LIKE in Irish English and around the World

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Introduction

Research questions

− Does the use of LIKE in Irish English differ from use of LIKE in other varieties of English?
− If so, how and why does it differ?

Aims of this talk

− State of the art: research on LIKE
− LIKE in Irish English vs. LIKE in other varieties of English
− Provide possible explanations for the differences we observe
Structure of the talk

- Introduction
- State of the Art
- Case study: LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond
- Discussion of the results
- Summary
Discourse marker LIKE

1. Cos I thought about *like* inviting my mum and dad and my aunties and uncles and all round for dinner. (ICE Ireland:S1A-038$B)

2. He got on he got on with the Black and Decker business *like*. (ICE Ireland:S1A-015$A)

3. *Like* wee kids tend to hang out at you know the very top of the street at College. (ICE Ireland:S1A-038$B)

4. [A]nd she just *like*, you know i= er it puts other people off you know? (COLT:u who=33-10 id=32)
Introduction

Common beliefs

- Non- or substandard, dialectal and vulgar (OED Online)
- Symptomatic of careless speech, functioning merely as a meaningless interjection (White 1955:303)
- “It [LIKE] can occur grammatically anywhere in a sentence” (Siegel 2002:64).
- Americanism
- Used only by teenagers and particularly by girls (Californian Valley Girl)
State of the art
Discourse markers

- Examples: *you know, so, just, sort of, kind of, though*
- Syntactically optional (sentence remains “acceptable/grammatical” if one leaves them out)
- Semantically empty (no propositional content)
- (Occur more often in informal than in formal text types and more often in oral rather than written discourse)
- It is difficult to assign them to a traditional word class
- Typically stigmatized
- Multifunctional
### The (Multi-)Functionality of Discourse Markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intra-linguistic function</th>
<th>Extra-linguistic functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourse-pragmatic, grammatical</td>
<td>Social, psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedging, focus marking, ...</td>
<td>Identity marking, signaling group membership, priming, accommodation, ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State of the art

Discourse-pragmatic functions

– Hedge
  – Expresses a minor non-equivalence between what is said and what is meant (Schourup 1983:31)
  – Used to soften statements for face-saving purposes (Siegel 2002)
  – Expresses uncertainty about the truth of the statement (Buchstaller 2006)

– Focusing device
  – Highlights new information (Underhill 1988)
  – Serves to counter possible objections (Miller & Weinert 1998)
Sociolinguistic profile

- **Age**
  - Predominantly used by younger speakers (e.g. Andersen 1998, D'Arcy 2005, 2007)

- **Gender**
  - (Young) Women use it most?
  - Mixed results (Ferrara & Bell 1995; Tagliamonte 2005)

- **Perceptual studies**
  - Speakers believe that women use LIKE more often than men.
  - Speakers using LIKE are considered friendly but not intelligent (Buchstaller 2006; Dailey-O’Cain 2002)
Syntax and grammar


- Possible positions have been described with respect to clausal structure
  - Clause-initial
  - Clause-medial
  - Cause-final
  - (Non-clausal)
## Syntax and grammar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Marker LIK<strong>E</strong></th>
<th><strong>(Syntactic) Environment</strong></th>
<th><strong>Example</strong></th>
<th><strong>Function</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before clauses (clause-initial)</td>
<td>[S]he wants to make friends but well <em>like</em> she keeps bloody well coming to sit back at the table, Trina (COLT: u who=33-10 id=30)</td>
<td>linking: introducing specifications or examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At phrase boundaries (clause-medial)</td>
<td>Cos I need some friends around just to <em>like</em> protect me (COLT: u who=33-7 id=400)</td>
<td>hedging/focusing the following phrase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After clause (clause-final)</td>
<td>[S]o that money prizes aren't gonna go to a school <em>like</em>. (COLT: u who=33-1 id=11)</td>
<td>Focus marking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relation to the clausal structure (non-clausal)</td>
<td>And my mum my da= g= my dad starts going <em>like, like, like</em>, and they go what d'you do you know. (COLT:u who=29-8 id=62)</td>
<td>Buying processing time to continue turn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State of the art

Historical Origin(s) of LIKE

- Hypothesis 1: Americanism
  - New York Counter Culture Movement (1960s) (Andersen 2000:116)
  - Californian Valley Girls (1980s) (Siegel 2002)

- Problem
  - LIKE occurs in historical data from England, Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand (cf. D’Arcy 2008; Schweinberger forthc.).

(5) I think more of the sorrows of Sir Condy, (says my master, joking *like*). (Corpus of Irish English: Castle Rackrent, an Hibernian Tale 1801; Author: Maria Edgeworth)
State of the art

Historical Origin(s) of LIKE

- Hypothesis 2: Grammaticalization
  - Origin in England app. 200 years ago (D’Arcy 2007; Schweinberger forthc.)
  - Grammaticalized from the comparative preposition, e.g.:
    (6) You walk just *like* my brother.
  - In certain context comparative like lost lexical meaning and gained more syntactical flexibility (Meehan 1991)
  - Gradual reinterpretation of *like* as a pragmatic element
State of the art

Historical Origin(s) of LIKE

− Hypothesis 2: Grammaticalization
  − Grammaticalization in progress (D’Arcy 2005: 5)
  − LIKE continues to intrude into formerly constrained syntactic environments (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999, D’Arcy 2005).

− Grammaticalization pathway

  comparative preposition
  sentence adverb
  discourse marker
  (clause-marginal discourse marker
  clause-internal discourse particle
  _______)}
Historical Origin(s) of LIKE

- Hypothesis 2: Grammaticalization

Figure 1: Grammaticalisation pathway of clause-medial LIKE adapted from D’Arcy (2005: 209).
LIKE across Varieties of English

- LIKE has conquered the English-speaking world
- LIKE as a focusing device
  - attested for 42 varieties (74 varieties of English)
  - 70% of “Traditional L1” varieties (Kortmann & Luckenheimer 2011)
  - Rather infrequently found in Pidgins and Creoles
- Clause-final LIKE
  - Restricted to “Celtic Englishes”
  - Attestations in Irish English, especially (cf. Siemund, Maier & Schweinberger 2009; Schweinberger 2012)
LIKE across Varieties of English

Figure 2: Use of focusing LIKE according to Kortmann & Lunkenheimer (2011).
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond
Case Study

How does the use of LIKE in Irish English differ from the use of LIKE in British English?

- Differences with respect to
  - (Clausal) Positioning
  - Social profile

- H1₁: Clause-final LIKE is more frequent in Irish English than it is in British English

- H1₂: Adolescents exhibit higher frequencies of LIKE than older speakers

- H1₃: Adolescent females exhibit the highest frequencies.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Case Study

- Additional perspective
  - LIKE use across varieties (data from my PhD dissertation)
    - North American English (Santa Barbara Corpus)
    - Canadian English
    - New Zealand English
    - Indian English
    - Jamaican English
    - Philippine English
Data & Methodology

- Data
  - International Corpus of English (ICE-Ireland & ICE-GB_{R2})
  - The Berger Corpus of London Teenage Speech (COLT)

- Methodology I
  - Extracting all tokens of *like*
  - Coding each instance of *like*: discourse marker LIKE (yes/no)
  - Determining the speaker for each instance of LIKE
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Data & Methodology

- Methodology I
  - Coding each instance of LIKE
    - Clause-initial LIKE: ini
    - Clause-medial LIKE: med
    - Clause-final LIKE: fin
    - Non-clausal LIKE: non
    - Unclassifiable cases: NA
  - Calculating the relative frequencies for (all variants of) LIKE for each speaker (LIKE per 1,000 words)
Results
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

LIKE’s Frequency & Positioning

Figure 3: Frequency of positional variants of LIKE in Irish English.
LIKE’s Frequency & Positioning

Figure 4: Frequency of positional variants of LIKE in Irish English and British English.
LIKE‘s Frequency & Positioning

Figure 4: Frequency of positional variants of LIKE in Irish English and British English.
Overall LIKE use

Figure 5: Frequency of LIKE across varieties of English.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

LIKE’s Frequency & Positioning

Figure 6: Frequency of positional variants of LIKE in Irish English and British English.
LIKE’s Frequency & Positioning

Figure 6: Frequency of positional variants of LIKE in Irish English and British English.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

LIKE’s Frequency & Positioning

Figure 6: Frequency of positional variants of LIKE in Irish English and British English.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Figure 7: Distribution of positional variants of LIKE across varieties of English.
LIKE‘s Social Meaning

− Who uses LIKE?
  − Age of speakers
  − Sex/gender of speakers

− Differences in social profile indicate differences in the social meaning/function of LIKE as an in-group marker.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Figure 8: Age and gender profile of LIKE in (a) Irish English and (b) British English.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Figure 10: Age and gender profile of clause-medial LIKE in (a) Irish English and (b) British English.
Figure 9: Age and gender profile of clause-final LIKE in (a) Irish English and (b) British English.
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Figure 11: Age and gender profile of clause-medial LIKE in (a) Canadian English (top left), (b) US American English (top right), (c) New Zealand English (bottom left), and (d) Jamaican English (bottom right).
Discussion
Discussion

- Differences in positional preference
- Differences in frequency
- Differences in the social profile
- Why are there such substantial differences between Irish English and British English?
Discussion

- Differences in positional preference
- $H_{11}$: Clause-final LIKE is more frequent in Irish English than it is in British English
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond

Figure 12: Distribution of positional variants of LIKE across varieties of English.
Discussion

- Differences in positional preference

- $H_{11}$: Clause-final LIKE is more frequent in Irish English than it is in British English
Discussion

- Differences in positional preference
- $H_{1_{1}}$: Clause-final LIKE is more frequent in Irish English than it is in British English \(\sqrt{\text{✓}}\)
Discussion

- Differences in positional preference
  - Two patterns
    - American pattern: LKE in clause-medial position
    - Irish pattern: LIKE at clause-boundaries
  - Colonial lag/fossilization
  - Two waves of spread
LIKE in Irish English, British English, and beyond
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LIKE in Irish English and Around the World
Discussion

− Differences in frequency
  − Identity marking
    − Clause-final LIKE as a marker of “Irishness”
    − Clause-medial LIKE as a marker of “US American culture”
  − Covert prestige
    − Middle-aged and older speakers in England rejected LIKE as a marker of “Americanization”
    − Among the younger generation clause-medial LIKE has covert prestige as a marker of US American culture
Scatterplot
LIKE Usage by Age of Speaker (N=372)
with Smoothed Regression Line

Normalized frequency (LIKE per 1,000 words)

Age of Speaker
Discussion

- The social meaning of LIKE
  - $H_{12}$: Adolescents exhibit higher frequencies of LIKE than older speakers.
  - $H_{13}$: Adolescent females exhibit the highest frequencies.
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Figure 11: Age and gender profile of clause-medial LIKE in (a) Canadian English (top left), (b) US American English (top right), (c) New Zealand English (bottom left), and (d) Jamaican English (bottom right).
Discussion

- The social meaning of LIKE
  - $H_{12}$: Adolescents exhibit higher frequencies of LIKE than older speakers
  - $H_{13}$: Adolescent females exhibit the highest frequencies.
Discussion

- The social meaning of LIKE
  - H$_{12}$: Adolescents exhibit higher frequencies of LIKE than older speakers. (√)
  - H$_{13}$: Adolescent females exhibit the highest frequencies. (√)
Discussion

- The social meaning of LIKE
  - AGE
    - Younger speakers use LIKE consistently more than older speakers
    BUT
    - In Irish English it is not the youngest age cohort that uses LIKE most, but the second youngest (speakers aged 26 to 33)
Discussion

- The social meaning of LIKE
  - SEX/GENDER
    - The gender distributions of LIKE use are rather varied and do not seem to follow a coherent trend.
    - The effect of gender appears to be culture specific.
Summary

- LIKE is very common in Irish English
- Clause-final LIKE is typically “Irish”
- The social profile of LIKE
  - Young speakers use it more than older speakers (angloversal)
  - The effect of gender appears to be culture specific.
- LIKE originated on the British Isles and has spread across the English-speaking world in two waves
  - 1st across the British Isles/over-sea settlements (clause-final LIKE)
  - 2nd from America across the world (clause-medial LIKE).
Thank you very much!

You can find the slides, the references, the data and most of the r-scripts for the graphs on my homepage: martinschweinberger.de
(Publications >> Presentations & Talks)
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