

## ***This is me/this is him: The quotative system of London adolescents***

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The English quotative system is claimed to be a good place to catch language change in action (Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004) and as London is often claimed to be the source of innovations in present day British English it is perhaps not surprising to find an, as yet, unreported quotative form. Here we present findings from our London Corpus of adolescent speech and document the use of the innovative quotative ***this is me/him/her*** etc. among London teenagers, as in the following examples:

- a. *this is me* "what . . what's your . what's your problem?" (Zack 1, 1:27:05)
- b. *this is my mum* "where? I ain't seen you....." (Alex 1, 1:19:35)
- c. *this is him* "they even battered the girl" (Laura 1, 19:50)

This innovation is competing with other well-documented quotatives such as *be like* as well as the older forms *go*, *say* and *think*.

We analyse the speech of 100 London adolescents aged 16-19, from one inner London and one outer London area, and compare their use of quotatives with a smaller corpus from speakers from the same areas, aged 70 and over. Although all groups of speakers are predominantly working class, the adolescents in inner London are from a wide range of ethnicities while those from outer London are predominantly of white British heritage. Multivariate statistical analysis is used to reveal the effect of the speaker's ethnicity as well as age and gender on the distribution of quotatives in contemporary multicultural London English. We analyse the distribution of the quotatives across tense, grammatical person and discourse-pragmatic function, comparing this with the results of previous studies and considering the rates of grammaticalisation of *be like* in inner and outer London. The comparison with elderly speakers in the two locations allows us to also address the question of whether the new quotative expressions fill a niche caused by a change in narrative style across the generations, as was suggested for Toronto English by Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2007).

References:

- Tagliamonte, S. & D'Arcy, A. (2004) *He's like, she's like*: The quotative system in Canadian youth. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8: 493-514.
- Tagliamonte, S. & D'Arcy, A. (2007) Frequency and variation in the community grammar: Tracking a new change through the generations. *Language Variation and Change* 19: 199-217.