You could so easily od *like*: Clause final and other pragmatic functions of *like* in Liverpool English speech

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Pragmatic or discourse *like* is one of the most prominent features in everyday vernacular Englishes (D'Arcy, 2005, p. 2). Overtly stigmatised, the discourse marker *like* is considered by many to be a superfluous feature that is a sign of hesitancy and inarticulacy and has given rise to many criticisms of such usage with those using *like* being thought of as stupid. In this study, I investigate the use of *like* among younger (16-25) males and females and older (50-65) males from Liverpool. Conversations between the three age cohorts and genders were recorded for the purpose of analyses. To ensure that the frequency of scores are comparable across texts, I adopt Biber, Conrad and Reppen's (1998) methodology of normalisation and give frequency scores per 1000 words of text. The study found that *like* is not a feature of inarticulacy, and that it's not used to gain time in conversation. It is used more by female speakers for certain pragmatic functions such as focus, metaphoric usage and narration. Between the genders males were found to use clause final *like* the most, which could be seen as a regional dialect feature.

Keywords: Clause Final *Like*; Liverpool English; Scouse; Pragmatic Functions of *Like*

1. Introduction

Pragmatic or discourse *like* can be described as one of the most widely acknowledged vernacular features in spoken English (D'Arcy, 2005). The use of *like* is usually characterised as being used by young people and adolescents and is stigmatized as a sign of inarticulacy and hesitancy (Anderson, 2001, D'Arcy, 2005). Despite being overtly stigmatised and regarded as a non-standard feature, the pragmatic marker *like* is ubiquitous in everyday speech. As a pragmatic marker, the variable functions of *like* have been extensively studied; however, most of these studies have focused exclusively on describing the functions of *like* in clause initial and medial functions, and not much research has been conducted into the clause final instances of *like* in varieties of British English such as Liverpool English, as in 'You could so easily od *like*'.[1] Hedevind, (1967), Miller and Weinart (1995) and D'Arcy (2005) consider clause final *like* to be a feature of 'Northern dialects' and examples of

clause final *like* are attested in written records such as Wright's *The English Dialect Dictionary*. Although some scholars maintain that there is a decline in the use of the clause final marker in some British dialects, it appears to be a pervasive feature in Liverpool English.

This paper aims to investigate the frequency and distribution of *like* in Liverpool English. To this end, I analyse a corpus of spoken English collected from three groups of speakers in order to investigate the manner in which *like* is used by Liverpool speakers and to see whether clause final *lik*e is a frequent feature of their speech. I draw on previous work by Romaine and Lange (1991), Honeybone (2006) and Honeybone and Watson (2013) in order to compare my results.

2. Background

2.1. Syntactic functions

Andersen (1996) observes that "due to its multiple syntactic functions, [...] *like* appears in a vast number of different grammatical contexts" (p. 37). *Like* can be a lexical word (noun, verb, adjective or adverb) or a function word (preposition or subordinator) (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999).

Like can be used as the main verb of a sentence:

   (1) I *like* apples (Andersen, 1996, p. 83)

Like can also be used as a preposition, a conjunction or an adverb, hence:

   (2) It looks *like* her. [prep.]
   (3) Let's be friends *like* we used to. [conj.]
   (4) It's more *like* eighteen percent. [adv.] (Andersen, 1996, p. 38)

Castell (2000, p. 21) observes that *like* as a preposition is used to convey ideas of resemblance or similarity as in the following examples provided by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985, p. 662) where both utterances are semantically equivalent.

   (5a) She's a blonde *like* me.
   (5b) She's a blonde, and so am I.

Biber et al., (1999, p. 858) note that *like* can be used as a stance adverbial.

   (6) She *like* said that they would. (Biber et al., 1999, p. 858)

In terms of its usage, Andersen (1996) has noted that there are uses of *like*

which "cannot readily be analysed in terms of ordinary word classes" (p. 37). It is not always easy to decide whether an occurrence of *like* is a discourse marker or not. Biber et al. (1999) observe, that in (6) it is difficult to tell whether to interpret *like* as having no particular lexical meaning or as a stance adverbial, showing that the proposition is being conveyed imprecisely (a hedge).

The use of *like* has been defined as a discourse marker used in conversational contexts (Schiffrin, 1987). Such usage has been attributed to adolescence, particularly adolescent girls, and taken to signal their lack of concern for precision or unwillingness to take responsibility for their statements. It is often seen as a hedge and in discussions relating to females, it is taken to indicate insecurity and the unwillingness to state a forceful opinion (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Fox Tree (2006) notes that as a precise marker of imprecision, *like* may be not only informative, but obligatory for the expression of some ideas.

Most discourse markers "are notoriously multifunctional and can operate on several different planes of discourse simultaneously" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 61). Andersen (2001) deals with this difficulty "by classifying particular functions of *like* on the basis of which function seems salient in a particular discourse context" (p. 265). Andersen (1996, p.38) gives the following example where the function of *like* is not clear cut.

> (7) What, so she was *like* your friend?

According to Andersen, this use of *like* could be interpreted as either a preposition or a discourse marker. An interpretation of it as a preposition would suggest 'similar to' whereas in a discourse marker reading, the terms 'she' and 'friend' would be co-referential in meaning so she was your friend (in some sense or the other) (Andersen 1996, p. 38). I would suggest that 'she was your friend' is markedly different from saying 'she was *like* your friend'.

In the literature on *like* there seems to be an ambiguity in the definitions of *like* (Castell, 2000). She further notes that the syntactic ambiguity sometimes evident by prepositional *like* has a strong bearing on analysis of its use as a discourse marker where, in theory, prepositional *like* only occurs with a noun phrase:

> (8) Tea grows well in temperate climates, *like* Sri Lanka and Kenya.
> (9) What's Bournemouth *like* as a seaside town? It's a little bit *like* Brighton. Quite lively! (BBC World Service)
> (10) Be *like* him—go jogging. (Castell, 2000, p. 22)

As Castell (2000, p. 22) observes, in these examples *like* clearly functions as a preposition. If *like* is removed, the clause retains its meaning but is clumsy.

(8a) *Tea grows well in temperate climates, Sri Lanka and Kenya
(9a) *What's Bournemouth *like* as a seaside town? It's a little bit Brighton. Quite lively! (BBC World Service)
(10a) ?Be him-go jogging

In Castell's view (2000) (10a) is interesting. Though this sentence is clumsy, she maintains that "the sense could be said to be in some way preserved, if the phrase is understood in a metaphoric way; be him could be said to imply be *like* him" (p. 22).

This "ambiguity and potential for reanalysis" of the function and position of *like* is recognized by Castell as illustrating the grammaticalization process currently being undergone by prepositional *like* (Castell, 2000). According to Hopper and Traugott (1993), grammaticalization[2] is the process by which lexical items become more "compacted, reduced, perhaps grammatical" (p. 65).

Castell (2000) identified several examples which are ambiguous, and which suggests that *like* is undergoing a process of grammaticalization. In these examples, it is not always easy to clearly differentiate whether *like* is to be understood in a prepositional or discourse particle sense. Take the following example:

 (11) A drug is *like* a drink, *like* an identification. (Castell, 2003, p. 23)

Both *like*s here are viewed by Castell (2000, p. 22) as prepositions, referring to the NPs 'a drink' and 'an identification'. However, the *like*s can also be removed, and the sentence still makes sense.

(11a) A drug is a drink, an identification.

Castell (2000, p. 22) argues that 'a drug is *like* an identification' is subtly different from 'a drug is an identification'. Similarly, in example 12, she says "the second *like* could be preposition, verb or discourse marker, and the syntax of the phrase is in dispute though meaning remains largely the same".

(12) I *like* shopping, *like* buying clothes (Castell, 2003, p. 23)

As Quirk et al. (1985, p. 668) note, prepositional *like* can easily be used metaphorically:

(13) What's its shape *like*?
    It's *like* a sausage.

The use of *like* as a metaphoric form also plays a key role in shaping the grammaticalisation process of prepositional *like*.

One of the more recent usages of *like* is its use as a quotative (the BE+*like* construction). Research has found that the form BE+*like* was an overwhelming marker of spoken interaction as well as internal dialogue.

(14) I was *like*, are you okay?
(15) She was *like*, yes, I'm fine.

Castell (2000, p. 25) writes that "syntactically, it works in the same way as other quotative forms such as GO and SAY". The examples provided by Biber et al. (1999) come only from American English. Andersen (1996), provides the following examples from British English:

(16) I suppose everyone was *like* what's she doing in a skirt or whatever, cos they were all looking. (p. 43)

Andersen (1996) identifies two areas where *like* functions as a discourse marker. He divides his data into two forms: (1) clausal *like*, and (2) independent *like*. Clausal *like* modifies elements within a clause and independent *like* "does not modify a specific sentence element" (Andersen 1996, p. 38). The following examples illustrate independent *like*:

(17) Erm, well *like*, I usually take the train about twenty past.
(18) *Like*, who was it who reckoned there was a corner on a boat?
(19) It's *like* what happened, is Jim still *like* that?

Examples of independent *like* are seen by scholars as difficult to distinguish (see Castell 2000, pp. 24-26). Castell identifies Andersen's example (17) as a clausal *like* arguing that it modifies a sentence element, on the basis that the comma after *like* is used in a similar way in another example, which is identified as clausal *like* (see Andersen 1996, p. 44). Andersen's example 19 given above is described as a quotative form and (18) as clause initial *like*. I could not clearly distinguish any examples of independent *like*. As Castell (2000, p. 24) notes, the difference in interpretation may be due to the way the data were tagged and coded.

2.2. *Like* in British English

The increasing use of *like* in spontaneous speech in different varieties of English in the world is often considered to be diagnostic of change in progress

(Anderson, 2001; Cheshire, Kerswill, & Williams, 1999, 2005; Daily-O'Cain, 2000 Levey, 2005; Tagliamonte, 2005). The majority of scholarly works on *like* are based on American English (Buschstaller, 2001, p. 21) with adolescents seen as being in the forefront of change, but there have been a few studies on the use of *like* in adolescent speech in British English, including those by Miller and Weinert (1995), Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams (1999, 2005), Castell (2000), Andersen (2001), Macaulay (2005). As in the USA, the burgeoning increase in the use of *like* in British English has attracted negative attention. In a recent attack on the use of *like* by teenage speakers, actor Emma Thompson told students, "Just don't do it. Because it makes you sound stupid and you're not stupid" (BBC News, 2010, September 28).

Whatever critics may think of *like*, it is clear that *like* is more than an unconscious tic, or a filler that people use to give themselves more time to think (Nunberg, 2001). As Levey (2006, p. 45) points out, previous research relating to the apparent increase in the innovative uses of *like* has cited age and gender as important social parameters influencing the trajectory of change in the use of this feature in several varieties of English. In this work, I specifically focus on two groups of speakers from Liverpool (i.e., male and female speakers aged 16-18 and 20-25).

Andersen (2001, p. 209) notes that *like* has a history as a discourse marker in the traditional dialects of England. Levey (2006, p. 419) examines the extent to which the pragmatic functions of *like* can be traced to dialect varieties of English from a diachronic perspective and gives the following examples[3] of historical usage taken from Wright's *The English Dialect Dictionary* (1898) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED):

(20) Father grew quite uneasy, *like*, for fear of his Lordship's taking offence. (Burney, 1829, p. 74)
(21) If your honour were more amongst us, there might be more discipline *like.* (Lytton, 1842, p. 64)
(22) Why *like*, it's gaily nigh *like* to four mile *like.*
(23) He is all open *like.*
(24) He would not go *like* through that. They are *like* against one another as it is.

Romaine and Lange (1991) claim that there is a major difference between the usage of *like* in British and American English in terms of where *like* can occur in the sentence; in American English *like* can occur before a phrase or constituent that it is intended to qualify, whereas in British English it occurs afterwards. Likewise, in his data, Andersen (2001, p. 222) differentiates clause final *like* as being traditional British usage from *like* that occurs in other syntactic positions. The non-traditional uses of *like* in his teenage

corpus are attributed to American usage (Andersen, 2001, p. 209).

Although there is a tendency in the literature to see non-traditional usage in British English as influenced by American English, this can be regarded as problematic (see Levey, 2006, pp. 419-420). As the examples given above suggest, the historical record attests clause internal uses of *like*, which "foreshadow its discourse-pragmatic uses in contemporary British English vernaculars"(Levey, p. 419. Further, there is synchronic evidence from dialect studies (D'Arcy, 2005, p. 6) which show that "nontraditional uses of *like* are productive among the oldest dialect speakers, which suggests that such usage has been embedded in regional English speech for quite some time, and are not exclusive to the younger generation" (D'Arcy, 2005, p. 6). The following utterances of older speakers of regional British dialects are taken from Tagliamonte as cited by D'Arcy (2005, p. 6 as cited in Levey, 2006, p. 420).

(25) They were just *like* sitting waiting to die. (Ayrshire, Lowlands, Scotland)
(26) We were *like* ready to *like* mutiny. (Maryport, northwest England)
(27) I couldn't stand it, *like* I just couldn't. (Portavogie, Northern Ireland)

It is clear from the evidence presented from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives that non-traditional usage (i.e., clause initial and clause internal *like*) cannot be wholly attributed to American influence and may be the result of other parallel developments in spontaneous speech (See Levey, 2006, p. 420 for further discussion).

2.3. Previous accounts of the pragmatic uses of *like*[4]

Schiffrin's (1987) definition of discourse markers applies to *like;* discourse markers are items which serve a pragmatic function in bracketing units of talk (Schiffrin, 1987). *Like* as a discourse marker has been treated by Schoroup (1985), Underhill (1988), Miller and Weinert (1995), Andersen (1996, 1998), and Jucker and Smith (1998). Its use in American English, Scottish English, and London English has been studied. Fox Tree (2006) studied discourse marker *like* in the telling of stories. She observed that for all discourse markers, uses can be described as informing about the talk at hand (the propositional content to be conveyed), a content use, or informing about how to process the talk (negotiating meaning between conversational participants), an interactional use. The following pragmatic uses of *like* have been identified:

2.3.1. *Like* as focus

Underhill's (1988) examples come from data collected by himself and his

students in the context of classroom discussion where he says it functions "with great reliability as a marker of new information and focus" (p. 234). He shows that *like* can be used to mark the focus in a question, to mark new or unusual notions and ideas that are not intended to be taken literally. He also suggests that *like* can function as an approximator, politeness hedge, and tag question. These suggestions are pioneering in the transition of the form *like*. Such ideas add a new perspective to the previous works written about politeness theories (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978; Salmani Nodoushan, 2012, 2014, 2017) and in particular female language usage (e.g., Holmes, 1990, 1995).

2.3.2. *Like* as evincive

Schoroup (1985) characterises *like* as an 'evincive', an item which indicates that the speaker is engaged in thinking, indicating approximation, suggesting an alternative, or introducing reported speech. Andersen (1996, 1998) also appears to agree with this idea when he says that a motivating factor for the use of *like* may be planning difficulties or a search for the right word.[5] Miller and Weinert (1995) question this assessment, pointing out that there seems to be little difference between all kinds of evincive forms such as *aha, well, um* and *like*.

2.3.3. *Like* as a hedge on quantifiers and numerals

In its use as a hedge on quantifiers and numerals, *like* has been seen as expressing "approximative meaning" (Schoroup, 1985; Underhill, 1988; Jucker & Smith, 1998; Biber et al., 1999 and D'Arcy, 2006). Jucker, Smith and Ludge (2003) say that *like* can be used to convey that the most useful information is imprecise rather than precise. For example, Fox Tree (2006) notes that, "saying that a wait lasted '*like* two hours' highlights what's meant by a wait of that length, rather than precisely expressing the length of the wait" (p. 728).

In the following examples provided by D'Arcy, *like* is said to occupy the same syntactic slot as approximative adverbs such as *about* and *roughly*, occurring to the immediate left of the quantifier (D'Arcy, 2006, p. 341).

(28) I was *like* forty one or forty two or something aye. (D'Arcy, 2006, p. 341)

(29) Whenever I was wee, whenever I was *like* ten or twelve year old . . . . (D'Arcy, 2006, p. 341)

Fox Tree (2006) observes that "where *like* occurred, speakers were indicating that the next quantity would be a loose expression" (p. 739). She notes that

this can be seen in the way quantities vary when preceded by *like.*

(30) Charged me *like* two hundred, three hundred bucks for it.
(31) It ended up costing me *like* two hundred and thirty bucks.

2.3.4. *Like* as approximation: hedge on quality of speech

Anderson (1998) and Jucker and Smith (1998) consider *like* in relation to a relevance theoretical perspective where they see *like* as 'loose' use of language that shows what the speaker is saying is not exactly what's on their mind. A similar view point is expressed by Fox Tree (2006) who maintains that *like* is used to indicate "an upcoming loose use of language" (p. 739). This idea is also evident in the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* where Biber et al. (1999) describe *like* as an "adverb of imprecision" (p. 871). Hence, the following example (32):

(32) I always thought that I reminded him too much of my mum and *like* depressed him. (Biber et al., 1999, p. 871)

Further examples which suggest 'looseness' are provided by Jucker, Smith and Ludge (2003, p. 1747). However, it is difficult to agree with the following explanation of looseness given by them.

(33) I feel *like* kind of stupid. (2003, p. 1747)
(34) She was *like* kind of *like* my supervisor. (2003, p. 1747)

In 33 and 34 Jucker, Smith and Ludge (2003, p.1747) assert that both kind of and *like* are double hedges as in example (33) and triple hedges as in example (34). They note that "the meaning of kind of is pragmatic or rhetorical as well as semantic, in that it softens the speech act of criticism" (p. 1747). They view *like* as similar to *kind of* and see the two as reinforcing each other (Jucker, Smith, & Ludge, 2003, p. 1747). This suggests that both words are grouped together to mean something like 'quite'. Castell (2000, p. 30) believes that *kind of* fills this slot. *Like,* on the other hand, is more elaborative and appears to be used for purposes of focusing. Similar examples from my data suggest that the use of *like* to indicate quality of speech is unlikely.

(35) The IPA that's *kind of like* an alphabet, *like* different letters but not letters symbols they kind of represent *like* the exact sounds in the world's languages. [male 16-18/U1]⁶

Example (35) is about the IPA. *Like* is used three times with the NPs 'an alphabet', 'different letters', and 'the exact sounds'. The speaker is trying to explain the IPA metaphorically. He uses the first *like* with *kind of* as a softening

device so as not to appear as though he obviously knows a lot about the IPA. I agree with Jucker, Smith and Ludge (2003) that *kind of* may be used to tone down what is said, but I would suggest that in all 3 instances *like* is used to exemplify what is said, as it allows the hearer to imagine the IPA in relation to their own schemata on alphabets.

2.3.5. *Like* as enquoting device

The use of *like* as an enquoting device has received considerable attention in the literature. Blyth, Recktenwald and Wang (1990), Romaine and Lange (1991), Ferrara and Bell (1995), Andersen (1998) and Fox Tree (2006) suggest that speakers can use *like* in creative and interesting ways to report what others have said. BE+*like* can be used innovatively to express thought and speech events that take place in discourse. This usage as an enquoting device "allows speakers to blur the distinction between word and thought both at the level of the original discourse reported, and within the reporting act itself" (Castell, 2001, p. 38).

The quotative SAY ties the reported words down to a verbatim report of speech (Capone & Salmani Nodoushan, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan, 2015, 2018). GO, however, can refer to a general impression of what was said (Blyth, Recktenwald, & Wang, 1990). GO can only be used with historical present and direct speech. Blyth et al. (1990) distinguish BE+*like* from other quotatives as representing states of mind rather than units or events in the world. "BE+*like* in particular makes no claims as to the verbatim reliability of what is reported" (p. 216).

3. The data

Data were collected from 3 different age groups: younger and older participants between the ages of 16-18, 20-25 and 50-65. For the younger participants, 2 groups of speakers were recorded for each age range. Each group consisted of 3 male and 4 female participants. The participants belonged to the same speech community and were speakers of Liverpool English. Their speech was considered to 'share a set of norms and rules' (Romaine, 1994, p. 22). Informed participant consent was obtained from all participants prior to data gathering to record without telling the informants in order to make the speech as natural as possible. The older participants recorded were all born and bred in Liverpool and spoke Scouse. They were taxi drivers by occupation. Informed consent was obtained in order to record the conversations and the recordings were made while travelling in the taxis from the researcher's home to Liverpool City Centre, which is approximately about 45 minutes in duration. The data were short and naturalistic; however, prior permission to record may have constrained the participants'

conversation resulting in the observer's paradox. Only a few minutes of the speech was recorded, as the primary purpose was to investigate the pragmatic functions of *like* in everyday conversation.

The coding of the pragmatic functions of *like* was quite difficult, for instance, as noted before, some forms of *like* were ambiguous as to their pragmatic function. Following Biber et al. (1998, p. 263), I analyse the distribution of *like* in terms of relative number of occurrences, and report its distribution across age and gender in terms of frequency per 1000 words. Biber et al. (1998) observe that "*normalisation* is a way to adjust raw frequency counts from texts of differing lengths so that they can be compared accurately" (p. 263). All instances where *like* appeared to have a pragmatic function were counted. Details of the study are provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Details of the Study

Age	Gender	Total participants	Word *f*	Total words	*f* of *like* per 1000 words
16-18	Male	04	98	10,521	9.3
16-18	Female	03	58	8,342	6.9
20-25	Female	03	106	15,310	11.0
20-25	Male	03	28	9,632	2.9
50-65	Male	03	13	1,220	1.8
	Totals	13	303	43,805	6.9

As can be seen in Table 1, there were 303 occurrences of *like* with a discourse marking function. Out of all the discourse markers found in the data, this was the most frequently used by most of the participants alongside other markers such as *you know what I mean*, *sort of, just* etc. Of the five groups of participants, the female group (20-25) used *like* most often, and between the genders, the main users of *like* were males aged 16-18 (9.3), with a high proportion of clause final *like*.

Table 2
Structural Distribution of Like

Structural distribution of *like*	Tokens
Clause initial *like*	7
Clause internal *like*	241
Clause final *like*	25
BE+*like*	30

Given that the trend towards gender variation often suggests change in progress, previous research has sought to explore the correlation between use of *like* and speaker gender. Blyth, Recktenwald and Wang (1990, pp. 223-224)

report that in their survey, based on speakers of American English, *like* was used more by men than by women, even though middle class teenage girls were perceived to be the most frequent users of this feature. Dailey-O'Cain (2000, p. 69) found that similar perceptions were manifest in her study, although once again, men were found to use *like* more frequently than women. Fuller (2003, p. 372), on the other hand, found that *like* was predominantly a female feature, with female speakers using *like* at a rate of 11.3 times per 1000 words, whiles males used it substantially less at a rate of only 4.1 times per 1000 words. In his study on adolescent speech in London, Andersen (1996, 2001) found that *like* was primarily used by female speakers in late adolescence. Levey's (2006, 2005) preadolescent London corpus results also appear to support the idea that *like* is more prevalent among female rather than male speakers. Fittingly, then, Eckert (2003, p. 395) remarks that there is no simple relationship between speaker gender and the use of *like*. In her work, the distribution of *like* was shown to be differentiated between the genders; females used *like* clause initially more frequently than males, whereas males used *like* clause internally, especially before noun phrases, more frequently than females.

4. Results

The results showed that *like* was primarily used by females, which is similar to previous studies done by Ferrara and Bell (1995), Fuller (2003), and Romaine and Lange (1991). In terms of frequency per 1000 words, females had the most frequent use with a rate of 6.9 in comparison to males who had a rate of 6.2. Holmes' (1990, pp. 260-261) suggestion that women use a style that is more cooperative and interactive, which would enable the use of facilitating devices such as *like* are borne out in relation to females in the age bracket of 16-25.

Table 3
Frequency of Like by Age and Gender

Age	Gender	Word frequency	Frequency per 1000 words
16-25	Female	164	6.9
	Male	126	6.2
50-65	Male	13	1.8

Among the younger males, *like* was used with a rate of 6.2 as compared to older males (1.8) (see Table 3). The results suggest that *like* is not as prominent in older males as younger ones. Among the female group, the most favoured variable of *like* was as a focus marker and as an exemplifier. This finding supports that of Underhill (1988), who suggested that *like* is actually used to add focus to particular points in an utterance. A feature that was

prominent among the female subject group was the use of *like* for moving a narrative along. This group used the BE+*like* construction the most (see Table 4).

Table 4
Use of Like in its Syntactic Positions

Syntactic position	Age 16-18				Age 20-25				Age 50-65	
	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	%
Noun phrase	48	15	63	40.4	14	10	24	17.9	02	15
Verb phrase (including BE+*like* construction	16	12	28	17.9	8	58	66	49.3	01	8
Adverb phrase	8	5	13	8.3	2	4	6	4.5	0	
Adjective phrase	4	12	16	10.3	0	16	16	11.9	0	
Prepositional phrase	9	7	16	10.3	3	8	11	8.2	0	
Clause initially	0	0	0	0.0	0	7	7	5.2	0	
Clause finally	13	7	20	12.8	1	1	2	1.5	10	76
Preceding either aborted sentence (false start) or pause	0	0	0	0.0	0	2	2	1.5	0	
Total	98	58	156		28	106	134		13	13

One of the most interesting points discovered was that this group only used *like* in clause final position in 1 instance. They did, however, use *like* in clause initial position and as a politeness hedge. This can be seen in the following example:

(36) I find that I keep talkin a bit scouse. *Like* when I say some words I'm a bit kkkk. [female 20-25/PA]
That's *like* a velar fricative [female 20-25/PC].

In example (36), the first speaker used *like* in clause initial position and the second speaker used *like* in front of the NP 'a velar fricative', as the speaker did not want to appear as though she obviously knew the technical term for what her friend was trying to describe. The insertion of *like* allowed the speaker to distance herself from the statement, consequently, seeming more polite. This usage of *like* is seen as very common among females and supports the idea that *like* is used in the form of a politeness hedge more by females than males.

The results show that younger males aged 16-25 did use the quotative form to introduce discourse but it was far less frequent than both female subject groups. This could be because their conversation did not include much narrative; instead it was largely fact and opinion based. This finding supports previous studies (Ferrara & Bell, 1995; Romaine & Lange, 1991) which suggested that *like* was used by males for introducing discourse but not as

frequently as females.

The findings also suggested that females aged 16-25 used *like* frequently as they were responsible for 6.9 uses per 1000 words. This finding supports the idea that young women are the most frequent users of the discourse marker *like*. Although the BE+*like* construction was the most frequent feature, this subject group also used *like* for purposes of focus, this can be seen in the following example.

> (37) It was the kids that *like* needed to concentrate on their cutting out skills. [female 16-18/PB]

In this example, *like* is used to focus on the point that it was the children who needed to concentrate, who found the task most difficult.

The results show that males are the predominant users of clause final *like*. A possible explanation for this finding may be that males use more traditional forms in order to express their Scouse identity.

4.1. Clause final *like*

The first point to note is that there were 34 instances in the data of *like* appearing in clause final position (see Table 4, above). I have already observed that according to previous research, clause final *like* is considered to be a feature of traditional British English dialects (See Andersen, 2001, p. 209). This can be further backed up by evidence from the Survey of English dialects.[7]

This is important in the light of previous research by Romaine and Lange (1991) who claim that the difference between clause final *like* and discourse *like* in other positions is possibly indicative of a difference between British and American English with regard to the placement of certain discourse markers. Romaine and Lange (1991, p. 249) propose that Americans tend to place *like* before the part of the text to be qualified or focused upon whereas British speakers place it afterwards.

Although not many uses of *like* were found in clause final position compared to other positions, the idea that it may be a feature of regional British English cannot be dismissed. This may be due to the fact that traditionally there are examples of *like* appearing in clause final position (see examples by Wright,1902) .

> (38) Ah sick, we should keep the recorder on for the journey *like.* [Male 16-18/SB]

In (38) the speaker uses clause final *like* as a signal for his peers to agree with

his idea of taking a recorder on a bus. As mentioned earlier, clause final usage has been attributed to regional British English, and appears to be a common occurrence among the younger male and (to a lesser extent) participants who are speakers of Liverpool Scouse.

(39) This shit is pretty new to me *like.* [male 16-18/UA]
(40) Drugs just scare me *like.* Injecting that shit you can so easily OD *like.* Do you know what I mean? Just stop breathing *like.* [male 16-18/UB]
(41) Ah, I remember that night I was hammered from the amount of vod I had *like.* [male 16-18/UA]

What is clear from these examples is that in spontaneous conversations, clause final *like* is a common occurrence among young people (12.8%). In this data set, younger males between the ages of 16-25 appeared to use clause final *like* more often than younger females with 13 instances as opposed to 7 in females of the same age group. Kevin Watson, who has been studying changes in the Liverpool accent, has discovered that, not only has it resisted the national trend of levelling out, it is actually becoming even more distinct. He says: "Scouse is becoming Scouser. So it is not surprising that a regional feature such as *like* is common among younger people" (Watson, 2004).

The fact that clause final *like* is used as a feature of Liverpool English is confirmed by its use in other contexts such as popular dialect literature and contemporary humorous dialect literature. As Honeybone (2006) notes, "there is, of course, a range of material, which seeks to represent the features of non-reference varieties of English in writing" (p. 4). Niall Griffith, a scouser born in Liverpool writes his fiction in authentic Scouse and Welsh dialects. This is seen in his use of phonological features in words such as *shurrup*, which substitutes t for r, and which is recognised by experts (Honeybone, 2006) as a feature of Scouse; for example, Honeybone (2006), gives the following examples from the book *Lern Yerself Scouse* as authentic Liverpool dialect:

- I've gorro lasso;
- Anyone gorra proey (=anyone got a programme)

Honeybone and Watson (2013) observe that these texts "typically seek to portray extreme (author's emphasis) varieties—the most localised variants of linguistic variables that are typically only used by a proportion of the speakers only some of the time" (p. 317). Similar examples are also used by Niall Griffith (it's somet you've *gorra,* what, fuckin endure). In Niall Griffith's short story "Coming of age", which consists of 1400 words, there are 32 uses of clause final *like*. The first utterance begins as follows:

(42) See, he's not my proper son, not by blood, *like.*
(43) She likes her bit of rough, *like.*
(44) Dodgy genes, *like.*
(45) The place is fucking chocka, all blokes *like.*
(46) Gorra show the boy how to do it, *like.*

Similarly, clause final *like* is also present in Kevin Sampson's writing. The following is an example from his book, *Awaydays* (1998, p. 84).

(47) We're so used to offs *like.*

The data collected from the older participants in the age range of 50 to 65 confirm that clause final *like* is a feature of Liverpool English. The data collected from the 3 participants consisted of 10 clause final *like*s (see Table 4, above); for example, one participant was talking about his family and used clause final *like* as follows:

(48) We r'all goin to Turkey in da summer for the daughter's wedding *like.*
(49) When da children r younger you don't have time *like.*
(50) Me daughter's been stayin with me n now she don't want ta move out *like.*

4.2. Functional distribution of *like* by age and gender

Metaphoric usage, focus and quotative usage were the most frequent functions in younger participants, although the relative frequency differs between genders and age. The females used *like* more for focus, as a "metonymic exemplifier" (Castell, 2000), and as a quotative device. Although grammatical innovations are generally more quickly adopted by younger people, the results suggest that the function of a grammaticalising forms such as *like* depends on the type of interaction and topic. The females were narrating stories, and *like* appeared to be very productive in introducing and reporting speech and thought. Dailey-O'Cain (2000) found that "the use of *like* makes the speaker seem more 'attractive', cheerful', 'friendly' and 'successful'" (p. 75). In terms of the use of the quotative, the fact that it is used more by females suggests differing speech styles where females are more expressive than their male counterparts.

4.3. The pragmatic uses of *like*

Three main pragmatic functions of *like* were evident in the data: focus, BE+*like*, and metaphoric usage.

4.3.1. Focus

The focusing function of *like* is important in clarifying information and giving

an idea of the truth. *Like*'s ability to be used for purposes of focusing allows speakers to talk about their ideas without the necessity of asserting the truth of something. Underhill (1988) shows that *like* functions with "great reliability as a marker of new information and focus" (p. 234). In the type of discourse contexts that Underhill describes such as questions and answers to questions, *like* is very useful in focusing on the relevant information content.

(51) You have to watch this video mate, it's good *like*, kind of summarises, well, not summarises as such but like gives a picture of how words are learned, I mean *like* it shows this child starting with gaga, and *like* moving to wada and then um saying water clearly *like.* There's some cool stuff *like.* [male 16-18/UB]

The speaker describes an episode of the birth of a word which he has watched on *You Tube*. He uses six instances of *like* of which three are clause final. The other three *like*s draw attention to how the child learns words, focusing on the various stages of learning. The use of *well*, *kind of*, *um* and *I mean* are also important here, as they are all used to enhance expression.

(52) What's Christmas ham? It's *like* gammon but ham. It's not gammon but it's *like* thick, it's *like* better. [female 16-18/SA]

In this utterance the first *like* is rooted in its metonymic function, whereas the next two *like*s focus on the adjectives 'thick' and 'better'. This finding supports Underhill's suggestion that *like* can be used to add focus to particular points in an utterance. He also claimed that *like* is often used to move a narrative along; this form of the variable was also found to be particularly prominent amongst the female participants as in (53).

(53) *Like* in the lounge we've got *like* a big fire place thing *like* with a top where the brass is kept. [female 20-25/PA]

In (53) the speaker uses *like* before key points in her story such as the lounge where the incident took place and the fire place where the brass was kept; The second *like* in conjunction with the word 'thing' creates a fuzzy picture of the fireplace and the use of *like* helps the speaker to communicate the important parts of the narrative.

Like used to introduce new entities into a conversation is another form of *like* that was suggested by Underhill; this can be seen in the following example (54).

(54) If you had *like* a wrap for your tea that's wrong cos it's *like* bread. [female 16-18/SB]

In (54) the speaker is discussing bread; she uses *like* to introduce the idea of a wrap into the conversation. One of the reasons why *like* co-occurs with noun phrases is because of the focus marking function which is used to "alert listeners to the introduction of new referents into discourse" (Underhill, 1988, p. 247). As in Levey's (2006) sample, corroborative data for this can be found in the co-occurrence of *like* with indefinite markers.

4.3.2. BE+*like*

In relation to (55) Romaine and Lange (1991) comment "He probably didn't scream, but he felt *like* someone who would scream 'Waaaa!'" (p. 230). Crucially, this quotative allows the hearer to insert his emotional understanding of how this might feel.

> (55) You know I could just see the outline of his body and was *like* Waaaaa!

In a radio broadcast, Nunberg (2001) says: "what follows I said is a report of people's words; what follows I *was like* is a performance of their actions. That's why I was *like* is as apt to be followed by a noise or gesture as by a sentence. Say is for telling, *like is for showing*" [Italics mine]. Tagliamonte and Hudson (1990) found that in British English BE+*like* was favoured by females more than males, and this finding is confirmed in my data with females using the quotative form more often than the male subjects.

> (56) Scouse people came in the pub on Saturday . . . yes and stole all the brass ha ha yeah *like* in the lounge we've got *like* a big fire safe thing *like* with a top *like* that and there's *like* brass cups and then you know *like* mini plate things that you hang off nails . . . and they've got patterns on *like* well old fashioned ones. Then as they walked out this man was *like* I'm sure that brass cup's gone so I chased them all the way to the bakery *like* can I have the brass cups back please. They're *like* we haven't got any brass. And I was like you have. And they were *like* are you tryin to say that all Scousers are thieves? I was *like* no I'm tryin to say that you're a thief.   [female 20-25/PA]

In (56) it is clear that the speaker uses *like* for a number of different reasons, one of which is for dramatising the story. This finding advances further on Romaine and Lange's (1991) findings that *like* is used to report the speakers' thoughts and feelings whereas more conventional verbs such as SAY were used to report speech. They note that "presenting a narrative by re-enacting it as a series of speech exchanges also simulates the normal exchange pattern of conversation and may therefore be perceived as less of an interruption than a

narrative presented entirely from one's own perspective" (p. 269). Tagliamonte and Hudson (1990) note the importance of the notion of narrative style with respect to regional variation and local norms for story-telling. They found that in British English narratives were more introspective. This element is also evident in my data.

4.3.3. *Like* as metaphoric

As Quirk et al. (1985) have noted, *like* can sometimes be used as a metaphoric device. In this role, *like* can create very fuzzy categories. *Like*'s role as a metonym/metaphor is related to its function as a focus marking device. Miller and Weinert (1995) say that "introducing examples and giving salience are quite compatible functions" (p. 371). Scholars like Castell (2000) and Buchstaller (2001) have explained the development of *like* from a comparative form to a quotative by appealing to its metaphorical and metonymic aspects. They suggest that the aspect of similarity or resemblance may have played an important role in the evolution of *like*'s function. The ambiguity in interpreting *like*'s role provides evidence of change in progress. Castell (2000) associates *like* with its increasing metonymic possibilities. In her opinion focused discourse with young men, she found that one of the main purposes of *like* was its use as a metonymic exemplifier. As Lakoff and Turner (1989) observe, "an evocation of an entire schema via the mention of a part of that schema is one kind of metonymy" (p. 100).

    (61) Well, surf and turf the food is *like* fish and meat yeah it's *like* scampi and steak *like* surf from *like* the sea and turf from land. [female 20-25/PC]

    (62) Which shoes did you buy? [female 20-25/PD]
        Eerrm *like* shoe booty type ones from work. [female 20-25/PB]

4.4. Variation in syntactic position

When one considers the syntactic position of *like* between the two genders, the picture that emerges for the two cohorts and genders is one of difference in usage. Table 4 (above) gives a breakdown of the syntactic positions of *like* for the two groups of participants.

An important finding in this work that is evident from Table 4 (above) is that *like* is only used in 1.5% with false starts. This falsifies popular arguments that claim that *like* is a feature of inarticulacy and communication difficulties and confirms that when it is used, *like* is not a sign of inarticulacy or production difficulties; in fact, as Table 4 (above) demonstrates, the majority of uses are clause internal. Moreover, my data shows that *like*'s use is preferred in certain syntactic positions; these include before or within noun

phrases, with verb phrases, especially, the BE+*like* construction, and clause initially. The use of *like* with noun phrases was mostly prevalent among males whereas clause initial *like* was only used by older female speakers.

5. Conclusion

From the preceding discussion it is evident that *like* can be used by people to serve a multitude of pragmatic functions in a manner that is both dramatic and expressive. As Romaine (1999, p. 325) suggests, one of the most effective ways of studying a form that is undergoing grammaticalisation is to examine its distribution and frequency of different functions and meanings. I have attempted to do this here in order to trace the variability of *like* in its different pragmatic functions in a small sample of male and female speakers in the age range of 16-25 and 50-65. The data collected for this study were from people who live in the same region of Britain and belong to the same race and ethnicity, and the results suggest that the region a person is from may influence the way they talk. It was found that females use more narrative in their dialogue as opposed to males. Likewise, both older and younger males were found to use *like* clause-finally, which supports historical research that suggests clause-final *like* may be a regional British English feature. Comparisons of normalised frequencies from other studies have shown that the use of *like* is on the increase between both genders and speakers of all ages ranging from preadolescent (D'Arcy, 2005; Levey, 2005, 2006; Macaulay, 2005; Tagliamonte, 2005). Another interesting finding was that as previously supposed, *like* is not a feature of inarticulacy and is used in a multitude of functions for focus, narrative, and metaphoric usage. The observations about clause-final *like* and its possible connection to traditional dialects need further investigation using more diversity and a bigger sample size to explore what makes *like* in Liverpool distinctive.

To recapitulate, the results of this study suggest that pragmatic *like* is mostly used by younger females for purposes of narrating a story and that clause final *like* is more characteristic of male speech rather than female speech. Clause final *like* is also more frequent among older males than younger males. The data therefore suggests that far from being a declining feature in regional English as suggested by some scholars, clause final *like* is very much alive in Liverpool English. The results from the study therefore challenge the popular assumption that *like* is "a pause filler" which demonstrates 'poor communication skills', 'stupidity', and 'inarticulacy'.

Notes

1. od is a shorthand for overdosing. – the speaker is describing the possibility of someone overdosing

2. For more explanation, please see Noora and Amouzadeh (2015).

3. Examples 20 to 22 were taken from *Oxford English Dictionary*; examples 23 and 24 were taken from Wright as cited in Levey (2006, p. 419).

4. The conventions used in this study, for example, underlining the word *like*; giving own examples in bold italics and examples from others in normal bold font and the subheadings for the pragmatic functions of *like* are based on a modified version of the categories used by Castell (2000).

5. This has also been studied by many psycholinguists who sought to show if there is any psychological reality to the planning-execution models of speech—e.g., Clark and Clark (1977) and Garman (1990) among others. It seems that psycholinguists' accounts may take care of Weinert's point.

6. The codes U1, PA, etc. identify the participants.

7. I am most grateful to Johnny Robinson, the curator of the British Library for providing me with anecdotal evidence about the use of *like* in Regional British English, which can be backed up with examples from the Survey of English Dialects.

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