

On était comme, "We think 'like' may be a COMP too"

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The present study investigates the linguistic factors that contribute to the variable presence of overt complementizers (COMP), a variable that has been identified in the linguistic repertoire of young Anglophone Montrealers (AM) in both French and English, as exemplified in (1-3):

- (1) I think he thought \emptyset it was really cool that I spoke French and that I was bilingual.
(Liz)
- (2) Because I felt like uh: OK, I understand that the French people have to protect themselves. (Louisa)
- (3) Je pense \emptyset c'est plus' anglophone je pense que les compagnies sont: donnent un sens de anglophone. (Greg)
I think \emptyset it's more Anglophone. I think that the companies give a sense of being Anglophone.

All sentences illustrating the variable presence of the COMP have been extracted from a corpus of data collected among Anglo-Montrealers aged 18 to 35 who were interviewed in both French (N \approx 500) and English (N \approx 1000) (Sankoff et al. 1997). We also extracted all examples of English *be like* (N \approx 90) and French *être comme* (N \approx 18) used to introduce reported speech, for reasons explained below.

Our analysis traces how *like* could be reanalysed as a COMP since it appears in the same surface position as the (deletable) COMP, and then makes predictions for the evolution of *comme* in French. In current spoken English it is common to have subordinate clauses introduced without an overt COMP, as in (1). The absence of COMP, although possible, is less common in French (see (3)). A preliminary study showed that AM respect this difference: they exhibit 73% COMP deletion in English but only 23% in French. This paper further investigates the linguistic constraints affecting the variation: choice of main clause subject, choice of lexical verb, frequency of collocation of these two, and phonological context.

In addition, in the English data, we see an effect of material which intervenes between the subject and the matrix verb: there is more COMP deletion when there are intervening words. Specifically, we observe cases where the absence of *that* co-occurs with the presence of *like*, especially following the verb *to be*, as in (2). We examine this intersection of subordinate clause marking and the innovative use of *be like* as a verb of quotation in order to better understand the process of grammaticalization of *like* as a COMP (*cf.* Buchstaller 2001, Meehan 1991, Romaine & Lange 1991, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2007).

We also examine how this hypothesis applies to the use of *comme* as a COMP in the French data. This is an innovation of the Anglo-Montrealers: there are no published reports of this usage of *comme* in L1 French (although Vincent & Sankoff (1992) report its increasing use as

marker of exemplification and Meyerhoff & Niedzielski (1998) report similar developments in other languages). Although its usage is far less frequent in French, our analysis supports the existence of several of the same stages of development of the usage of *comme* as a COMP in both the French and English of these Anglophone Montrealers.

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