

## The “new” quotatives in American English: A cross-register comparison

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In the past decade, a growing number of studies has been concerned with the use of *like* as direct speech introducer, mostly in American English (Blyth et al. 1990, Romaine & Lange 1991, Ferrara & Bell 1995), but also in other varieties of English, such as Scottish English (Macaulay 2001), British and Canadian English (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999), and African American Vernacular English (Cukor-Avila 2002). While they provide important insights in the use of this new quotative, as well as cumulative evidence of its expansion, these studies are based on small samples of conversational narrative, and their findings are thus hardly generalisable. In addition, very little attention has been devoted to other new direct quotation introducers, such as *be all* and *go*. To date, there are indeed no studies of the use of *like* and other new quotatives, in principled, diverse corpora of spoken English.

This corpus-based study investigates the frequency of use and the discourse-pragmatic function of the innovative quotatives *be like*, *go*, *be all*, compared with the traditional quotative *say*, in contemporary spoken American English. The analysis is based on four corpora of spoken American English representing different registers of spoken interaction: casual conversation, campus-related service encounters, academic office hours consultations, and students' study groups.

The study includes quantitative analyses of frequency of occurrence of the quotatives, frequency in association with grammatical person, and comparison of frequency across corpora; and qualitative analysis of the discourse-pragmatic function of the quotatives. Simple present and simple past tense forms of the quotatives were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively in four small corpora of approximately 500,000 words.

The findings showed that type and frequency of occurrence of the quotatives vary across different registers of spoken language, thus suggesting that the use of direct quotation and the way it is introduced are sensitive to context and level of formality. The new quotatives *be like* and *go* were found to be frequent quotatives which successfully compete with the traditional *say* in casual registers such as conversation and service encounters. However, these quotatives are infrequent in consultative registers such as office hours. The new quotative *be all* was found to be rather infrequent in all registers. The study also revealed that there are clear patterns of association between frequency of occurrence of the quotatives and grammatical person, as well as between grammatical person and discourse-pragmatic function of the quotative.