

Localized globalization: A multi-local, multivariate investigation of quotative *like*

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Studies of linguistic variability that can be interpreted locally as well as trans-locally (e.g. Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999; Walters 2002; Milroy 2004, forthcoming; Stuart-Smith 2006) demonstrate the need to incorporate variationist findings within broader empirical issues, such as the tension between global flows and their local consequences. In this paper we examine the impact of what has arguably become the flagship globally available linguistic resource – quotative *be like* as in (1) – in four spatially discontinuous locales: the US (1988-1992, N=1371), Canada (2002/3, N=2269), New Zealand (2000-2003, N=405), and England (1994/5, N=2064).

- (1) a. It's **like** “whoops there goes my chips, okay fine”. (US)
- b. I **was like** “This is ridiculous.” (Can)
- c. I **was like** “Oh God you exaggerate.” (NZ)
- d. She **was like** “ehh sorry but I can't be bothered to go out.” (Eng)

Britain (2002:618) points out that in cases of contact between a global (or supra-local) innovation and local traditional norms, there are at least three possible outcomes: wholesale adoption of the innovation, flat rejection, or interaction between the local system and the innovative feature. In this paper we ask, when spreading from the US, is *be like* adopted with its functional and social boots on? Or alternatively, do speakers reinterpret it as it hits foreign ground? If so, which features are reinvented and which stay the same? We explore the nexus between global linguistic process and their local underpinnings by (i) consolidating previous findings on *be like* from a variety of corpora and (ii) investigating four large data sets coded with a comparative investigation in mind.

Multivariate analysis of the four corpora, which combined include more than 1000 tokens of *be like* distributed across two generations of speakers (US 9%, Canada 35%, New Zealand 13%, England 5%), demonstrate that speakers can participate in global trends, yet by creatively adapting linguistic innovations, they do so in a highly localized and idiosyncratic manner. Thus, while the ‘classic factors’ of grammatical person and content of the quote function similarly across space, favouring first persons and reported thought, the operation of other factors on the use of *be like* is particularized to the local system into which it is adopted. For example, linguistic constraints such as mimesis and tense/aspect and social constraints such as gender and SES may be negotiated in situ rather than transmitted wholesale.

In sum, the evidence suggests interaction between the established local system and innovative *be like*. By pinpointing a few ways in which a globally available resource is reconciled with local patterns, this study takes one small step toward our understanding of the form and forming of linguistic spatiality. Cumulatively, results such as those presented here will give important insights into the coming-into-being of localized linguistic identities. Further, as we begin to look in some detail at the adoption of linguistic innovations beyond a strictly local or intra-national scale, the limits on the supra-local transfer of information without face-to-face contact emerges as an important consideration (Meyerhoff & Niedzielski 2002, 2003).

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