



Anna Hurlbut
Oklahoma State University

Then I was like, "Let's go get coffee."

Usage of the Quotative 'Like' in the Southern Great Plains

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE QUOTATIVE 'LIKE'?

'Like' has become a ubiquitous term in the modern English language, from usage of the traditional verb (*I like ice cream*) to the sentence-filling tic (*I, like, can't believe it!*) and many more (Love 1). A relatively recent phenomenon is the usage of the word 'like' as a quotative, a word to introduce a quotation or action. Though many think that 'like' is merely a lazy substitution for 'say,' the two words are not always interchangeable. People usually use 'say' when they are quoting someone literally, but this is not always the case with 'like.' This new quotative can be used to express not only one's words but also his or her attitudes, and it is often used to convey 'inner monologues,' facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice (PBS).

Acknowledgments:

Special Thanks to Dr. Thomas Wikle and Dr. Guy Bailey

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a college student, I hear 'like' being used in this way very frequently by my peers, leading me ask how ubiquitous this new 'like' is within the population. In my research, I set out to answer the following questions:

- How does the usage of the quotative 'like' correlate with age?
- To what extent does a person's level of education or level of income correlate with his or her usage of the quotative 'like'?
- What other grammatical features are commonly used by those who use the quotative 'like'?

HYPOTHESES

- It is more common for younger people to use 'like' than for older people.
- Those with higher levels of education and/or those with higher incomes use the quotative 'like' less than those with little education and/or low income.
- The usage of like will be relatively evenly distributed across the three states because it is more dependent upon age than upon geographic location.

METHODS

This data was collected by the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research using a telephone survey. In order to collect this sample, a *probability-proportionate-to-size* sampling design was used. The 3 states were divided in 83 sections based on 3-digit zip codes. 40 of these sections are represented in the final sample including the 19 most populous zip codes, 12 from the medium populous sections, and 9 from the least populous sections. In these surveys, respondents were questioned about grammatical features and pronunciation of certain words and phrases, and their responses were recorded. 1201 residents of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas are included in the final data sample.

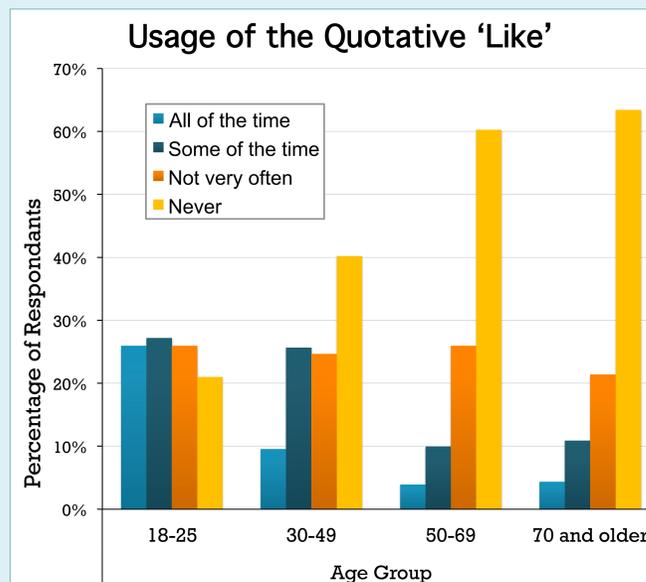
VARIABLES OF INTEREST

- Age
- Income
- Education
- State of Residence
- Grammatical Features (ex. snap beans, y'all, fixin' to, might could, anymore, done, quotative like)

RESULTS

AGE

'Like' had a negative correlation with age, which means that older people use the quotative 'like' less than younger people.



EDUCATION AND INCOME

There is a very small correlation between a person's usage of 'like' and their education, and there is an even smaller correlation between usage of 'like' and income. When broken down by state, it is clear that Texas is the only state in which these small correlations are true. In both Kansas and Oklahoma, there were no correlations between 'like' and education or 'like' and income.

STATE OF RESIDENCE

Correlations between 'like' and age are similar in each of the 3 states.

GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

Of all of the grammatical features we surveyed, 'like' had the most significant correlation with age. 'Like' correlates significantly with nearly all of the grammatical features we tested (all except 'snap beans').

Grammatical Features	Correlations with 'Like'	Correlations with Age
Snap beans	0.033	0.025
Y'all	0.090	-0.151
Fixin' to	0.162	-0.076
Anymore	0.257	-0.057
Might could	0.261	0.026
Done	0.280	-0.057
Like	1.000	-0.303

CONCLUSIONS

- Usage of quotative 'like' and age have a negative correlation, meaning that younger people use the term more frequently than older people.
- People with higher levels of education and income are only very slightly less likely to use 'like' than those of lower socioeconomic status. This suggests that 'like' primarily a generational term.
- 'Like' had very small correlations with other grammatical features, meaning that it is used by people with varying dialects.

REFERENCES

- Dailey-O'Cain, J. (2000). The sociolinguistic distribution of and attitude toward focuser *like* and quotative *like*. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4(1), 60-80. Retrieved from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9481.00103/abstract>
- Love, J. (2011). And I'm Like, Read This! *The American Scholar*. Retrieved from: <https://theamericanscholar.org/and-im-like-read-this/#.VTEsNxd4iMY>
- PBS, (n.d.). Like, Quote Me. Retrieved from: <http://www.pbs.org/speak/words/sezwho/like/>