

'This is me'

**An innovation in waiting and other quotative
use among adolescents in London**

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The English quotative system:

“a good place to catch language change in action”

Tagliamonte and D’Arcy (2004:493)

The emergence of quotative '*BE LIKE*':

***I'm like* 'Oh my God'**

Singler (2001) - *BE LIKE* has established itself as the primary quotative in vernacular American English, particularly in younger generations.

Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2004) – *BE LIKE* increased in use by more than four and a half times from 1995 to 2002/3 among young Canadians and is now the most frequent quotative.

Buchstaller (2006) – *BE LIKE* starts to appear in British English in the early 1990s.

Tagliamonte and Hudson (1999) – *BE LIKE* accounts for 18% of quotatives among university students in York (recorded 1996).

Macaulay (2001) – reports 14% *BE LIKE* among Glaswegian adolescents in 1997.

Levey (2007) – reports 5% *BE LIKE* in London corpus of preadolescents.



Results based on sub sample of 53 speakers in the London English Corpus:-

- 6 elderly speakers (70 yrs +) inner London – 3 male, 3 female, white Anglos
- 19 adolescents (16-19 yrs old) inner London – 11 male, 8 female from a range of ethnic groups reflecting the local population
- 6 elderly speakers (70 yrs +) outer London – 3 male, 3 female, white Anglos
- 22 adolescents (16-19 yrs old) outer London – 12 male, 10 female, all white Anglos reflecting the local population
- All instances of reported speech extracted – direct and indirect – 3158 instances of reported speech.

Direct Vs. Indirect speech

	Inner London Elderly % (<i>n</i>)	Outer London Elderly % (<i>n</i>)	Inner London Adolescents % (<i>n</i>)	Outer London Adolescents % (<i>n</i>)
Direct speech	95.3 (370)	91.2 (272)	93.5 (1282)	95.3 (1052)
Indirect speech	4.7 (18)	7.8 (23)	6.5 (89)	4.7 (52)
TOTAL N	388	295	1371	1104

Distribution of Quotatives

	Inner London	Outer London
	Elderly	Elderly
	% (<i>n</i>)	% (<i>n</i>)
<i>Say</i>	70.8 (261)	73.5 (200)
<i>Think</i>	4.1 (15)	10.3 (28)
<i>Go</i>	4.6 (17)	0.4 (1)
<i>Zero</i>	18.9 (70)	12.9 (35)
<i>Others</i>	1.6 (6)	2.9 (8)
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TOTAL N	370	272

Distribution of Quotatives

	Inner London Elderly % (n)	Outer London Elderly % (n)	Inner London Adolescents % (n)	Outer London Adolescents % (n)
Say	70.8 (261)	73.5 (200)	27.4 (351)	31.2 (328)
Think	4.1 (15)	10.3 (28)	12.8 (164)	6.1 (64)
Go	4.6 (17)	0.4 (1)	11.7 (150)	26.5 (279)
Zero	18.9 (70)	12.9 (35)	15.1 (193)	12.3 (129)
Be Like	-	-	24.4 (313)	20.8 (219)
This is + (S)	-	-	4.8 (61)	-
Tell	-	-	1.9 (24)	-
Others	1.6 (6)	2.9 (8)	2.0 (26)	3.2 (33)
TOTAL N	370	272	1282	1052

Quotative *GO*:


- **Girls use the vernacular *GO* more than boys**
(Macaulay 2001; Stenström 2002; Buchstaller 2004)
- ***GO* is favoured in third person contexts**
- ***GO* is favoured for introducing direct speech and non-lexicalised sounds or gestures but strongly disfavoured for introducing internal dialogue**
- ***GO* is strongly favoured to occur with conversational historical present**
(Stenström 2002; Levey 2007)

Quotative *BE LIKE*:

- Female led in inner London but Male led in outer London
- Evidence of grammaticalisation as *BE LIKE* is used in 1st and 3rd person contexts
- Further evidence of grammaticalisation as although *BE LIKE* is strongly favoured to introduce non-lexicalised sounds and gestures it is also used to introduce direct speech
- Further evidence of grammaticalisation as *BE LIKE* occurs in a range of tenses


- now when i go in the shop ***HE'S JUST LIKE*** "yeh how are you alright?"
- and there was a cop and police car right there and I started screaming and ***I'M LIKE*** "go and get them"
- I was going into square with my friends and ***THEY WERE LIKE*** "yeah oh yeah be careful round here...."
- it's been a couple of times where ***I'VE BEEN LIKE*** "uuurr can't smoke no more"
- ***HE WOULD BE LIKE*** "aah shut up shut up..."
- ***IT'LL BE LIKE*** "why you always chatting English for?"

THIS IS + S(subject)

- A new quotative – accounts for 4.8% of quotatives among adolescents in inner London
- Used with a range of subjects
 - This is them* ‘what area are you from . what part?’
This is me ‘I’m from (inner London)
 - This is her* ‘that was my sister’
 - This is him* ‘don’t lie . if I search you and if I find one I’ll kick your arse’
 - This is my mum* ‘what are you doing? I was in the queue before you’
 -  *This is my mum’s boyfriend* ‘put that in your pocket now’

Quotative *THIS IS* + *S(subject)*:

- **Strongly favoured and led by females**
- **Strongly favoured in first person contexts**
- **Used predominantly in conversational historic present**
- **Used categorically with direct speech**

i literally walked past two thugs that i didn't not knew but they just grabbed me by the hood swang me in a alley and had me at knifepoint. and i couldn't do nothing but i said . and 

THEY SAID "where you from?"

I SAID "east london that's where i'm from"

THIS IS THEM "don't be funny" cos they're . i was right in a bit of east london so

THEY SAID "don't be funny with me like that cos i'll stab you" and

I SAID "i'm not trying to be funny"

THIS IS THEM "what area are you from . what part?"

THIS IS ME "i'm from (name of place)" and then like

THEY JUST SAID "oh yeh i don't like that area where area" and then like some hero. thank god there is some typical heros who. it's like if you're short don't even bother come over because you're just gonna get stabbed yourself like .

SUMMARY:

- Among London adolescents there are three main competitors to quotative *SAY* – *GO*, *BE LIKE* and *THIS IS S(subject)*.
- Compared to the elderly speakers:
 - High incidence of *GO*, especially in outer London
 - Emergence of *BE LIKE*, and higher frequencies compared to COLT(0.5%) and outer London preadolescents (5%) (Levey 2007)
 - *BE LIKE* well on the way to being grammaticalised, particularly in inner London
- Emergence of *THIS IS + S(subject)* among inner London adolescents. At present confined to a particular role in narratives.
 - Age-graded?
 - Grammaticalising?
 - Diffusing beyond inner London?

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Linguistic Innovators: the English of adolescents in
London

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www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/index.htm

(website maintained by E.Torgersen)

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