack of articulacy.
Women say *like* more than men do.
Like began with the Valley Girls.
Only young people, and adolescents in particular, use *like*.
Like can be used anywhere in a sentence.

METHOD

The primary body of evidence brought to bear here on the issues encompassed by the *like* myth consists of corpus data from a large archive of spoken contemporary 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.[3] The full Toronto English 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.

With the largest metropolitan population in Canada, Toronto presents an ideal context in which to examine urban vernacular usage. Toronto is also the fourth largest city in English-speaking North America; only New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago have larger populations (WorldAtlas.com 2006). Although General Canadian English differs from General American English in a number of respects, the uses of *like* exemplified in (1) are shared by both varieties. Consequently, Toronto English is taken here to represent North American English more generally, an assumption that is further supported by two factors. First, models of spatial diffusion (Trudgill 1974; Bailey et al. 1994; Labov 2003) highlight the crucial role of cities in the spread of linguistic features. Typically, new forms spread hierarchically from an originating center. Although some changes are seemingly arrested by national boundaries (e.g., the Northern Cities Shift), others are not (e.g., uvular (r) in Europe; Trudgill 1974). Second, the vast body of research investigating quotative *be like* (as in 1a) has revealed regular trends across American and

TABLE 1
The 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

Canadian Englishes, showing that this form is consistently constrained in the U.S. and Canada (e.g., Blyth, Recktenwald, and Wang 1990; Singler 2001; Cukor-Avila 2002; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004, 2007a). Similarly, there is striking consistency in observations about nonquotative uses of *like* (as in 1b–1d) regardless of locale (e.g., Schourup 1983; Underhill 1988; Meehan 1991; Romaine and Lange 1991; Dailey-O'Cain 2000; D'Arcy 2005, 2006). From this we can extrapolate that regardless of issues of origin, *like* is a feature of North American English more generally.

The age range in table 1 signals a crucial respect in which the method adopted here differs from previous discussions of *like*. While a number of researchers have considered quotative *be like* (as in 1a) from a generational perspective (Ferrara and Bell 1995; Cukor-Avila 2002; Buchstaller 2004, 2006a; Barbieri 2007; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007a), examinations of other vernacular uses of *like* (as in 1b–1d) have focused on specific subsections of the population: preadolescents, adolescents, or young adults (e.g., Underhill 1988; Miller and Weinert 1995; Andersen 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001; Siegel 2002; Hasund 2003). With the exception of Dailey-O'Cain (2000), no analysis of nonquotative uses has considered the full age spectrum within a community. Even Buchstaller (2001), which provides a perspective on vernacular uses of *like* within a single family, is limited to one college-age woman and three middle-aged adults (late 40s to mid-50s). Consequently, the upper edge of such uses remains unclear, yet this point bears directly on issues of language change, stability, and age grading, as well as those surrounding the purported genesis of *like* in discourse. This lack of information regarding adult cohorts has obscured our understanding of *like*, and as will be shown, in so doing it has contributed to *like* ideologies in a number of ways.

The current method differs from that of previous analyses in three further ways. First, I distinguish between different discourse functions of *like* in vernacular usage. Second, I treat each of these separately, carefully circumscribing the variable context according to structural diagnostics within functional domains. Third, I consider not only those contexts where *like* does occur, but also those where it does not. The methodology has been described in detail in D'Arcy (2005) and is too elaborate to repeat in full here, but crucially, 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 function, including nothing, other discourse makers (*you know*, *well*), other verbs of quotation (*say*, *think*), and so on. Exemplification is provided in (2) using the clause-initial context. This methodology offers a unique perspective on the use of *like* in the community and exposes details previously unavailable for consideration.

2. a. Ø Nobody said a word. LIKE my first experience with death was this Italian family. [N/f/82]
   b. YOU KNOW, LIKE the people were very, very friendly. YOU KNOW, Ø we'd sit out in the park and talk with different people. [N/f/60]
   c. And Ø my other cat always sleeps, and LIKE we almost never see him. [3/m/11]

DISENTANGLING FACT FROM FICTION

In discussing the beliefs surrounding *like*, it is important to bear in mind that certain aspects of the myth are more general than others, which may be somewhat restricted regionally. For example, while the association of *like* with younger speakers seems to hold across the English-speaking world, there is evidence that its associations with both women and the United States are variably salient. In North America, the frequency of *like* in the speech of women and the focus on California are overtly acknowledged as key elements in the received wisdom surrounding vernacular uses (e.g., Dailey-O'Cain 2000). In the New Zealand context, the pivotal role of women remains fundamental, but the Valley Girl link is more tenuous, especially among older speakers who may not be familiar with this particular social grouping. This is not to say that the perception of *like* as either an American or more specifically a Californian feature does not persevere. Indeed, anecdotal evidence clearly associates *like* with the United States. In the United Kingdom, Buchstaller (2006b, 369–70) investigated attitudes toward quotative *be like* and found that although a substantial proportion of speakers associate the form with women (34%; $N = 101$), the majority (59%) are in fact noncommittal to any gender pattern. Moreover, only 12% of responses associated *be like* with America, compared to the 74% response rate for "no idea" for its regional affiliation ($N = 90$; Buchstaller 2006b, 374). Thus, the details of the *like* language myth clearly differ somewhat across varieties of English. That such is the case serves as an important reminder of the culturally dependent nature of myths in general. In what follows, however, I attempt to address each part of the myth apart from cultural context, focusing on the content of the belief itself rather than the social milieu that may have led to its formation in the communal consciousness.

LIKE IS JUST *LIKE* (AND IT IS MEANINGLESS). In the media there is a tendency to talk of *like* as a single, monolithic entity, and metalinguistic commentary typically involves performative speech in which most, if not all, the uses demonstrated in (1) are modeled. There are, however, four uses that draw attention in vernacular speech. Each is functionally distinct and can be

distinguished from the "grammatical" and largely unremarkable uses in (3).[4]

3. a. VERB: I don't really LIKE her that much. [2/f/12]
   b. NOUN: He grew up with the LIKES … of all great fighters. [N/m/60]
   c. ADVERB: It looks LIKE a snail; it just is a snail. [I/f/19]
   d. CONJUNCTION: It felt LIKE everything had dropped away. [I/m/40]
   e. SUFFIX: I went, "[mumbling]" or something like stroke-LIKE. [N/f/31]

To distinguish between the forms in (3), which have long been features of both written and spoken English (Romaine and Lange 1991, 244), and the forms in (1), which are largely restricted to informal discourse, I will refer to the latter as VERNACULAR USES/FUNCTIONS OF *LIKE*. This signals quite clearly the existence of more than one *like* in discourse. The functions included in the vernacular category are quotative complementizer (as in 4), approximative adverb (as in 5), discourse marker (as in 6), and discourse particle (as in 7).[5]

4. QUOTATIVE COMPLEMENTIZER
   a. And we WERE LIKE, "Yeah but you get to sleep like three-quarters of your life." He WAS LIKE, "That's an upside." [2/f/12]
   b. I WAS LIKE, "Where do you find these people?" [I/f/19]
5. APPROXIMATIVE ADVERB
   a. It could have taken you all day to go LIKE thirty miles. [N/f/76]
   b. You-know, it was LIKE a hundred and four [degrees], but it lasted for about two weeks. [N/m/84]
6. DISCOURSE MARKER
   a. Nobody said a word. LIKE my first experience with death was this Italian family. [N/f/82]
   b. I love Carrie. LIKE Carrie's like a little like out-of-it but LIKE she's the funniest. LIKE she's a space-cadet. [3/f/18]
7. DISCOURSE PARTICLE
   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 color it. [N/f/75]
   b. And they had LIKE scraped her. [I/m/35]
   c. She's LIKE dumb or something. Like I love her but she's LIKE dumb. [3/f/18]

As a quotative, *like* occurs with the dummy form *be* to support inflection and to satisfy the requirement that the clause have a lexical verb (see Romaine and Lange 1991, 261–62). This collocation performs the specialized role of introducing reported speech, thought, and nonlexicalized sounds, among a range of other content (i.e., CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUE; Tannen 1986, 315). Since Butters's (1982) editor's note in *American Speech*, quotative *be like* has

received vast attention in the sociolinguistic literature (e.g., Schourup 1983; Blyth, Recktenwald, and Wang 1990; Meehan 1991; Romaine and Lange 1991; Ferrara and Bell 1995; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999; Singler 2001; Cukor-Avila 2002; Buchstaller 2004, 2006a; D'Arcy 2004; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004, 2007a); there is little more to add here. I will simply reiterate what has been said elsewhere: *be like* is an innovation, representing ongoing change.[6]

Use of the quotative is constrained by both language-internal (e.g., person, tense, and temporal reference, content of the quote) and language-external (e.g., gender, age) factors. The relevance of the linguistic factors is twofold: one, the operation of grammatical constraints reveals systematicity; and two, such constraints highlight the unique function of *be like*, not only within the quotative paradigm but vis-à-vis other vernacular uses of *like* which do not share these same conditions on use. The relevance of the social factors will be broached later in the discussion. Finally, the quotative is referentially contentful, functioning as a synonym for a range of verbs within the quotative repertoire, such as *say*, *think*, *ask*, and the like. This last point is demonstrated in (8), which restates the examples from (4) using more traditional verbs of quotation in place of *be like*.

8. a. And we SAID, "Yeah but you get to sleep like three-quarters of your life." He SAID, "That's an upside."
   b. I THOUGHT, "Where do you find these people?"

The second vernacular use of *like* denotes concise propositional content as well. It is used to signal approximation, and it is an adverb (D'Arcy 2006). Thus (5b), repeated here as (9a), in which *like* and *about* alternate, can be paraphrased straightforwardly with *about* alone as in (9b), or simply with *like*, as in (9c), without affecting the meaning.

9. a. You-know, it was LIKE a hundred and four [degrees] but it lasted for ABOUT two weeks. [N/m/84]
   b. You-know, it was ABOUT a hundred and four [degrees] but it lasted for ABOUT two weeks.
   c. You-know, it was LIKE a hundred and four [degrees] but it lasted for LIKE two weeks.

The synonymy illustrated in (9) has been noted since the earliest work on vernacular uses of *like*. Schourup (1983, 30) notes that before numerical expressions, "*approximately* or *about* or *around* can be substituted for *like* . . . without noticeably altering their meaning or acceptability," and Underhill (1988, 234) excludes *like* a priori as an approximative when it precedes quantified phrases. That *like* should convey such meanings falls out from

processes of semantic change, since it has long conveyed approximative content in English (Meehan 1991; Romaine and Lange 1991), yet it is rarely seen as grounds for distinguishing a distinct function in the folk linguistic lore surrounding *like*. It is interesting to note, for example, that Newman (1974, 15) illustrates "meaningless speech" with the phrase *like six feet tall* (cited in Schourup 1983, 29).

The third vernacular function of *like* is the discourse marker. Markers fill the syntactic adjunct slot, adjoining in English to the left periphery of CP, the functional projection that dominates the clause (i.e., (2); see Kiparsky 1995; Traugott 1997; D'Arcy 2005; Traugott and Dasher 2002). This position follows from their pragmatic role, which is to signal the sequential relationship between units of discourse, whether it be one of exemplification, illustration, explanation, or the like (Fraser 1988, 1990; Brinton 1996). As such, they operate in the textual component, marking discourse and information structure. Consequently, markers are sometimes referred to as "discourse deictics" (Schiffrin 1987) or "discourse connectives" (Blakemore 1987).

The examples in (6) illustrate the use of *like* as a discourse marker, where it brackets elements of talk (e.g., Schiffrin 1987, 31). Although the bracketing is local in that *like* links contiguous utterances, discourse markers may also link noncontiguous stretches of discourse (see Schiffrin 1992). Other markers in English include *so*, *then*, and *well*, as well as parentheticals such as *I/you know*, *I guess*, and *I think* (Brinton 1996; Traugott and Dasher 2002). Indeed, these last can often be felicitously substituted for *like* without affecting the epistemic stance of the utterance. This is exemplified in (10). A characteristic trait of pragmatic features in general is their lack of lexical meaning (Östman 1982). Nonetheless, markers are not a trivial resource in discourse despite the difficulties inherent in trying to define them in referential terms. Rather, they are "essential to the rhetorical shape of any argument or narrative" (Traugott and Dasher 2002, 154).

10. 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.

The final vernacular function of *like* to be discussed here is the discourse particle, which—in contrast to the marker—occurs within the clause as demonstrated in (7). A number of pragmatic functions have been proposed for this use of *like*, including pausal interjection (Schourup 1983), focus (Underhill 1988), and nonequivalence between form and intention (Schourup 1983; Andersen 1997, 1998, 2001). Unlike quotative *be like*, approximative adverb *like*, and discourse marker *like*, particle *like* cannot be glossed. This

does not mean, however, that it serves no purpose. Whereas markers function at the textual level, particles operate in the interpersonal realm, aiding cooperative aspects of communication such as checking or expressing understanding. They may also generate a sense of sharing or intimacy between interlocutors (Östman 1982; Schourup 1983, 1999; Schiffrin 1987). Indeed, the discourse saliency of particles is quite high, since interactions in which particles do not occur can be perceived as unnatural, awkward, dogmatic, or even unfriendly (Brinton 1996, 35). Such is also the case with *like*. In a matched-guise experiment, Dailey-O'Cain (2000, 73) found that although *like* guises were rated as less intelligent than non-*like* guises, speakers were rated significantly more attractive, cheerful, and friendly when they used *like* as opposed to when they did not. Thus, regardless of subjective attitudes toward *like* more generally (i.e., whether speakers like *like* or not), it serves important and palpable social functions in face-to-face interactions.

In sum, there is clearly more than one *like* in discourse. Even though what is heard consistently is /laɪk/, this unit of sounds is not simply recycled in various frames as an undifferentiated entity. Rather, it is a versatile form, performing multiple—and distinct—vernacular functions. In attending to the belief that *like* is just *like*, we simultaneously address another part of the myth, which is that *like* is a meaningless interjection. Each vernacular form of *like* has a unique function. It therefore follows that each has a unique meaning, whether such meaning is primarily referential or pragmatic. To suggest that *like* is no more than a linguistic crutch, signaling hesitancy and a lack of fluency or articulation (e.g., Siegel 2002, 47; see also citations in Diamond 2000, 2 and Levey 2003, 24), trivializes the complex juxtaposition of functions performed by this lexeme in the spoken language (see Levey 2003). In recognizing that numerous functions of *like* are operative in vernacular usage, the myth of meaninglessness is simultaneously demystified.

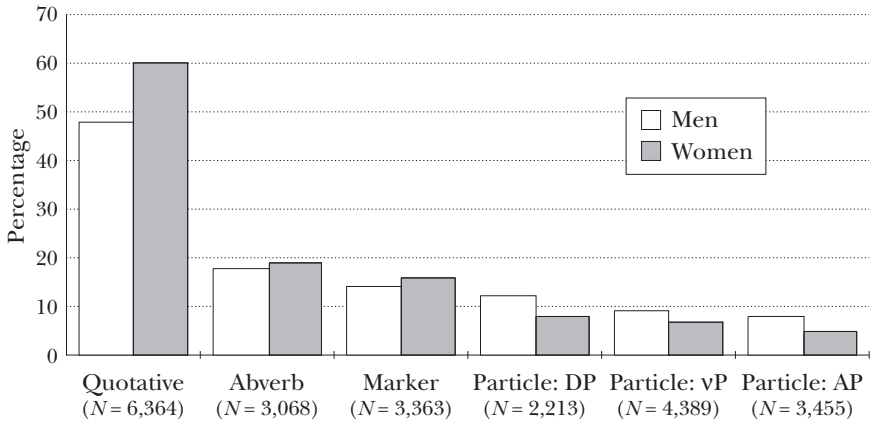
WOMEN SAY *LIKE* ALL THE TIME. Another widely held belief concerning the vernacular forms of *like* is that men use them less often than women do, an ideology substantiated by Dailey-O'Cain (2000, 68–69). She gave her participants a written questionnaire that included two sample sentences, one demonstrating the particle and one demonstrating the quotative. Asked whether they associate *like* with men or women, the overwhelming majority of the participants, nearly 83% ($N = 40$), responded in favor of women. Given the multiple vernacular functions of *like*, however, this question is not as straightforward as it may seem. There is also the issue of quantification. What counts as "more"? Variationist analyses of the quotative system generally follow the principle of accountability (Labov 1972, 72) and consider the frequency of *be like* relative to all other verbs of quotation in some body of

materials. In other words, all quotative frames are extracted from the data set and then individual quotative complementizers are quantified proportionally (e.g., Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999; study 1 in Dailey-O'Cain 2000; Cukor-Avila 2002; D'Arcy 2004; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004, 2007a; though see Singler 2001). Within the discourse-pragmatic literature, a rather different methodology is adopted: raw or normalized frequency counts are reported (e.g., Andersen 1997, 1998, 2001; Hasund 2003; Levey 2003).

In an effort to draw analyses of the nonquotative manifestations of *like* in line with the variationist model, I considered the approximative adverb, the marker, and the particle separately, carefully constraining the variable contexts according to syntactic structure (for the detailed methodology, see D'Arcy 2005). Accountable analyses of *like* in the syntactic frames unique to the various functions were then performed (see above). Crucially, this method allows for comparable comparisons of the distributional frequencies for each vernacular form of *like*, including the quotative. The findings of this proportional comparison are reported in figure 1, where the overall distributions are given for each use of *like* according to gender.[7]

As figure 1 demonstrates, the gender puzzle is finely articulated: the question of men versus women depends on which vernacular form of *like* is at issue. In the case of the quotative, women use *be like* significantly more than their male peers do overall ($N = 6{,}364$; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007a). Concerning the discourse marker, women use this form more frequently than men do as well, and despite the narrow margin in the overall results, this too is significant ($N = 3{,}363$; D'Arcy 2005, 97). The results for the approximative

FIGURE 1
Overall Distribution of Vernacular Functions of *like* across Gender Groups



adverb reveal a slight female edge (19% vs. 18%), but these proportional results fail to be selected as significant in a multivariate analysis, where the probabilities for both men and women hover near .50 (N = 3,068; D'Arcy 2006, 349). Thus, whereas the quotative and the marker are significantly favored by women, gender is not a conditioning factor on the adverb. Both distributionally and in terms of probabilities, men and women are equally likely to use this form.

What of *like* as a particle? The results for this function are divided into three syntactic environments in figure 1: (1) DP, the functional projection that dominates noun phrases (N = 2,213); (2) vP, the functional projection that is located hierarchically between the tense phrase (which hosts auxiliaries and other functional categories in the verb phrase) and the lexical verb projection (N = 4,389); and (3) AP, which represents predicate adjective constructions (N = 3,455).[8] In each of these three contexts, *like* is more frequent among men than it is among women. Strikingly, the proportional differences between the two genders—though narrow—are statistically significant across the board (D'Arcy 2005, 155, 160, 196). This is likely due to the consistency of the gender pattern across the age groups that use the particle in each of the relevant contexts. It is worth noting that Dailey-O'Cain (2000, 66), who employed accountable variationist methodology in analyzing the particle in focus contexts, also reported a male favoring effect.

In short, there are distinct gender patterns associated with the vernacular functions of *like*. The quotative and the marker are correlated with women, the adverb exhibits no gender conditioning at all, and the particle is more frequent in the speech of men. Thus, even though popular belief makes women the "great offenders" in the *like* arena, the winner in this battle of the sexes depends on function. Such a result underscores the discussion in the previous section. If *like* truly were just *like*, we might expect all manifestations to be similarly constrained by gender. Such is not the case.

BLAME IT ON THE VALLEY GIRLS AND ADOLESCENTS. The differences in function and in social conditioning displayed by the various forms of *like* raise the question of where the vernacular uses came from. As discussed above, popular ideology situates the epicenter of *like* usage in California, and the Valley Girls in particular are attributed with launching *like* into the general social consciousness (Blyth, Recktenwald, and Wang 1990, 224; Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 70). It is difficult, however, to divorce the issue of genesis from that of practice, because the truth of one impinges directly on that of the other. It is a common assumption that vernacular uses of *like* are age-graded, frequently marking the speech of adolescents and younger adults only to be outgrown in adulthood. In other words, *like* use is presumed ephemeral and temporally

banded, appropriate for a certain stage of life and then shrugged off when its suitability wanes. In addressing the history of the various discourse functions, issues are raised concerning its social embedding, of which age is an important concomitant.

It is generally assumed that the vernacular uses of *like* discussed here have their origins in American English (e.g., Andersen 2001, 216). In popular lore, no distinctions are made beyond "America" and/or "California." Among linguists, however, it is possible to find some degree of differentiation. For example, it has been suggested that the marker and the particle (and most likely the approximative adverb as well) developed among the counterculture groups (i.e., jazz, cool, and Beat) of New York City during the 1950s and 1960s (Andersen 2001, 216, and references therein), while the quotative complementizer emerged some time later in California (see Blyth, Recktenwald, and Wang 1990). This last hypothesis is the most easily defensible on the basis of empirical findings; I will concentrate on the rise of the remaining vernacular uses before subsequently returning to the issue of the quotative.

It is entirely plausible that counterculture groups drew on *like* as a resource in constructing their sociolinguistic identities, and attestations demonstrate that they did use *like* as both a discourse marker and a discourse particle. Chapman (1986, 259) describes these uses as characteristic of "1960s counterculture and bop talk," which he exemplifies with the sentence "Like I was like groovin' like, you know?" and as shown in (11), a quote from Jack Kerouac's monument to the Beat generation, *On the Road*, and in (12), from *Neurotica*, a Beat journal published from 1948 to 1951, both uses were already features of English in the mid- and early 1950s.

11. "Man, wow, there's so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even begin to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on LIKE literary inhibitions and grammatical fears. . . ." [ellipsis in original; Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking, 1957), 7]
12. ". . . LIKE how much can you lay on [i.e., give] me? . . ." [Lawrence Rivers, *Neurotica*, Autumn 1950, 45 (*OED2*)]

The attribution of the discourse marker and the discourse particle to particular groups in a specific place at a specific time suggests that use of either form among speakers over a certain age in North America (or elsewhere) would be unexpected. For example, if we assume that the apparent time hypothesis (Labov 1966) provides a valid premise on which to model ongoing language change (for discussion, see Bailey 2002 and Sankoff 2004), then in North America, use of both the marker and the particle should be roughly circumscribed to speakers aged 65 years and under. This figure is

based on the following calculation: speakers who were 17 years old in 1955 (roughly the purported dawn of the *like* age in the United States) would today be in their mid-sixties. To allow for the transatlantic diffusion of these forms to the United Kingdom, the cutoff should be somewhat younger in British varieties.

As the examples in (14) demonstrate, *like* is used as a discourse marker by speakers well beyond 65 years of age. Moreover, not only is this form used by elderly speakers in the North American context (as in 14a–14d), but it also occurs in the speech of septa- and octogenarians living in isolated, rural villages across the United Kingdom (as in 14e–14h).

14. a. LIKE our daughter was turning sixteen, and the little girl down the street is sixteen, was given a car for her birthday. [N/m/83]
    b. LIKE we were above the tracks but um it was a pretty good company. [N/f/87]
    c. LIKE we always said "karkey" but now I hear them saying "khaki." [N/f/80]
    d. LIKE we were quite close and when I went away, he just closed the doors and went to work for someone else. [N/m/84]
    e. LIKE my neighbors and we got on fine. [AYR/f/78]
    f. LIKE you forget that's on at the finish, don't you? [MPT/m/78]
    g. LIKE it was my thinking bit of road. [MPT/f/81]
    h. LIKE it was a kind-of wee bit of tongue-twister. [CLB/f/89]

An important question to consider is whether the occurrences in (14) represent isolated or rare tokens in the speech of individuals that could result from the late adoption of lexical forms or whether they represent a more regular pattern of use in discourse. While no distributional analysis has been performed on the British dialect data, figures are available concerning the overall rate of use in the Toronto materials. Among the oldest speakers in the sample, those in their eighties, *like* marks 8% of matrix-level clauses, while all other discourse markers combined (*well*, *I mean*, *so*, *you see*, *actually*, etc.) account for 11% of contexts overall ($N = 299$). In other words, *like* accounts for almost half of the total discourse markers used by speakers in their eighties; we can surmise that it is a relatively high-frequency item in the speech of this generation, who were already in their thirties and early forties in 1955.

Evidence from the particle presents a further twist. In (15) *like* is shown in two distinct syntactic positions: on the left edge of a noun phrase (as in 15a–15c), and on the left edge of the lexical verb (as in 15d–15f). These data illustrate the use of the particle by elderly speakers of regional British varieties. In (16), the same contexts are illustrated from the Toronto materials.

15. a. It was only LIKE a step up to this wee loft. [CLB/m/91]
    b. Oh, it was LIKE boots we wore. [CLB/f/89]
    c. That was LIKE the visitors and we says we would nae mind ken. [AYR/f/78]
    d. We were LIKE walking along that Agohill road. [CLB/f/86]
    e. They were just LIKE sitting waiting to dies. [AYR/m/75]
    f. We were like ready to LIKE mutiny. [YRK/f/74]
16. a. We stayed at LIKE a motel. [N/f/76]
    b. Now Tim would be going more for LIKE Fred Flintstone. [N/f/72]
    c. They didn't have windows. They had LIKE a box. [N/m/62]
    d. So we bought it and LIKE moved five houses over. [N/f/55]
    e. They were LIKE living like dogs. [N/m/52]
    f. I'm not sure if my eight-year-old LIKE understands that. [N/m/46]

In the North American data, the oldest speakers to use the particle in the context of noun phrases are in their seventies (in 16a and 16b), much younger than is the case, for example, in Culleybackey, Northern Ireland (in 15a and 15b). In the case of lexical verbs, the oldest speakers to use *like* in Toronto are in their fifties (in 16d and 16e), again well behind communities in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and England (in 15d–15f). These two contexts form the basis of comparison here because they illustrate an important point: there is no context where *like* occurs among, for example, the 80-year-olds from Toronto where it does not also occur among the 80-year-olds from the rural U.K. locales. The reverse does not obtain.

In isolation, the Toronto data are somewhat problematic for the counterculture genesis hypothesis. Not only is the marker used by speakers older than 65 years of age, but the examples do not represent random occurrences. As noted, the marker is highly productive among Torontonians in their eighties, occurring nearly as often as all other discourse markers combined in the speech of this cohort. This suggests that the marker was already a feature of the vernacular before it was associated with the Beat and jazz groups of the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, working from the apparent-time hypothesis, in the 1930s, when these 80-year-olds were teenagers, *like* must have been relatively frequent in the ambient language as a discourse marker, a usage inherited by these speakers from the previous generations. The added perspective afforded by the British data further jeopardizes the plausibility of the counterculture genesis hypothesis. As both a marker and a particle, *like* is attested among the oldest speakers in the English, Scottish, and Northern Irish communities considered here, raising troubling questions about the American roots of these forms more generally. If we interpret the differences between the North American and the British dialect data as temporal analogues, then *like* was used as a particle in certain contexts approximately

10–20 years earlier in the British varieties than it was in comparable syntactic frames in North American English.

There is a further complication. A form that is highly reminiscent of the use of *like* as a discourse marker is attested in literary sources from the nineteenth century, as in (17a) from the *OED2*, as is its use as a discourse particle, as illustrated in (17b).

17. a. "Why LIKE, it's gaily nigh like to four mile like." [De Quincey 1840–41, 224][9]
    b. He would not go LIKE through that. . . . They are LIKE against one another as it is. [C. Clough Robinson, *A Glossary of Words Pertaining to the Dialect of Mid-Yorkshire*, English Dialect Society no. 14 (London: Trübner, 1876), 76 (Wright 1902)]

Shown in (18), the marker is also attested in recordings of elderly speakers made by the New Zealand National Broadcasting Service in 1946–48. These data document the speech of native New Zealanders born in the period from 1851 to 1919. The vast majority of these speakers' parents had emigrated to New Zealand from England, Ireland, and Scotland; none had come from the United States.

18. a. LIKE until his death he used to write to me quite frequently. [Thomas Steel, b. 1874, Waikato]
    b. LIKE you'd need to see the road to believe it. [John McLew, b. 1875, Otago]
    c. You know, LIKE you would be going to the hotel to stay for a day or two. [Catherine Dudley, b. 1886, Central Otago]
    d. LIKE once we got the milk from the cows he'd take it into town. [Eric Robinson, b. 1919, Canterbury]

Examples such as these support Romaine and Lange's (1991, 270) assertion that nonquotative uses of *like* have probably been functioning in the vernacular for more than a century. In fact, in the case of the marker, they suggest a much longer history. Moreover, the early sources in (17) are British, not American, and an American link would be difficult to construct for the New Zealand examples in (18). Thus, both the historical record and synchronic facts contradict the notion that American English is the origin of the vernacular uses of *like* as both a marker and a particle.

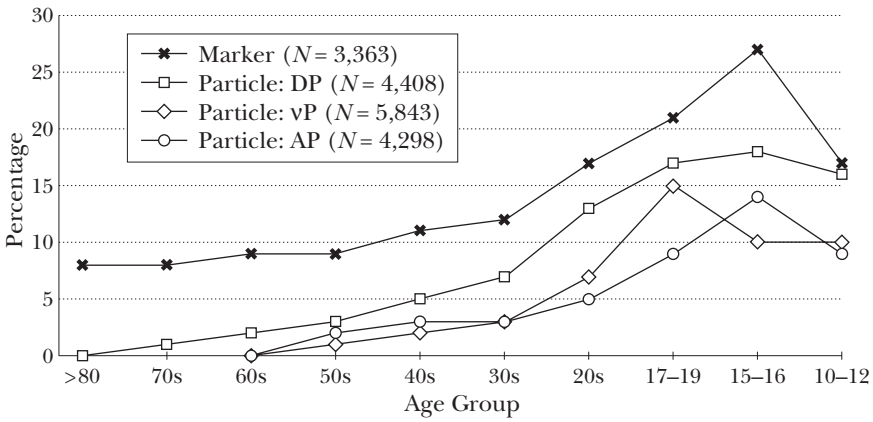
New linguistic forms may occur at extremely low rates for extended periods before reaching a point of widespread diffusion, assuming they survive at all. Language change is not deterministic. In order to advance, innovative forms must develop an association with some desirable social construct (Labov 2001, 462). Although it seems clear that the jazz, cool, and Beat groups of

the 1950s and 1960s were not the SOURCE of *like* as a marker and a particle, it also seems incontestable that these uses were associated with the counterculture groups. In other words, they exploited a resource already available in the ambient language. A reasonable deduction, therefore, is that these groups provided the means for *like* to accelerate in the vernacular. In short, I suggest that circa the middle of the twentieth century, *like* was an incipient form in the vernacular and its connection with certain groups cultivated the appropriate social context for the marker and the particle to advance. These forms represent change in progress.

That *like* has functioned as a marker and a particle for some time in the English language itself indicates that such uses are not restricted to adolescents and young adults. The data in (14)–(16) further substantiate this observation: speakers in their seventies, eighties, and nineties use *like* in the same ways speakers more than sixty years their juniors do. Why, then, does the *like* language myth consistently point to younger speakers? The answer is as obvious as it is timeless. As with any form involved in change, adolescents are in the vanguard. They are not the only members of the community using these forms, but they use them at higher frequencies than older age cohorts within the population.[10]

To this end, consider figure 2, which tracks the frequencies of the marker and the particle across apparent time in Toronto. For the particle, the same contexts from figure 1 are included. There are two critical observations to draw from these results. First, in each vernacular function, the frequency of *like* increases steadily across apparent time. This monotonic association of

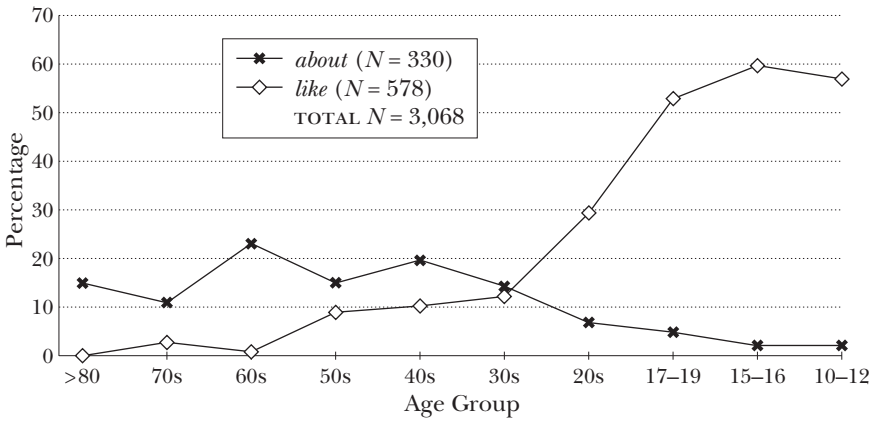
FIGURE 2
Frequencies of *like* as a Discourse Marker and a Discourse Particle across Apparent Time in Toronto



frequency with age is characteristic of change in progress (Labov 2001, 460). Second, a peak occurs in each trajectory, either among the 17–19-year-olds or the 15–16-year-olds. According to Labov (2001), these peaks are not, for example, indicators of age grading whereby we can expect a retrenchment toward adult norms following adolescence. Rather, the peaks are a general requirement of ongoing change, falling out from the logistic progression of innovative forms. In short, *like* the marker and *like* the particle are not simply passing fads of the adolescent years. It is incontrovertible that younger speakers use them more frequently than older speakers do. This has been established in other research as well (e.g., Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 66). It is also incontrovertible, however, that despite popular belief, adolescents are not alone. Other age groups also use *like* for these functions; they simply do not do so as often, exactly as predicted by all models of language change.

Similarly, the use of *like* as an approximative adverb has increased dramatically over the past 65 years within this same population. Interestingly, the adverbial function provides an example of lexical replacement. As shown in figure 3, it has been ousting *about* in the spoken vernacular for most of the period we can track with this corpus, providing a trajectory of weak complementarity (Sankoff and Thibault 1981, 207). Although a minority form among the oldest speakers in the community, *like* has gained significant currency across apparent time as an approximative strategy. While speakers over the age of 30 tend to prefer the traditional form, *about*, speakers under that age favor *like* (D'Arcy 2006). In other words, the form has changed: where

FIGURE 3
Overall Distributions of *like* and *about* as Lexical Approximations across Apparent Time



one increases, the other decreases. This is the defining characterization of weak complementarity (Sankoff and Thibault 1981, 207).

None of this, however, relates to the Valley Girls. Songs like Frank Zappa's "Valley Girl" (1982) and Atlantic Pictures's 1983 movie by the same name provide snapshots of life as a teenage girl in the San Fernando Valley, iconic images that continue to be perpetuated in pop culture (e.g., Paramount's 1995 *Clueless*). The vernacular forms of *like* are salient features of the Valley Girl persona, but as with the counterculture groups, the Valley Girls were not the only speakers to use these forms, nor were they the innovators. This much is obvious. Furthermore, while it is likely—as one reviewer rightly points out—that the linguistic and cultural style associated with the category "Valley Girl" was established prior to its being popularized by media representations in the early 1980s, it remains nonetheless that the category only became available to the broader social context at this time. Stated differently, outside its local milieu, "Valley Girl" was not an active model for association, linguistic or otherwise, until after 1980. The apparent-time trajectories in figures 3 and 4, however, suggest that as a marker, particle, and approximative adverb, *like* was already increasing in frequency before this time. For each use that is tracked in these figures, the upward slope begins 20, and in some cases 30, years earlier than can be reasonably postulated for the Valley Girl branch of the myth to be upheld. Nonetheless, this belief seems too robust in the North American psyche to be utterly without substance. It is possible, for example, that vernacular uses of *like* were recycled as a Valley Girl phenomenon once their initial association with the counterculture groups waned among subsequent generations of speakers. As Milroy (2004, 169) states, "different groups may be foregrounded at different times." In other words, the saliency of social categories can be variable across time, and linguistic forms associated with one may later come to be associated with another as each rises to prominence in the cultural landscape of the time. There is some support for this in the apparent-time trajectories. In figures 2 and 3, some of the slopes steepen visibly within the cohort of speakers in their thirties. These speakers would have been in their pre- and young teens when the Valley Girl persona rose to popularity.

Table 2 summarizes the results of five multivariate analyses (one for each of the vernacular functions seen in figures 2 and 3) within four major age brackets: the school years (10–16), university and young adulthood (17–29), middle age (30–59), and retirement (60 and over). The probabilities reveal that the point in apparent time at which each of these uses becomes favored is among speakers aged 29 and under. Despite having been active features of the vernacular for some time, the critical developmental period for the marker, the particle, and the approximative adverb appears to have occurred

TABLE 2
Probabilities for (Nonquotative) Vernacular Uses of *like* According to Age

	10–16	*17–29*	*30–59*	*60+*	*Total*
Marker					
Factor Weight	.65	.58	.43	.36	
Percentage	22	18	11	8	
N	585	1,056	957	765	3,363
Particle					
DP					
Factor Weight	.72	.65	.39	.16	
Percentage	17	14	5	2	
N	792	1,421	1,149	685	4,047
vP					
Factor Weight	.65	.62	.24	—	
Percentage	10	10	2	0	
N	1,242	1,780	1,367	1,094*	4,389
AP					
Factor Weight	.63	.50	.41	—	
Percentage	11	6	3	0	
N	866	1,419	1,170	843*	3,455
Approximative Abverb					
Factor Weight	.78	.77	.45	.08	
Percentage	33	32	10	1	
N	509	928	1,013	618	3,068

* These tokens were excluded from the multivariate analyses due to the categorical failure of *like* to occur within this age groups

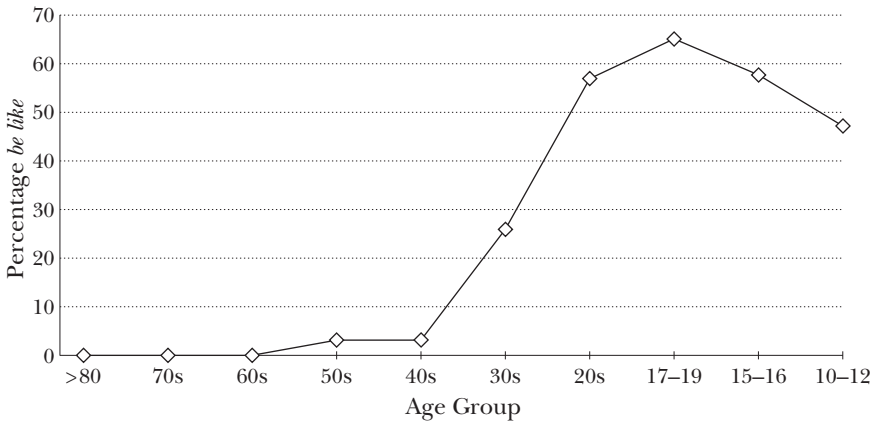
in the past 15 to 20 years. In short, each seems to have recently undergone a phase of rigorous expansion.

Thus, the sum of the apparent-time evidence indicates that *like* was functioning in the vernacular as a discourse marker, a discourse particle, and an adverb of approximation well before the Valley Girl category was popularized in the early 1980s. These functions were also increasing in frequency before this time. However, the rate of change seems to increase among speakers between the ages of 30 to 39, and this momentum is then maintained across apparent time. In fact, it is among the subsequent age groups that the vernacular uses of *like* attain significance, favored among speakers aged 29 and under. All together, the results suggest that while the Valley Girls were not solely responsible for launching these forms in discourse, they did seem to get a boost during the height of the Valley Girl period, which may in turn have helped to propel them into the vernacular faster than they would have otherwise.

The one form that probably can be identified as "Valley Girl" is quotative *be like*, since in this instance the chronology seems to corroborate popular belief. The first mention of *be like* in the sociolinguistic literature is dated 1982 (Ronald Butters's editor's note in *American Speech*), at which time it appeared to be an incipient form (see also Tannen 1986). There are attestations of this use available from the pop culture of the time (e.g., "She's like 'Oh my God'" in Zappa's "Valley Girl"), yet none predating the Valley Girls of which I am aware. The inception of quotative *be like* for introducing constructed dialogue thus seems to be fairly well circumscribed to the early 1980s. Apparent-time data provide further support for this accounting. Figure 4 displays the frequency of the quotative across the Toronto population.

The results demonstrate that although *be like* appears in the speech of Torontonians in their forties and fifties, such uses are extremely rare. In contrast, *be like* is used productively by speakers in their thirties, accounting for 26% of quotative verbs overall within this cohort ($N = 453$). This is the generation—born in the late 1960s and early 1970s—that comprised the teenagers of the 1980s. The divide between the results for this group and those for the 40-year-olds in figure 4 is critical to disentangling the developmental history of *be like*. Similar data from 1995 demonstrated that the overall distribution of *be like* among speakers aged 18 to 27 was then 13% (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). The real-time trend comparison from Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2007a) reveals that use has since increased substantially: *be like* now accounts for 58% of quotatives among 25–29-year-olds, and 31% of quotatives among speakers aged 30–34. In other words, the frequency of *be like* has more than doubled across two similar populations in the seven intervening years.

FIGURE 4
Overall Distribution of Quotative *be like* across Apparent Time in Toronto
(after Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007, 205, fig. 2; N = 6,364)



Results such as these provide compelling evidence for communal change, with speakers increasing their use of innovative features throughout their lifetimes (Labov 1994, 84). Relative to the genesis of *be like*, this suggests that the odd tokens which occur in the speech of 40- and 50-year-olds do not mark the inception of this form, but rather reflect the late adoption of a new feature during adulthood (see Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007a; also Buchstaller 2006a).

In short, of the vernacular forms of *like* that occur in discourse, only quotative *be like* may have Valley Girl origins. The discourse marker and particle have long histories in the language, predating the Valley Girls by at least a century (cf. 17 and 18; also Romaine and Lange 1991), and the conversational use of *like* to mean *about* has likewise been a feature of English throughout most of the twentieth century (cf. 5; also figure 3). Moreover, the apparent-time data indicate that the use of nonquotative forms of *like* was increasing prior to 1980. Nonetheless, a distinct change in the rate of this increase coincides with the rise of the Valley Girl persona. It is unlikely that these are disparate phenomena. Given the general perception that *like* is just *like*, it is possible that the association of quotative *be like* with the Valley Girl image led to concomitant increases in the use of other functions performed by *like* in the vernacular. It may also have contributed to the belief that the Valley Girls are responsible for all of the vernacular forms.

However, to acknowledge that the Valley Girls may have contributed to the advancement of these forms in North America must not be confused with saying that they are responsible for their spread more generally. As I have argued above, outside quotative *be like*, the other forms of *like* have been increasing in the vernacular for as long as we are able to ascertain with synchronic data. Moreover, these functions are not unique to North America. They are found in the discourse of elderly speakers of isolated, rural varieties across both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. To these observations can be added the evidence from perceptual investigations. The social baggage of one region does not straightforwardly—or even necessarily—carry to another region. For example, quotative *be like*, the only vernacular form for which a North American genesis can be supported, appears to carry no coherent regional affiliation for speakers in the United Kingdom (Buchstaller 2006b). Thus, notions like 'Valley Girl', 'California', or even 'American' may not be as salient outside the North American context as they are within it. We must, therefore, be very cautious about claims that the American media are responsible for exporting the vernacular functions of *like* to other varieties. While it is possible that use by iconic media figures reinforced these functions, it is more than likely that they were already in existence in the vernacular. In other words, it is important to distinguish between the development and subsequent embedding (social and linguistic) of linguistic forms, their trans-

mission across nonproximate contexts, and the possible influence of other varieties as "targets" for adoption and/or appropriation to the local context (for discussion of "Americanization" in language variation and change more generally, see Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 2003).

ANYTHING GOES. The apparent-time perspective also provides insights on how the current state of adolescent vernaculars has come into being. The trajectories in figures 2 and 3 reveal quite clearly that nonquotative uses of *like* have not appeared ex nihilo. Each function and each syntactic frame has developed gradually across the generations. The net result is that frequency of use is the primary criterion distinguishing adolescent cohorts from adult ones.[11]

However, it is also the general impression that vernacular forms of *like* can be used anywhere, inserted into an utterance at whichever point in the syntax a speaker wishes. As with other aspects of the *like* language myth, this belief is propagated by the media (e.g., Diamond 2000) and by language commentators (e.g., Wilson 1987, 92). It can also be found in various guises in the linguistic literature. Siegel (2002, 64) maintains that *like* can "occur grammatically anywhere in a sentence," and Romaine and Lange (1991, 261) state that *like* is characterized by "syntactic detachability and positional mobility." While it is true that the combined functions of marker and particle account for a wide range of contexts across clause structure, it is also the case that these positions are not random. To see this, it is necessary to observe not only where these forms of *like* do occur, but also where they do not. I will concentrate here on the position of the particle vis-à-vis verbs. However, similar types of argumentation can be applied to the other clause-internal contexts where *like* functions as a particle, as well as to the use of *like* as a discourse marker (see D'Arcy 2005).

In the current data set, the syntagmatic order of *like* and verbs is highly fixed: the particle categorically occurs to the immediate left of the lexical verb. Thus, when functional morphemes such as modal verbs, auxiliary verbs, and infinitival *to* are present, *like* appears between these and the main verb, as exemplified in (19) (see also 15d–15f and 16d–16f above). This observation was made by Underhill (1988, 243) for American English and by Andersen (2001, 280) for London English, and it also holds in the Toronto materials (D'Arcy 2005; $N = 4389$).[12]

19. a. I'd LIKE wake up and feel good. [2/m/15]
    b. I've LIKE grown into that. [3/m/12]
    c. They like to LIKE intervene a lot. [3/m/18]
    d. Everyone is LIKE calling stuff out. [I/m/22]
    e. They kept LIKE jumping around. [N/m/26]

The consistency and regularity of the pattern in (19) refutes the notion of arbitrariness in the use of the particle. It also suggests that *like* targets a specific adjunction site in the syntax, since its position is systematic. D'Arcy (2005) has argued that in the verbal domain, this target is the light verb projection (i.e., vP), since this would situate *like* between functional material in the higher tense phrase and lexical material in the lower lexical verb phrase. Note that a prediction that falls out of this analysis is that *like* can target the periphery of any vP. Thus, in biclausal complexes such as control structures, it should be possible to find instances of *like* adjoining to the higher vP, to the lower vP, as well as to both light verb projections.[13] As the examples in (20) demonstrate, all three patterns are attested in the Toronto data.

20. a. They LIKE want to Ø get together. [3/f/16]
    b. I didn't Ø want to LIKE walk up to them [2/f/15]
    c. You're Ø trying to LIKE pull it out of the water. [3/f/17]
    d. As long as they LIKE try to LIKE merge with Canadian culture.... [I/m/22]

The positional systematicity of *like* in a range of predicate constructions thus provides compelling evidence that *like* is not an ad hoc option of the vernacular. Some further evidence that the particle is not randomly inserted in discourse is provided by its linear order relative to adverbs. Jackendoff (1972, 1997, 2002) has proposed that adverbs can be grouped into three basic classes: speaker-oriented, subject-oriented, and degree/manner. Crucially, these classes are hierarchically located at different levels of structure, with speaker-oriented adverbs merged highest in the verbal complex and manner adverbs merged lowest.[14] If *like* has a fixed position in the structure and adverbs occur in a range of structural projections, then it is entirely plausible that the syntagmatic ordering of these elements may vary depending on the type of adverb with which *like* co-occurs.

Examination of the Toronto data reveals two distinct patterns: (1) adverb + *like* and (2) *like* + adverb. This first pattern is demonstrated in (21) and (22); the second pattern is shown in (23) and (24). Crucially, these patterns are not accidental; they correlate with adverb type. In (21) and (22), where the particle co-occurs with speaker- and subject-oriented adverbs, *like* follows the modifier. In (23) and (24), where the particle appears with degree and manner adverbs, it precedes the modifier. Thus, there seems to be consistent division between adverbs that arguably are located quite high in the structure of the verbal complex and those that arguably are located quite low in this domain, with *like* adjoining at some point between these positions.

21. SPEAKER-ORIENTED
    a. I don't REALLY [epistemic 'truly'] LIKE judge people on what music they listen to. [2/m/15]
    b. We LITERALLY LIKE cooked all the food. [N/m/26]
    c. He ACTUALLY LIKE stood up. [I/m/21a]
    d. They HONESTLY LIKE threatened me. [I/m/21b]
22. SUBJECT-ORIENTED
    a. Andrea STILL LIKE comes to lunch with us. [2/f/16]
    b. Me and my friends, we ALWAYS LIKE took rulers. [3/m/11]
    c. They like it but they NEVER LIKE played. [3/f/17]
23. DEGREE
    a. A trade that I LIKE REALLY [intensification] like was the one they had got from Jersey. [3/H/m/12]
    b. Some people LIKE TOTALLY fell into the mold. [2/i/f/19]
    c. The glue LIKE SLIGHTLY falls off your hair. [2/r/f/11]
24. MANNER
    a. But people will LIKE SLOWLY get into it. [2/f/19]
    b. And then he LIKE SLOWLY added more and more things. [S/m/15]
    c. And then they LIKE GRADUALLY changed like how they looked. [2/m/15]

Thus, in examining just one syntactic context in which the discourse particle occurs, it becomes fairly evident that *like* is not a random element of the vernacular. Nonetheless, the PERCEPTION that it is ad hoc is likely to endure in popular belief. There are at least three reasons for this. First, as a lexeme, *like* is remarkably versatile. It functions as a lexical verb, a noun, a preposition, a conjunction, a suffix, a quotative complementizer, an approximative adverb, a discourse marker, and a discourse particle. As noted by Wilson (1987, 92), "the only part of speech *like* isn't is a pronoun." In terms of raw occurrence, this translates directly into increased token frequency. Second, the marker and the particle together account for at least eight adjunction sites in the syntax, and probably more: CP, TP, DP, NP, DegP, AP, vP, AdvP (D'Arcy 2005; see also note 11). Thus, not only is *like* multifunctional, but certain of these functions cover a wide array of contexts. The third compounding factor is that, as discussed above, the vernacular forms of *like* have recently undergone a period of vigorous development. All together, these facts have contributed to its saliency, and because each form sounds like every other, it creates the illusion that *like* can go anywhere grammatically. In other words, we have returned to the first ingredient of the *like* language myth, that *like* is just *like*, which it is not.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, I have argued the following. First, there are minimally four vernacular functions of *like* occurring in discourse: quotative complementizer, approximative adverb, discourse marker, and discourse particle. Because they all sound the same, they resound in the communal ear simply as 'like'. Second, each function connotes a distinct referential and/or pragmatic meaning. Third, gender does not condition use of the vernacular forms uniformly. Women are favored for the quotative and discourse marking functions, but men are favored across the range of contexts examined here in which the particle occurs. The adverb exhibits no gender pattern, being equally probable as an approximation strategy in the speech of either gender. Fourth, the vernacular forms are not twentieth-century innovations that originate from the Valley Girls. Only the quotative may be sourced to this group; the rest have extended histories in the English language. Fifth, adolescents use the vernacular forms more frequently than adult cohorts do, but adults of all ages use them to some extent or another. Sixth and finally, vernacular uses of *like* are systematic, not arbitrary.

Returning to the various components of the *like* myth, a little bit of truth has been disentangled from the fiction. These truths in turn suggest some of the factors that may have been instrumental in the rise of the myth more generally. The combination of empirical data from regional dialects of British English and the apparent-time results from Toronto suggest that the nonquotative vernacular functions of *like* have been increasing in frequency over the last 65 years or so, and the marker for seemingly longer still. In other words, they represent change in progress and cannot be isolated to the North American context. In the interim, quotative *be like* was likely introduced by the Valley Girls in the early 1980s, and the other forms were concomitantly associated with this group as well. Since this time, all vernacular forms of *like* have subsequently increased in frequency to the point where they are now significantly favored among speakers under the age of 30 and disfavored (though not absent) among older age groups. As a consequence of the typical trajectory of change, these uses are most frequent in the speech of adolescents, and the stigma associated with the vernacular forms draws overt attention and commentary.

From here it is possible to hypothesize a scenario that could have led to the cultivation of a number of beliefs about *like*. In North America at least, Valley Girls remain a well-defined category. This not only perpetuates the Valley Girl image, but it also perpetuates stereotypes of Valley Girl behavior. *Like* is one aspect of this image. Crucially though, Valley Girls are young

and female. While this might seem obvious, it helps to explain why the myth perseveres, focusing on the use of teenagers and women in particular, even though it is clear that vernacular uses are not, nor have they been historically, confined to these segments of the population. The adolescent peak that is a general requirement of language change then feeds the adolescent connection, as does the strong female preference for quotative *be like*. If *like* is just *like*, then it follows that what holds for one holds for all.

This, however, raises an interesting issue for theories of language change more generally. The gender conditioning displayed by the vernacular functions of *like* does not correlate with the social affiliation that has emerged within its attendant ideology. The iconic figures of the counterculture movements were predominantly male (e.g., William S. Burrough, Neal Cassady, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Peter Orlovsky, etc.), yet the discourse marker, which was a part of the Beat vernacular (as in 12 and 13), has been more frequent in the speech of women than in that of men across apparent time. Only the particle displays a regular association with men. Valley Girls are young women, and while the quotative—for which they are credited—has more or less consistently been favored among women throughout its development (Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007a), the particle remains more frequent in the speech of men. At the same time, the use of *like* as an approximative adverb is independent of gender. This suggests that social patterns of use are not tied to the groups with which a form comes to be associated for a time. In other words, social perception and language use can operate independently of one another. Thus, even though *like* might simply be regarded as a single form in the received cultural wisdom, in the grammar these various functions remain distinct.

To conclude, teasing apart the individual beliefs that contribute to popular *like* ideology has revealed what the vernacular uses of *like* are as well as what they are not. On one hand, they are complex and historically long-standing features of English dialects. Only quotative *be like* can be defined as a late-twentieth-century innovation. On the other hand, these uses are not simply "a girl thing," "a teenager thing," or some combination of the two (e.g., "a Valley Girl thing"), nor can it be said that they are a strictly "American thing." Instead, to a certain extent, these forms are everybody's thing.

NOTES

I gratefully acknowledge Sali Tagliamonte for granting me access to the Toronto English and Roots of English archives, without which this research would not have been possible. I also thank Isabelle Buchstaller, Suzanne Romaine, Johanna Wood,

and three anonymous reviewers for their careful and insightful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript. Finally, I acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), who supported this work with Doctoral Fellowship no. 752-2002-2177.

1. On language myths in general, see Bauer and Trudgill (1998) and articles therein; for attitudes toward language change, see Aitchison (1981) and L. Milroy (2004); and on the state of the language, see Cameron (1995).
2. Parenthetical information following examples marks the subcorpus from which the datum was extracted, followed by the speaker's sex and age. The following corpora, housed in the Sociolinguistics Laboratory at the University of Toronto, document Toronto English: 2 = data collected by students in the 2002 Research Opportunities Program (ROP) in Linguistics; 3 = data from the 2003 ROP course; I = data collected in 2003 as part of the "In-TO-vation" (TO) research project; and N = data collected in 2004 for the TO project. For British dialect data, the relevant codes are: AYR = Ayrshire; PVG = Portavogie; MPT = Maryport; and YRK = York (see Tagliamonte and Smith 2002; Tagliamonte forthcoming).
3. For discussion of the design and construction of the individual corpora within the Toronto Archive, see Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2004, 497) and Tagliamonte (2006).
4. Despite being a feature of colloquial English since the fourteenth century (Romaine and Lange 1991, 244, n. 7), the use of *like* as a conjunction created an uproar during the 1950s in North America when R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company released the advertising slogan "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should." Interestingly, this usage recently drew a reaction from a New Zealand audience of older, educated speakers during a presentation about the vernacular uses of *like* (Sept. 5, 2006). It seems the conjunction was perceived along the lines of *like* in (1d), suggesting that despite the longevity of constructions such as (3d), there are sectors of the population who continue to advocate the use of 'as (though)' in speech.
5. This article, which draws largely on data from North American English, presents evidence for four vernacular functions, though it is clear that some varieties of English may distinguish between five or more. For example, English English and Scottish English include a sentence-final adverbial, discussed by Andersen (2001) and Miller and Weinert (1995) and exemplified profusely in the *OED2* (see also 17a), which takes backward scope and can be glossed as 'as it were' or 'so to speak'. In North American English, this function is marginal, restricted in the Toronto materials to speakers over the age of 60 (e.g., "We need to smarten it up a bit LIKE" [N/f/76]), though even within this cohort its use is extremely rare. It has also been suggested that *like* functions as a pause-filler, equivalent to *um* and *er* (e.g., Siegel 2002, 38; Fought 2006). While it is possible that as a particle *like* may function this way in some of its uses, it should be noted that most instances of *like* are prosodically integrated; co-occurrence with self-repair and hesitation phenomena constitute the exception, not the norm, in vernacular

use (Andersen 2000, 19; Levey 2003, 28). Consequently, this function is not considered here.

6. See Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2007a) for discussion of the actuation problem with reference to *be like*.
7. The results for quotative *be like* in figure 1 are drawn from Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2007a), while the results for the approximative adverb, the discourse marker, and the particle are drawn from D'Arcy (2005, 2006). It should be noted that this figure reports overall distributions across the age groups who use each form of *like*. This age range differs from function to function (see figures 2–4).
8. This list is intended to be representative, not exhaustive.
9. Notably, in his discussion of "vulgarities," De Quincey (1840–41, 224) provides the sentence in (17a) as an example of the speech typical of uneducated, older, rural males of Westmoreland. That he associates *like* with this particular social group suggests that it was already at that time well-entrenched as a feature of the vernacular. De Quincey goes on to state that like is used so frequently that "if the word were proscribed by Parliament, he ["an ancient father of his valley"] would have no resource but everlasting silence."
10. Buchstaller and Traugott (2006) discuss adverbial *all* (e.g., John is *all* wet), tracing its history from Old English through to the present day. Though not new, this adverbial function is often considered such (e.g., Waksler 2001), linked with the genuinely innovative form quotative *be all*. Buchstaller and Traugott (2006, 364) suggest that the perception of newness for adverbial uses results from a "social selective attention effect," what Zwicky (2005) has called the "adolescent illusion." A similar effect may be at work with vernacular *like*. Specifically, the emergence of quotative *be like*, a form whose diffusion has progressed with extreme rapidity, may have increased the saliency of the other vernacular functions, triggering a "perceptual generalization" (Buchstaller and Traugott 2006, 365) whereby adolescents, associated with quotative *be like* as a recent change in progress (as opposed to slower, long-standing ones), become associated with all functions.
11. In fact, when language-internal constraints are factored into the analysis, they are revealed to operate uniformly across the sample, regardless of speaker age. In short, the entire speech community shares a single variable grammar for each of the vernacular functions of *like* (D'Arcy 2005, 139, 213–14).
12. This does not rule out the possibility that *like* may subsequently generalize beyond this position and begin to occur in an increasing array of syntactic contexts. In D'Arcy (2005, 219), I hypothesize that grammaticalization of the particle is incomplete, which, if correct, would allow for its spread to projections not yet in evidence in either the Toronto materials or the earlier corpora used by Underhill (1988) and Andersen (1997). Indeed, I thank Isa Buchstaller for sending the below examples from the Web, found using Google (pers. comm., Feb. 10, 2007), which demonstrate just that. In other words, the suggestion being made is that the restriction of *like* to the immediate left of the lexical verb represents an earlier stage of development in this ongoing change.

a. Like, something like when you get LIKE to see if you have like strep throat or something. [interview with "low-risk teen" about AIDS, Center for Risk Perception and Communication, Carnegie Mellon University, http://www.hss.cmu.edu/departments/sds/risk/HIV%20interview%2004.pdf (accessed Feb. 10, 2007)]

b. . . . but when you get LIKE to go and see them and help out, same people that you've robbed. [David Smith, Harry Blagg, and Nick Derricourt, "Mediation in South Yorkshire," *British Journal of Criminology* 28 (1988): 378 (http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/28/3/378)]

c. . . . and she LIKE is walkin to the banster and when she gets there she like hippbummps the air! [ps_iluvyou_xo, post on High School Musical Club discussion board, Picture Trail, http://www.picturetrail.com/club/forums/viewTopic.php?topicID=5419, July 10, 2006]

13. The νP analysis is also able to capture the contrast between the positioning of *like* vis-à-vis finite lexical *be* (*like be*) and nonfinite lexical *be* (*was/am/is like*) (for details see D'Arcy 2005, 184).

14. The hierarchy proposed by Jackendoff (1972, 1997, 2002) is compatible with the extended cartography argued for by Cinque (1999, 2004), where adverbs are merged in the specifier position of functional projections. For example, Cinque's fixed universal hierarchy situates speech act, evidential, and epistemic adverbs in distinct Mood projections, located high in the syntax. These types of adverbs fall into the group of speaker-oriented adverbs, the highest category in Jackendoff's model. I adopt Jackendoff's approach simply because the fine-grained analysis in Cinque exceeds the level of detail necessary here.

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