

***Be like* et al. beyond America:
The quotative system in Canadian and UK youth**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The quotative system in English consists of a wide variety of verbs (or 'dialogue introducers' (Johnstone, 1987)) which are used to present segments of 'constructed dialogue' (Tannen, 1986). Recently, however a "vigorous new quotative" has been reported in American English (Ferrara & Bell, 1995:285), *be like*, as illustrated in (1).

- 1) a. He said, you know, "Happy birthday."
And I *was like*, "Oh, that's really nice."
and Angela's just, "Did you do anything last night?"
I *was like*, "Yeah we went to Oscar's and had a really good time."
she *was like*, "Oh, you didn't tell me."
I *was like*, "Well, no. You're the whole reason why the whole night ..."
And she's *like*, "Well you could have phoned me."
I *was like*, "Angela, you know, there's really bad tension." (UK/j)
- b. And I'm *like*, "Joe man, how's the truck?"
And he's *like*, "Oh, Clarky man, I fucked my truck up.
Were you with me?"
I'm *like*, "Yeah, man!" (laugh)
He goes, "No way man, what was I doin'?"
I'm *like*, "Rabbits man, that's all I remember was rabbits." (CD/t)

Though absent from informants over the age of forty (Blyth et al., 1990:219), this quotative is very frequent particularly in the speech of teenagers and university students. Moreover, it is apparently making fast inroads within the quotative system as recent research has claimed that it is a case of grammaticalization in progress (Ferrara & Bell, 1995). Due to the heavy focus on *be+like* in the literature however, relatively little is known about the status of other quotative verbs, not only the standard forms such as *say*, as in (2), and *think*, as in (3), but also *goes*, as in (4), and *zero*, as in (5).

- (2) a. And she *said*, "Would you like me to phone?"
and I *said*, "Don't do that 'cause Dad'll be furious." (UK/b)

- b. So I *said*, "Tell him—" I *said*, "Tell Chris, to tell him, to call me."
It was goin' through this chain, eh!
And aah, Season *says*, "OK". (CD/a)
- (3) a. And I *was thinking*, "Well surely they can all get on."
I *thought*, "Right O.K.." I told them what I was doing. (UK/j)
- b. And I *thought*, "Well that's not very nice!"
Yeah, tsk. Anyway, I *thought*, "Fine."
And I was kind of crabby after that.
I *thought*, "Nobody tells me that," you know?
I thought that was just rude. (CD/n)
- (4) a. And then he looked at me, and smiled and *went*, "Oh I'll lock us in,"
and *went*, "[pouck]" and pulled them
and they just *went*, "[kuck]" like that. (UK/s)
- b. And uh anyways she *goes*, "They're not my relatives,"
She *goes*, "I'm related to these people named Michaels."
I *go*, "Michaels,"
I *go*, "Holy woah!" (CD/p)
- (5) a. This bloke trailed her in the front door.
"Josephine, who's this?"
"Oh, he's staying the night at our house."
"When did you meet him?"
"Oh, about half an hour ago in the train station." (UK/k)
- b. I pretended to shuffle around in one of the drawers in front of me. Couldn't find
it. Didn't know what I was looking for anyway.
Get back on the phone.
"Uh, Marc?"
"Yeah?"
"I can't find the catalogue." (CD/n)

If grammaticalization is occurring in this system, then as Traugott & Heine (1991) have outlined, the correlation of independent linguistic features (such as collocations patterns, semantic associations and grammatical environment) with the evolving grammatical morpheme (i.e. *be+like*) are crucial keys to viewing grammaticalization in synchronic data, particularly in a system where there are already a number of existing forms. However, all the research that has been conducted on *be+like*, to our knowledge, is based on American English. Thus, the extent to which the same processes may be occurring in other areas of the English-speaking world remain unknown.

2. FORM/FUNCTION

It is relatively uncontroversial that the semantics of each quotative constrain its use. Consequently each form is said to differ slightly in function (Johnstone, 1987; Romaine & Lange, 1991:246; Yule & Mathis, 1992). The relatively bland *say* is said to report speech without the contribution of any particular pragmatic effect (Romaine & Lange, 1991:235). *Go* appears to be an option for direct speech (Butters, 1980; Schourup, 1982) and non-lexicalized sounds (Romaine & Lange, 1991:240), while *think* is used to report internal dialogue. However the very nature of narrative discourse lends itself to a myriad of pragmatic ramifications, differing styles of narration, and local norms for story-telling, (Johnstone, 1990). All these may be conveyed by the use of the quotatives themselves. So, for example, some quotatives are said to stress and/or emphasize different parts of a report (e.g. *yell/scream* vs. *say*) (Romaine & Lange, 1991:234), to create immediacy (e.g. the zero quotative) (Mathis & Yule, 1994), and even to indicate the relationships of power or authority between characters (i.e. alternation between *say* and *said*) (Johnstone, 1987), all creating interest for the listener and heightening dramatic effect (Romaine & Lange, 1991:234).

Whatever the inherent nature of *be+like* however, its rise as a viable English quotative upsets the balance amongst the more traditional dialogue introducers (Ferrara & Bell, 1995:286). Because a new choice is available to speakers, the partitioning of forms within the system must necessarily re-organize. The extent to which the *be+like* alternative will grammaticize, depends on how entrenched it becomes within the grammar, in overall frequency, generalization and/or specialization of function, and the extent to which the new meaning and use is taken up across the social strata. As we shall see, *be+like* provides a particularly interesting context in which to view the evolution of innovative forms across widely dispersed communities. Both issues, 1) the extent of *be+like* usage outside the US;

and 2) comparative examination of the multiple independent factors contributing to the appearance of different forms within the total quotative cohort, are the focus of this paper.

3. DATA AND METHOD

The data upon which this study is based are summarized in Table 1.

	Female	Male	Total narratives	Total quotatives	Date of collection
British Corpus	21	22	66	665	1996
Canadian Corpus	14	9	39	612	1995

All the speakers were university students between 18 and 28 who recounted narratives of personal experience to interviewers who were their peers. Narrative structure was analyzed using the framework provided in Labov & Waletzky (1967) and every instance of a verb introducing constructed dialogue was retained for analysis.

4. RESULTS

Table 2 shows the overall distribution of forms in the two corpora.

QUOTATIVES	BRITISH ENGLISH		CANADIAN ENGLISH	
	%	N	%	N
<i>say</i>	31	209	36	219
<i>go</i>	18	120	22	135
<i>be+like</i>	18	120	13	79
<i>think</i>	18	123	4	27
<i>zero</i>	10	66	20	123
<i>be+just</i>	0	1	0	0
<i>be</i>	2	10	1	5
Misc.	2	16	4	24
TOTAL		665		612

The innovative form *be+like* represents 18% of the total number of all quotatives in British English and 13% in Canadian English. Not surprisingly, and as noted in

previous research (Blyth et al., 1990:219), *say* is the most frequent form, consistent with its general semantic function. On the other hand, the distribution of other forms is quite different across the two varieties. In British English *go*, *be+like* and *think* are equally represented, with the zero quotative making up most of the remainder. In Canada however, *go* and the zero quotative are robust, *think* is negligible and *be+like* makes up most of the remainder. The most salient difference between the two is the high use of *think* in Britain and its rarity in Canada (we return to these observations in section 4.4.). This suggests that the functions of these quotatives may be different as well. However overall distributions do not reveal what conditioning may be present within the system, nor the relative strength of those influences when they are considered simultaneously, both of which will provide clues as to the competition and shift that may be taking place within the quotative system as a whole. For this reason we now turn to a multivariate analysis of the two systems (Rand & Sankoff, 1990). Each analysis has been specifically configured to test the predictions for increasing grammaticalization of *be+like* outlined in Ferrara & Bell (1995). These measures and their predictions are summarized in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1:
Summary of predictions for increasing grammaticalization of *be+like*.

MEASURE	INITIAL STAGE	LATER STAGE
SEX	Females use more <i>be+like</i> than males	Neutralization of sex difference
GRAMMATICAL PERSON	<i>be+like</i> used with 1st person	Expansion into 3rd person
CONTENT OF QUOTE	Used for dramatic effect, e.g. non-lexicalized sound	Expansion of use, e.g. internal dialogue -> direct speech

4.1. Multivariate analysis

Tables 3 and 4 display the results of five independent variable rule analyses of the factors contributing to the probability that *say*, *go*, *be+like*, *think* and zero will be used to introduce constructed dialogue in British and Canadian English.

Table 3: Variable rule analysis of the contribution of factors to the probability of different quotatives considering the combined effect of CORRECTED MEAN + FACTOR WEIGHT.

	<i>say</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>be + like</i>	<i>think</i>	<i>zero</i>	TOTAL
CORRECTED MEAN:	.37	.15	.16	.45	.10	N
Number of tokens	209	120	120	123	66	665
SEX						
Female	.29	.13	.29	.44	.08	298
Male	.43	.17	.09	.45	.11	367
GRAMMATICAL PERSON						
<i>it</i>	.13	.01	.71	KO=0%		35
1st person	.27	.18	.17	.55		272
Full NP	.48	.18	.11	KO=0%	n/a	84
3rd person	.55	.16	.11	.29		167
CONTENT OF THE QUOTE						
Non-lexicalized sound	.02	.56	.20	.03	.15	39
Internal dialogue	KO=0%	.04	.19	.61	.06	191
Direct speech	.44	.22	.14	KO=0%	.11	427

Since the individual quotatives vary substantially in frequency, we make use of

Table 4: Variable rule analysis of the contribution of factors to the probability of different quotatives considering the combined effect of CORRECTED MEAN + FACTOR WEIGHT.

	<i>say</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>be + like</i>	<i>think</i>	<i>zero</i>	TOTAL
CORRECTED MEAN:	.37	.22	.14	.07	.19	N
Number of tokens	219	135	79	27	123	612
SEX						
Female	.49	.13	.16	.09	.19	382
Male	.21	.43	.11	.05	.20	230
GRAMMATICAL PERSON						
<i>it</i>	KO=0%	KO=0%	KO=0%	KO=0%		3
1st person	.43	.11	.19	.10		232
Full NP	.30	.29	.08	.02	n/a	57
3rd person	.32	.39	.11	KO=0%		188
CONTENT OF THE QUOTE						
Non-lexicalized sound	KO=0%	.59	.26		.41	17
Internal dialogue	.01	.34	.26	KO=100%	.08	75
Direct speech	.51	.19	.12		.21	517

the input + factor weight function of the variable rule program. This permits us to compare the probability that each of the quotatives will occur in a given context,

while at the same time controlling for its overall *frequency* in that context. In effect, each table provides a composite picture of the quotative system in each variety. Thus, in addition to the standard comparison of factor weights within a *single* run, we will also compare the factor weights for a given factor *across* independent runs in order to view each quotative in terms of its status vis-à-vis the others.

In interpreting the variable rule analyses we will consider each of the measures in Figure 1. The relevant findings are highlighted in the tables and these will be referred to in turn.

4.1.1. Sex

There is actually some disagreement in the literature concerning whether *be+like* is preferred by men or women. Blyth et al. found it was more prevalent in male speech (1990:221) whereas Romaine & Lange found it more frequent with women (1991:228). However Ferrara & Bell (1995:273) tracked the use of *be+like* over a period of four years and demonstrated that it was losing its gender bias. In their data from 1990, *be+like* was indeed favoured by women (29% vs. 15% for men), but in 1992, there was equal usage (Ferrara & Bell, 1995:275-7). They interpreted this result as a neutralization of the sex effect and an indication of increasing expansion of *be+like*.

In Table 3, British English, *be+like* is indeed favoured by females. Males, on the other hand prefer *say*. In Canadian English in Table 4, we see a very different effect. *Be+like* is barely sensitive to sex of the speaker and indeed this was not selected as significant in a step-up/step-down analysis of the same configuration of the data (not shown). Instead, *say* and *go* are the quotatives which are sensitive to sex. Females favour *say* while males favour *go*. It is interesting that *go* is so highly favoured amongst these mostly middle-class Canadian males when it seems regarded as a "blue-collar" feature (Blyth et al., 1990:224). This suggests that it

has been imbued with covert prestige here.¹ In British English in Table 3, a similar constraint hierarchy is observed: males favour *go*. Here, however, the strength of the effect is much attenuated. This suggests that *go* has been imbued with different social meaning across the two varieties.

4.1.2. Grammatical person

We now turn to the effect of grammatical person. In earlier studies (Blyth et al., 1990; Romaine & Lange, 1991) the use of *say* and *go* was found to be favoured for 3rd person subjects, while *be+like* was restricted to first person. In Ferrara & Bell's (1995) study however they found that *be+like* had undergone a significant expansion in function over the four year period represented in their research. In the most recent corpus (circa 1994) a dramatic change from the previous samples was found: nearly half of all tokens of *be+like* were being used with third person subjects. They interpreted this finding as another indication of increasing grammaticalization. Focusing on this factor and the use of *be+like* in our two data sets (shaded in the tables) it is clear that there is no expansion into 3rd person contexts in either variety. Use of *be+like* is favoured in 1st person contexts, while there is little to distinguish between Full NPs and 3rd persons.

We now consider the other quotatives with respect to grammatical person, comparing the factor weights across rows (relevant sections are indicated in bold outline in the table). We observe that it is not just *be+like* which is sensitive to grammatical person. In each variety certain contexts highly favour certain forms. In British English, first person subjects favour *think*, while Full NPs and 3rd person pronouns favour *say*. In contrast, in Canadian English, first person subjects favour *say*, .43, while Full NPs and pronouns are evenly divided between

¹ Interestingly, the earliest attestation of *go* used productively as a quotative is among male adolescents in North Carolina, US (Butters, 1980).

say and *go*. This highlights the different *partitioning* of quotative forms that exists within the two varieties.

Finally, we note an interesting anomaly in British English. The most highly favoured context for *be+like* in Britain is with existential *it*, as illustrated in (6).

- (6) So anyway we started walking
and it *was like*, "Oh. Should we turn down this lane?"
"Oh. Where's t'compass?"
And then it'd be sort of like no-one'd say anything.
And it *were like*, "Oh. Well, we've forgot that.
We'll have to navigate by the stars!" sort of thing.
And er, we just carried on. (UK/n)

This represents a relatively small portion of the data (N=35), yet Ferrara & Bell (1995) report this usage too, although it is even rarer in their data, (N=18). In the Canadian corpus it only occurred twice, as in (7).

- (7) But there's this something, this noise outside our door.
It's *like* "(breathing sound repeated 3 times)".
And we're like, "Oh my God Jason's coming to get us." (CD/k)

Whether this construction represents an incipient grammatical form, particularly in the British context, remains a question for further research.

4.1.3. Content of the quote

As mentioned earlier, the content of the quote is thought to determine what quotative will be used (Romaine & Lange, 1991:246), and *say* is thought to be the neutral (Blyth et al., 1990:222). Tables 3 and 4 show that it clearly dominates the direct speech category in both varieties, corroborating this view. *Go* and *be+like* on the other hand, are claimed to be used for dramatic effect and expressive categories such as non-lexicalized sounds (Blyth et al., 1990:222), as in (8).

- (8) a. And it *was like*, "Whoosh." (UK/K)
b. And it *went*, "Bloop." (CD/u)

Although the traditional quotatives *say* and *think* are divided rather obviously between direct speech and inner monologue (Blyth et al., 1990:215), one of the interesting facets of *be+like* is that it may function with *both*. However, use of *be+like* with direct speech is thought to be developmental. That is, it only appears

in a later stage in the grammaticalization process (Ferrara & Bell, 1995:271). In the shaded segment in Tables 3 and 4 however, we see that in both British and Canadian English *be+like* is favoured for non-lexicalized sound and internal dialogue, but is much less likely to be used for direct speech.

However now consider how the other quotatives function with respect to this factor. First, although it might be expected that *say* is *never* used for internal dialogue (see Table 3), it is used in this function in some contexts in Canada, as in (9).

- (9) And, so I stood there, not even saying anything.
Standing there beside him,
going, "OK! How am I going to do this?"
And aah... then I just *said*, "OK, I'm just gonna go up to him
and say: 'you know...'" (CD/a)

Elsewhere we observe much more extensive overlaps amongst forms. In Britain, *be+like* competes with *think* for use with internal dialogue, but *go* is rarely used in this context with a probability of only .04. In Canada, on the other hand internal dialogue may be introduced with either *be+like*, *go* or *think*. The probabilities are .26 for *be+like*; .34 for *go* and 100% for *think*. This means that when *be+like* enters the quotative system as an introducer of internal dialogue, it has only one major competitor in Britain, *think*, but in Canada it has two, both *think* and *go*.

Thus, there are in fact a wider range of options for reporting internal dialogue in Canadian English than in British English. This fact explains the higher frequencies of *think* in Britain compared to Canada (see Table 2). However, it still does not explain *why* such a difference should obtain. We believe it is necessary to look at more general differences between the narrative *styles* of these two varieties of English to provide a broader contextualization of these findings. In fact, the British narratives typically have far more introspection overall (28%) than the Canadian narratives (12%), with fewer quotatives available to report this.

This difference in story-telling styles can be seen quite clearly in the two excerpts in (10), which by coincidence, report similar instances of the throwing of beer.

- (10) a. And then I ran off upstairs, which was quite funny.
And then I came back down
and he was brandishing sort of a pint glass like menacingly.
And I *thought* "Ahhhh."
And then I *thought* "Oh well hang on, I threw some beer on him so
therefore he should be able to throw some on me."
Because it was like even and then it would be fair.
So I *went* "Go on then get me."
And he swung it right back like that [gestures with arm].
And I moved my head forward.
He swung it and it hit me. (UK/x)
- b. The bouncer comes over, "Did you throw the beer on her?"
I *go* "Ya", but I was I was obviously covered in beer too.
So I *said*, "Well she threw it on me first."
So then he went and he *said*, "Did you throw your beer on him?"
She *goes*, "Ya."
"Well, who did it first?"
And then- and then I just ignored everything from then.
I went back to playing chess.
And then like ten minutes later the bouncer comes over.
"Ya everything is O.K. but you just watch yourself."
So I *said*, "O.K." (CD/q)

While the British story is narrated with robust use of *think*, suggesting a predominately inner voice, the Canadian narrative has robust use of *go* and *zero* suggesting more kinaesthetic and action-oriented narration. While these impressions are clearly linked to the lexical nature of the verbs, this general observation is corroborated by other important linguistic measures. For example, the data in Table 1 revealed that the British speakers use far less quotatives per number of narratives than the Canadians — 10% vs. 6%. This is a result of the fact that the foreground to background ratio is greater in the narratives overall. In other words, the British speakers use more orientation and evaluation (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). In addition, the use of the Historical Present (HP) is quite different across the two corpora. Previous quantitative studies have found that the HP represents approximately one third of quotatives in English narrative clauses

(Schiffrin, 1981), and this is corroborated by other studies (Tagliamonte & Poplack, 1988), including the present Canadian English sample, 37%. However, the British narratives contain a far lesser proportion of Historical Present, only 13%. Such salient distributional differences provide an indication of the type of linguistic diagnostics that might be used for operationalizing North American vs. British narrative style.

5. DISCUSSION

We have seen that of the three measures of increasing grammaticalization of *be+like* proposed by Ferrara & Bell (1995) for American English, only one is visible in these British and Canadian data: the lack of a sex effect in Canada. Apart from this, use of *be+like* still fairly localized, being used for non-lexicalized sound or internal dialogue and for first person subjects. The indications of its incipient grammaticalization are all there however. First, the fact that it occurs at all is suggestive. It represents a non-negligible proportion of both data sets — 18% in the UK and 13% in Canada, at rates comparable to the other quotatives. Second, the multivariate analysis in Tables 3 & 4 showed that *be+like* has made inroads in precisely the contexts where its expansion is said to have arisen in earlier research reports (internal dialogue; non-lexicalized sound; university-age female speakers).

In order to view this cline from a further cross-linguistic perspective we now reconfigure our data so as to be comparable to Ferrara & Bell's data (1995). Figure 2 displays the distribution of the total number of *be+like* tokens across corpora according to grammatical person.

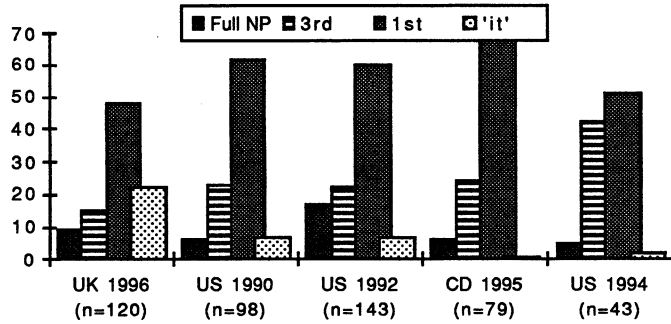


Figure 2: Distribution total number of *be+like* tokens by GRAMMATICAL PERSON in the US, Canada and UK. (1990, 1992 & 1994 US corpora abstracted from Ferrara & Bell 1995: Table 6)

The 1994 US speakers are clearly in the lead with respect to use of *be+like* with 3rd person subjects. The Canadians are at a point comparable to the 1990 and 1992 samples from the US. The British exhibit a pattern that is slightly more conservative. Only in Canada are 3rd person subjects being used with *be+like* as frequently as in the US in the early 1990's. This provides further evidence that in British English the development of *be+like* is several steps behind Canadian English, which in turn is several steps behind the US with respect to the 'insurgence' of *be+like* on this measure of grammaticalization. We conclude, that US-Canadian-British differences provides a view of different stages in the ongoing grammaticalization of *be+like*.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study however is that as far as the development of *be+like* is concerned, British and Canadian youth are following the *same* trajectory as that found in the United States. This development is apparently proceeding regardless of the different form-function correspondences we have observed in the British vs. Canadian quotative cohorts. While *be+like* is moving in on *think* territory in Britain, it is encroaching on the territory of both *think* and *go* in Canada (see Tables 3 and 4). The earlier partitioning of the quotative cohort seems to be no impediment; *be+like* imposes itself in the same way in both cases, that is in

contexts of internal dialogue or introspection regardless of the original quotative form usually used there. This highlights the extent to which the semantic function the quotative embodies, takes precedence in the re-assignment of functions within the grammatical system, thus corroborating the view that cross-linguistic similarities in the channels of grammaticalization are motivated by semantic similarities (Traugott, 1982).

Finally, we have suggested that differing narrative styles relating to cultural differences underlie the varying *distributions* of quotatives we have discovered here. It is an empirical question however, how this stylistic dimension relates to the consistent parallel *patterning* of internal linguistic features which constrain the variability. Of course, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the quotative system, it would be necessary to probe the diachronic perspective more extensively, establishing the precise origins of the each quotative, as well its embedding within the broader social structure, particularly the social and/or cultural characteristics which may develop in the process. A careful study of the cohort of discourse markers in earlier varieties of English within the social strata of a community is needed. This could also go some way in explaining the high use of *go* by males in Canada, or vastly higher rates of *think* in Britain. Nevertheless, from this analysis we are able to conclude that *be+like* is alive and well in British and Canadian English, and making inroads into the quotative systems well beyond, and not far behind, the development already observed in America.

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