This is me, this is him:
Quotative use among adolescents in London

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The Second International Conference on the Linguistics of Contemporary English
Université de Toulouse II - Le Mirail, 2-4 July, 2007
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.


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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inner London</th>
<th>Outer London</th>
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<th>Outer London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elderly</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct speech</td>
<td><strong>95.3 (370)</strong></td>
<td><strong>91.2 (272)</strong></td>
<td><strong>93.5 (1282)</strong></td>
<td><strong>95.3 (1052)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect speech</td>
<td><strong>4.7 (18)</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.8 (23)</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.5 (89)</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.7 (52)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL N</strong></td>
<td><strong>388</strong></td>
<td><strong>295</strong></td>
<td><strong>1371</strong></td>
<td><strong>1104</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Distribution of Quotatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inner London</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elderly</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td>% (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Say</strong></td>
<td>70.8 (261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think</strong></td>
<td>4.1 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Go</strong></td>
<td>4.6 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zero</strong></td>
<td>18.9 (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td>1.6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL N</strong></td>
<td><strong>370</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Distribution of Quotatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inner London Elderly % (n)</th>
<th>Outer London Elderly % (n)</th>
<th>Inner London Adolescents % (n)</th>
<th>Outer London Adolescents % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Say</strong></td>
<td>70.8 (261)</td>
<td>73.5 (200)</td>
<td>27.4 (351)</td>
<td>31.2 (328)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think</strong></td>
<td>4.1 (15)</td>
<td>10.3 (28)</td>
<td>12.8 (164)</td>
<td>6.1 (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Go</strong></td>
<td>4.6 (17)</td>
<td>0.4 (1)</td>
<td>11.7 (150)</td>
<td>26.5 (279)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zero</strong></td>
<td>18.9 (70)</td>
<td>12.9 (35)</td>
<td>15.1 (193)</td>
<td>12.3 (129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be Like</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24.4 (313)</td>
<td>20.8 (219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This is + (S)</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.8 (61)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tell</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.9 (24)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td>1.6 (6)</td>
<td>2.9 (8)</td>
<td>2.0 (26)</td>
<td>3.2 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL N</strong></td>
<td>370</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>1282</td>
<td>1052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} 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?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Inner London Elderly</th>
<th>Outer London Elderly</th>
<th>Inner London Adolescents</th>
<th>Outer London Adolescents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct speech</td>
<td>93.9% (n=341/363)</td>
<td>87.2% (n=225/258)</td>
<td>81.6% (n=1045/1280)</td>
<td>83.7% (n=867/1036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal monologue/thought</td>
<td>4.7% (n=17/363)</td>
<td>11.2% (n=29/258)</td>
<td>16% (n=204/1280)</td>
<td>9.1% (n=94/1036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-lexicalised sound</td>
<td>0.6% (n=2/363)</td>
<td>1.6% (n=4/258)</td>
<td>1.6% (n=21/1280)</td>
<td>2.2% (n=23/1036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>0.8% (n=3/363)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.8% (n=10/1280)</td>
<td>5% (n=52/1036)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**THIS IS + S(ubject)**

- A new quotative – accounts for 4.8% of quotatives among adolescents in inner London

- Used with a range of subjects
  
  i) *This is them* ‘what area are you from . what part?’

   *This is me* ‘I’m from (inner London)

  ii) *This is her* ‘that was my sister’

  iii) *This is him* ‘don’t lie . if I search you and if I find one I’ll kick your arse’

  iv) *This is my mum* ‘what are you doing? I was in the queue before you’

  v) *This is my mum’s boyfriend* ‘put that in your pocket now’
Quotative *THIS IS + S(ubject)*:

• 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

**T**HEY 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

**T**HEY 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

**T**HEY 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 .
We were all in bed – standing in the bedroom with a gun and all [THE SOLDIER HAS THE GUN]. Here’s me: ‘In the name of God, have youse lost your senses?’ [EXTREMELY HIGH PITCHED] Here was I: ’Then I must be hard of hearing or something – you rapped the door and I didn’t hear you’ …out the back and everywhere they were. Here’s me: ‘Have youse took leave of your senses?’ [HIGH PITCHED]. He says – uh – ‘Get everybody up, everybody up’

(Milroy and Milroy, 1977:54)
SUMMARY:

• Among London adolescents there are three main competitors to quotative SAY – GO, BE LIKE and THIS IS S(ubject).

• 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(ubject) among inner London adolescents. At present confined to a particular role in narratives.
  - Age-graded?
  - Grammaticalising?
  - Diffusing beyond inner London?
Thanks to……

• Eivind Torgersen

• The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for research grant RES-000-23-0680

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)
References


