

## “And I was like ‘ah yeah, what are they talking about?’” – The use of quotatives in New Zealand English

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### Abstract

Research in recent years has shown that the use of quotatives such as *say*, *think* and *be like* is an important narrative tool in English interactions. These devices can be used to make a story more immediate and entertaining and to make the tone of a conversation more personal. The form *be like* in particular, being a relatively new quotative that is often associated with the speech of young women, has been found to work as a marker of informality. The interpersonal functions of quotatives as well as recent changes observed within quotative systems make them an interesting device to investigate, both in terms of gender differences as well as differences between varieties of English. This paper focuses on the uses of quotatives in New Zealand English, based on a corpus of roughly 5 hours of dyadic interactions between native New Zealand university students (same sex and mixed sex pairs). The study seeks to establish the quotative inventory of New Zealand English for this speaker group. The data is analysed in terms of the forms and frequencies of quotatives and gender differences, and the results are discussed in the context of similar studies conducted for other varieties of English.

### 1. Introduction

Quotatives are often described as serving to introduce elements of dialogue, such as imagined or re-enacted speech events, inner thoughts or comments and non-verbal elements (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999; Winter 2002). Among the items commonly counted as quotatives are: all verbs of speech such as *say*, *tell*, *scream* or *yell* (e.g. *he says: “that sounds alright”*) as well as the verb of inner reflection *think* (e.g. *but I thought: “ah stuff it”*) and less transparent forms such as *go* (e.g. *I rang up and I go “can I have a new T-shirt?”*), zero quotative (e.g. *and the tutors hated it: “we could have done so much”*), *(be) like* (e.g. *you come home you’re like: “wuah wuah”*) and *be (all)* (e.g. *she was all: “it wasn’t me!”*).

Quotatives usually occur in narratives or other spoken interactions where they serve a range of narrative and interpersonal functions: they can be used by speakers to create a greater sense of immediacy, thereby rendering a story more entertaining, and make the tone of a conversation more personal (Ferrara and Bell 1995; Mathis and Yule 1994). The variation of quotatives used in a story can also have narrative or discourse structural purposes, for example marking the relative importance of particular elements (Romaine and Lange 1991), indicating power relations between characters (Johnstone 1987) and generally helping to create interest and increase the dramatic effect (Ferrara and Bell 1995; Mathis and Yule 1994; Romaine and Lange 1991).

The relatively recent introduction of new quotative forms such as *be like* or *be all* to English allows researchers to study language change in real time. Studies that look at the use of these new quotative forms consider the changes within the quotative system, their sociolinguistic distribution and the internal constraints that govern their use (Blyth, Recktenwald and Wang

1990; Ferrara and Bell 1995; Romaine and Lange 1991; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999).

Analyses of quotative systems also present an opportunity to establish differences between varieties of English. The majority of studies dealing with quotatives are based on American English (Schourup 1985; Blyth et al. 1990; Meehan 1991; Romaine and Lange 1991; Dailey O'Cain 2000). However, quotatives have also been observed in Canadian English (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004), British English (Andersen 2001; Hasund 2003; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999) and Australian English (Winter 2002). Comparisons of different varieties of English have shown that, for example, *think* is used more often in British English than in Canadian English (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). *Go*, on the other hand, occurs much more frequently in Australian English (Winter 2002) than in either British or Canadian English.

The quotative that has received the most academic attention by far is *be like*. Not only have researchers observed a marked increase in the use of this form over the last few years, it is also functionally more complex than most quotatives. Unlike other forms, which clearly indicate that what is to follow is a representation of what was said or thought, *be like* is able to express either. This allows the listener to interpret what follows as either a representation of a quote, thought, attitude of the speaker, fictional dialogue or an enacted comment or evaluation of a situation (Blyth et al. 1990).

In the literature, *be like* has been discussed and analysed with regard to its discourse functions (Ferrara and Bell 1995), possible functional restrictions (Schourup 1985; Blyth et al. 1990; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004), sociolinguistic distribution (Ferrara and Bell 1995; Dailey O'Cain 2000; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004) and its status in terms of grammaticalisation (Romaine and Lange 1991; Brinton 1996; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004). One of the main variables considered in studies on the sociolinguistic distribution of *be like* is the influence of gender. While research on language attitudes indicates that *be like* is typically associated with young female speakers (Dailey O'Cain 2000), the results of corpus analyses are less clear cut. Some studies suggest a higher frequency use by females (Romaine and Lange 1991; Ferrara and Bell 1995), others by males (Blyth et al. 1990). Yet others did not find any major differences between the two groups (Ferrara and Bell 1995; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999 for their Canadian English data).

To date, quotatives in New Zealand English (NZE) have only been discussed in a publication based on a student project: it focused on gender differences and changes in the frequencies of use of quotatives between 1995/ 1996 and 2000 (Baird 2001). Baird's study is based on 12 hours of interview data with 24 participants, 12 from each data collection year. The participant group is comprised mostly of university students aged 20-24, and provides equal amounts of male and female speakers. According to Baird (2001), *go* and *say* were the most frequently used quotatives in both the 1995/1996 and 2000 data. However, by 2000 *be like* had gained substantial ground, while *be all* and *be* were used only rarely. Her study suggests that New Zealand females use quotatives more than males overall and they also lead in the use of *be like*. Baird's (2001) study provides an initial description of quotative use in NZE and captures some change in use over time. However, with 12 participants per data collection

year, Baird's findings are based on a relatively small population. An investigation of a larger population would help establish the quotative inventory of NZE with greater certainty.

Considering that Baird's (2001) data suggests that the NZE quotative inventory has changed markedly in a short amount of time, it would also be useful to establish a thorough quotative inventory based on more recent data. In addition to providing a basis for further investigations of changes in the quotative system of NZE, such a thorough inventory would also help to ascertain trends of use across different varieties of English. One of the points of interest for such a comparison is the use of quotative *go*, which was found to be used prominently in both NZE (Baird 2001) and Australian English (Winter 2002). This preference for *go* stands in contrast to the findings of studies on North American English from the same time period, which mostly exhibit a preference for *be like* (Blyth, Recktenwald and Wang 1990; Ferrara and Bell 1995; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). This could suggest that quotative *go* has developed as a marker of southern hemisphere English. An updated and more detailed analysis of quotatives in NZE would reveal whether or not this preference for the *go* quotative is still prevalent in NZE, or whether NZE has also embraced *be like* as the dominant quotative.

The present paper reports on the results of an investigation of quotative use by 30 native speakers of NZE. A description of the classification process is followed by the provision of the quotative inventory of NZE. These results, in turn, are then compared with the findings from studies on other varieties of English. Finally, the study explores the gender distribution of quotatives in the same sex and mixed sex data sets, and discusses the importance of considering individual variation for quantitative analyses.

## 2. The data

The data used in this study is taken from 15 dyadic interactions between 30 native speakers of NZE, which include 15 male and 15 female speakers. Even though the corpus is still relatively small, it features more than twice as many speakers as the previous account of NZE (Baird 2001) study included for each data collection year. The interactions were recorded between March 2004 and July 2005 as part of a larger corpus that consists of NZE, German and cross-cultural interactions (Terraschke 2008). The current corpus consists of 5 male-male (M-M), 5 female-female (F-F) and one of 5 mixed sex (F-M) interactions. All 30 participants were between 20 and 30 years old at the time of the recording. All but two participants were university students and, with the exception of one dyad, participants had not met before the recording. Overall, the conversations add up to approximately 5 hours of recorded conversation or 58,900 words of transcription, with the female dyads producing about 20,200 words, the male dyads 17,600 and the mixed sex conversations 21,100 words. All conversations took place in the same room on campus, and were recorded with a mini-disc player and a video camera. The participants were asked to engage in conversation for 20 to 30 minutes about anything they liked. To encourage informality, the researcher was not present during the recording.

## 3. Classifying quotatives

Quotatives are commonly defined as markers of reported speech and thought (Romaine and Lange 1991). One of the features of quotatives can be the use of direct speech rather than

indirect speech following the quotative verb (Romaine and Lange 1991). The difference can be marked by the use of first rather than third person for the speaker and present rather than conditional tense. However, in English it is not always possible to clearly differentiate between the use of indirect and direct speech as there are constructions that could be used for both. Quotatives can also be recognised by a range of prosodic markers including pauses or a change in intonation or voice quality, which can be used to set the quote apart from the rest of the utterance (Blyth et. al 1990; Romaine and Lange 1991). Prosodic markers are particularly important for the identification of quotatives that often occur in ambiguous constructions, such as zero quotatives (Mathis and Yule 1994) and quotative uses of *think* (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). The wider discourse context can also give an indication whether a construction serves as an element of constructed speech or not.

These are broad characteristics rather than guidelines for identifying quotatives as they may or may not be applicable to individual cases. Quotatives vary to the extent they are grammatically and prosodically marked as reported speech, which means that researchers have to make decisions on how to treat ambiguous cases. For the purpose of the current study, instead of pre-selecting a range of quotative forms, all cases of constructed speech are considered for the quantitative analysis (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). Quotatives are counted only when they seem to introduce a new turn, either by a new speaker or by the same speaker at a different time. A turn that continues after an interruption, for example an interjection, is counted as one occurrence (Mathis and Yule 1994; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). In the following section some problematic cases and issues with classifying quotatives are described in more detail.

Example 1 illustrates a straightforward use of quotatives. All of the examples used in this section are taken from the present NZE corpus described above. In this excerpt, Mark introduces a story of a death related to the smoking ban in bars in the United States. The bold element is the quotative and the reported speech itself is in italics (for transcription conventions see Appendix).

(1) Mark: someone was in + a bar and they lit a cigarette . and the bouncer caught him up and **he said** [change of voice:] *you can't do that*

In this case, there does not seem to be any doubt that the final part of the utterance *you can't do that* is a representation of direct speech. First of all, the element is introduced by a form of the verb of quotation *say* and is clearly attributed to the bouncer. The example also contains a clear change in person reference and tense. Thus, in the reported speech segment, present tense is used instead of past tense and the person who lit a cigarette is referred to in the second person singular. The element is also marked by a very distinct change of voice, signifying that the speaker has taken on a different character. The general context of occurrence can also be taken as an additional clue, as narratives are a very common environment for quotatives to occur in.

The context of occurrence and the grammatical structure become particularly important when the speakers do not use prosodic markers to set the quotation apart from the rest of the

utterance as in example 2. In this example, Caleb describes his encounter with a famous New Zealand rugby player.

(2) Caleb: I just ran into [name] from [place] eh + far out he plays like he plays rugby every sport imaginable eh and . like ah he's just standing like they're just sitting down stretching and just crouched over and **I was like** *ah yeah . what are they talking about . this guy is not THAT big* . and then he stood up and **I was just like** *far out*

Here, the prosodic markings on the elements following the two *be like* quotatives are only subtle. Nevertheless, the context of Caleb telling a story, the use of the quotative construction *be like*, the clear positioning of Caleb as the speaker and the quote initial emphatic exclamation *ah yeah* mark the elements as instances of reported speech. The use of the *be like* quotative here makes it impossible to determine whether Caleb actually said these things out loud, he thought them at the time, or whether they are completely constructed comments he has added to make his story more interesting. In this case it seems Caleb uses the quotatives for comedic effects as he vividly juxtaposes his initial blasé attitude of *this guy is not THAT big* with his subsequent surprise that the rugby player in question is indeed rather large.

While these two examples are relatively straightforward cases of quotative use, there are a number of situations where, despite the presence of a quotative verb, syntactic and contextual clues are not enough to clearly distinguish between quotatives and non-quotatives. After all, like other multifunctional items, verbs of quotation are not fixed in their function to introduce direct speech – they can also be used for other purposes such as to introduce a simple verb (e.g. *people say things they don't mean*) or indirect speech (e.g. *he said that it was ok*). The second highlighted quotative in example 3 illustrates a case where it is not quite clear if the verb of quotation actually introduces direct speech element. The first highlighted quotative, on the other hand, raises the question whether it can be considered to be a quotative at all. In the excerpt, Carl recounts how he got involved in the present research.

(3) Carl: the ad I replied to I don't know if this is the same one **said** *MEN WANTED* I was like + yeah they were **saying** to anyone between twenty-one and thirty

The issue with the first highlighted quotative *said* is that it refers to what was written on a poster. Even though Carl uses a verb of saying, he actually recounts something that was written. Furthermore, Carl not only recounts what was written on the ad but by speaking emphatically, he also represents the way it was presented on the poster: in big letters. Quotatives are usually discussed in relation to the use of reporting utterances in narratives. They are described as being able to refer to either “direct speech or inner monologue” (Blyth et al. 1990: 215; Romaine and Lange 1991; Ferrara and Bell 1995; Dailey-O’Cain 2000), and they are used to introduce constructed dialogue (Tannen 1986; Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999) or even non-lexicalised sounds or gestures (Blyth et al. 1990). Tagliamonte and D’Arcy (2004) are among the few who discuss the use of quotative verbs of saying and writing in relation to written materials and include such items for their quantitative analysis. Most studies do not mention this particular use of quotatives or address the status of verbs of writing as quotatives, which makes it impossible to tell whether such instances were included

in the quantitative analyses of other studies. This could make comparisons across studies more problematic. In order to capture the full scope of quotative use in NZE, instances of verbs of writing that introduce constructed speech are included in this study. Verbs of saying or zero quotatives that refer to written texts are also included.

The second highlighted quotative *saying* is similarly problematic with regard to its status as a quotative, because the grammatical construction of the sentence does not clearly indicate if the element *to anyone between twenty-one and thirty* is a direct quote of what was written on the poster, or if *saying* is used in this case as a simple verb (as in *they were saying x to someone*). Interpreting it as a quote would be supported by the fact that the segment occurs in the context of a description of a poster, and is preceded by the two quotatives *said* and *I was like*, which introduces a non-verbal element. However, the fact that there is neither a noticeable change of voice nor an obvious break in the grammar or the context of the clause (for example a shift in topic) could also suggest that it is used as a verb to indicate who the poster was directed to. In this particular instance, the interpretation of *saying* as a quotative appears to be somewhat more convincing as the context seems to suggest a continuation of quoting the poster. Throughout the categorisation process, grammatically ambiguous cases like these were individually appraised and categorised based on the presence or absence of prosodic marking and the wider discourse context. Instances that remained ambiguous even after this closer examination were excluded from the count.

Finally, the forms *it's like* and *it was like* are often problematic with regard to their quotative functions. Andersen (2001) proposes that the use of the standardised collocation *it's like* or *was like* as a pragmatic device indicates that the speaker wants to elaborate on the current topic. In this sense, the form can be used to introduce elaborations or descriptions as well as personal comments, opinions or evaluations (Terraschke 2008). Quotative *it's like* can also be used to introduce comments, opinions or evaluations. The main difference is that quotative *it's like* indicates that what is to follow is a re-enactment of a comment, opinion or evaluation as it was experienced at the time. It can also mark a performance of a comment, opinion or evaluation that is made retrospectively at the time when the story is being told. It is often difficult to differentiate between these two uses. In example 4, Rueben vividly describes what it felt like to be on a waterslide in a water park in Japan.

(4) Rueben: and it was so fast you couldn't like even keep eyes open in water it just .  
splashed in your face and you're just trying to breathe the whole time and it's all of a  
sudden you're in the water **it's like** [chuckles] far out it feels like you just jumped off a  
[chuckles] board

Rueben ends his recount of his experience with a comment or a description of what it felt like when he reached the bottom of the slide and was catapulted into the pool. The first part of the description, introduced by the bolded *it's like*, takes the form of a standard colloquial New Zealand English phrase *far out*. This phrase is usually used to express that something was intense or extreme. In this context Rueben's use of *far out* does not seem to be a retrospective evaluation but a re-enactment of what it felt like or what he thought at the time. In contrast, the use of *it's like* in example 5 appears to be a comment about the situation from

the speaker's modern day perspective. In the example Zach is talking about the protests surrounding the Springbok tour protest movement of 1981.

(5) Zach: but but . just going onto the field and in front of like thirty thousand . rugby fans . and stopping their game **it's like** . fuck man

Here the speaker seems to use an emphatic and elongated *fuck man* to express his respect for the protestors who tried to stop the rugby games by marching onto the pitch. Rather than representing the thoughts of the people involved in the riot, the speaker himself presents his own evaluation of what has happened. In this context, *it's like* serves as a focus marker rather than a quotative, adding emphasis to the following segment.

Overall, the identification of quotatives is usually a relatively straightforward matter as they are marked by a combination of prosodic, performative, grammatical and contextual clues. Nevertheless, there are problematic cases, such as the inclusion of quotes or recounts of written materials and the different uses of *it's like* as well as instances of ambiguous sentence structure and prosodic marking. A discussion of the classification process brings up coding decisions that influence the scope of the item under investigation.

#### 4. Inventory of quotatives in New Zealand English

The corpus of NZE was searched electronically and manually for instances of verbs of quotations and zero quotatives. The classification of ambiguous cases was further confirmed by listening to the recordings. Table 1 shows the result of these searches. The quotatives listed in this table include both present tense and past tense forms of verbs (e.g. *think* and *thought*). Whereas most studies would combine the forms *he/she is like* and *it's like* together in the *be like* category, the two varieties are listed separately below. Many accounts of quotatives also do not mention the use of *like* on its own or appear to have excluded it from the count on the basis that it takes on the meaning of 'for example' in those contexts (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). However, the present corpus includes some examples where *like* was used by itself to introduce quotes, constructed dialogue or performed comments or attitudes (e.g. *it's like other people like: "hey you know pay for my cancer kind of thing"*). In instances where *like* occurred in conjunction with another verb of quotation (e.g. *he said like*), the verb was counted.

Table 1: Quotatives in NZE

Quotative	N	%
Zero	107	30.83
Be like	85	24.49
It's like	43	12.39
Say	34	9.8
Go	33	9.51
Like	18	5.19
Be (all)	12	3.46
Think	11	3.17

Decide	1	0.29
Ask	1	0.29
All	1	0.29
Write	1	0.29
Total	347	100

As the table indicates, the NZE corpus contained 12 different quotative forms. The most commonly occurring one is the zero quotative, closely followed by *be like*. *It's like* is used less than half as often as the zero quotative, and *say*, *go* and *like* are used even less. The remaining six quotative forms put together make up merely 7.79% of all quotatives in the corpus. When combining the numbers for *be like* and *it's like*, as was done in previous studies, the most frequently occurring quotative would be *be like* with 129 occurrences or about 37% of all quotatives found in the data.

These results differ markedly from Baird's (2001) findings for the use of quotatives in interviews with university students recorded in 2000. The most frequently used form by far in Baird's data was *say*, followed by *go* and *be like*. Zero quotatives hardly feature in Baird's data at all, while it is one of the most frequently occurring forms in the present corpus. These differences in the frequency ranking seem rather extreme considering that the current data was collected only five years after Baird's. One explanation for these differences in use could be that this is a case of rapid language change. Alternatively, the differences are the result of the different data collection methods. Thus, the high frequency use of the more standard quotative *say* by participants in Baird's (2001) data from 2000 might be related to the greater formality of being involved in an interview, as opposed to the more informal conversations used in the current study.

Table 2 below compares the use of quotatives in NZE with the results of studies from other varieties of English and across time. Shown here is data from five different varieties of English, namely American English (AmE), Canadian English (CanE), British English (BE), Australian English (AustE) and New Zealand English. The results represent data that was collected between 1990 and 2005, covering a period of fifteen years. The dates given for each variety indicate the year when the data was collected and the studies are sorted as chronologically with the oldest study on the left and the most recent data on the right.

The data for American English were taken from Ferrara and Bell's (1995) study, which looked at the uses of quotatives in a corpus of personal experience narratives by 18-25 year old college students in Texas. Similarly, the British English data and the earlier study of Canadian English are also based on corpora of personal experience narratives told by college students (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999). The figures from the 1995 and 2000 NZE data (Baird 2001), as well as the Australian (Winter 2002) and the 2003 Canadian English (Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004) data are based on three different kinds of interview data: interviews with the researcher, sociolinguistic interviews with 15-16 year olds and interviews between peers aged 10-19 years respectively. It seems possible that the differences in the results presented in the table, especially the differences between the earlier and later CanE and NZE sets, could be related to the different methodologies used in those studies. Thus, the



setting of providing personal experience narratives or being interviewed by a researcher might explain the proportionally high use of *say* and even *go* in those data, whereas interactions between peers or the fact that most participants were university students might be responsible for a frequent use of *be like*. It is likely that the different methodologies have had an impact on the results of these studies and important that these effects are acknowledged; nevertheless the results of those studies represent the only means to be able to compare quotatives across different varieties of English over time. While in the following comparison of the results the methodological differences will not be discussed further, the potential impact of the chosen methodologies need to be borne in mind.

*Table 2: Comparison of quotatives in different varieties of English and across time (shown as percentages)*

	AmE 1990	NZE 1995	CanE 1995	BE 1996	AustE 97-99	NZE 2000	CanE 2003	NZE 2005
Go	25	54	22	18	45	24.6	7	9.51
Say	42	37	36	31	24	56	11	9.8
Be like	23	9	13	18	8	16.6	58	36.88
Ø	n/a	0	20	10	18	0.8	18	30.83
Think	n/a	n/a	4	18	0.4	n/a	2	3.17
Others	10	0	5	5	4	2	5	9.81

When looking strictly at the percentages from left to right across all varieties, there appears to be a steady decline in the use of the quotatives *go* and *say* over the last 15 years. This progression can be seen in particular for those two varieties where data from different years is available, namely Canadian English and NZE. For example, in Canadian English quotative *go* constitutes 22% and *say* 36% of all quotatives in 1995 but merely 7% and 11% respectively in 2003. The use of *be like*, on the other hand, has increased rather substantially, with 13% in the 1995 Canadian data as opposed to 58% in 2003. Assuming that the methodological differences did not have much of an impact on the data, these rather severe changes within the quotative system seem to have occurred relatively rapidly within five to eight years.

The proportional use of *go*, *say* and *be like* across the AmE, 1995 CanE and BE data appears to be very similar. This is particularly obvious when contrasted with the AustE and 1995 NZE data, both of which feature much higher uses of *go* and slightly lower percentages of *be like*. This pattern could suggest that there were differences in the quotative systems between the northern and southern hemisphere varieties of English at the time of data collection for these studies. However, when looking at the most recent NZE and CanE data, the proportions of use seem to be more similar now than they were previously, especially with regard to *go* and *say*. CanE is still leading in terms of the occurrence of *be like*, but now the form is the most frequently occurring quotative in NZE as well. This could indicate that previous differences in the quotative systems between northern and southern hemisphere varieties of English are diminishing. However, more recent data from these varieties of English would be needed to confirm or dismiss this observation. More recent data could also show whether

some varieties were able to maintain their distinctive features, such as the preference for *go* in AustE or *think* in BE.

It is also important to acknowledge that some differences between the 2005 NZE data and the 2003 CanE data remain. The most prominent difference is the markedly high proportion of zero quotatives in the NZE data – 30.83 compared to 18 percent. Note however, that the overall combined proportions of zero quotatives and *be like* are similar for NZE and CanE – 67.71 and 76 respectively. This could suggest that in NZE, zero quotatives are taking over some of the functions of *be like*. A functional analysis of the data is necessary to shed further light on this issue. The NZE data also features a high proportion of use of alternative quotatives which could suggest a greater variability in this variety of English.

## 5. Distribution of quotatives across the three dyad types

The data from the female-female and male-male dyads provides the means for a straightforward gender comparison while the mixed sex interactions can give an indication of the influence of the gender of the interlocutor on a speaker's use of quotatives. Figure 1 illustrates the frequencies of use of the seven most frequently occurring quotatives across the three groups. Since the subsets do not contain the same number of words, absolute numbers of occurrences cannot be used for comparison. Instead, a frequency index was calculated by dividing the number of occurrence of each quotative by the number words overall of the relevant subset. This result was then multiplied by 100, resulting in an overall rate of each item per 100 words within the corpora. Even though quotatives are often multi-word collocations, the corpora were not adjusted accordingly as it seemed the difference would not have a great impact on the results. The corpora were also not adjusted for other collocations or pragmatic devices.

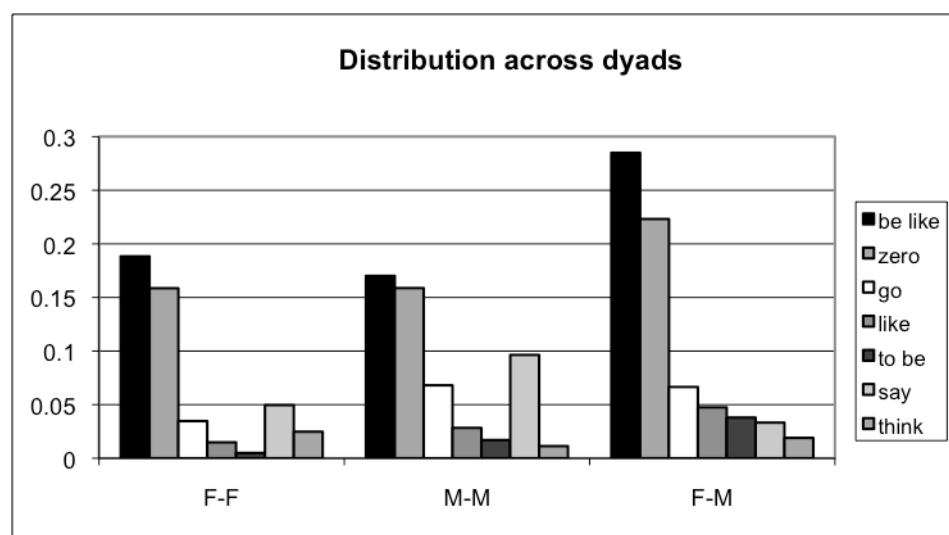


Figure 1: Frequencies of the seven most commonly used quotatives (NZE data)

The data presented here shows that a preference for the *be like* quotative (including *it's like*) is consistent across all three data sets followed by the zero quotative. However, the three sets differ with regard to the less frequently used quotative: for the F-F and M-M groups the third most frequently used quotative is *say*, but for the F-M group it is *go*. Interestingly, quotative

*say* occurs twice as often in the M-M group as in F-F subset, who in turn use it slightly more often than the F-M dyads. Even though these differences may be marginal and not statistically significant, this result for *say* is noteworthy because it was the most frequently used quotative in Baird's (2001) 2000 data. In her corpus male speakers were also the main users of this particular form. This could suggest that in NZE *say* is a feature of male speech.

Taking a closer look at *be like*, it can be noted that this quotative occurs only marginally more often in the female-female interactions than in the male-male corpus. The highest occurrence can be found in the mixed sex group. With a frequency index of about 0.19 in the female subset and 0.17 in the male data the difference between the two groups is indeed rather small – the male subset would need merely 3 more *be like* quotatives in order to close the gap. This result does not reinforce the popular belief that *be like* is a feature of female speech. Instead, it further supports the notion that gender is not a relevant variable when it come to the use of *be like*. The highest occurrence of quotatives overall was found in the mixed sex interactions with a frequency index of 1.03, followed by male-male interactions with a frequency index of 0.55; the lowest frequency index was found in the female-female interactions with 0.48. A closer look at the female-male interactions is required to determine the gender distribution of quotatives within this subset.

Table 3: Distribution in F-M subset (NZE data)

Quotative	Female	Male
Be like	0.45	0.13
Zero	0.21	0.23
Go	0.06	0.07
Like	0.06	0.04
Be	0.07	0.01
Say	0.02	0.04
Think	0.02	0.02
Ask	0	0.01
TOTAL	0.89	0.55

As Table 3 illustrates, female speakers in the mixed sex dyads use quotatives markedly more often, in particular *be like*. This stands in stark contrast to the results of the same sex dyads. Female speakers in female-male conversations use quotatives nearly twice as frequently as female speakers in the same sex set. In addition to the higher occurrence of *be like* and zero quotatives in the female F-M data, females can also be seen to use more *be* quotatives. The male speakers in the mixed sex dyads, on the other hand, use quotatives at very similar frequencies as males in the same sex interactions, with the exception of a lower frequency use of *say*.

A further examination of the spread of the quotatives across the participants reveals that the high frequency use of *be like* among female speakers in the F-M interactions is not the result of all female speakers using this form more. Instead, it is mostly caused by the linguistic preference of a single speaker. This one female speaker has the highest frequency of use among all participants, and she single-handedly is responsible for about 60% of all quotatives in the female subset of the F-M data. In fact, 87% of all quotatives in this subset were

produced by only two of the five female speakers. The quotatives in the male subset are distributed more evenly across four of the five participants, as one speaker did not use any quotatives at all. This result highlights the importance of considering individual variation in the use of certain devices, especially with relatively small groups of speakers. The comparatively excessive use of *be like* by one speaker makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about the use of this form by females in mixed sex dyads. An analysis of a larger corpus involving a greater number of speakers for each group would be needed, to avoid interference effects of individual variation and produce more accurate and reliable results.

When considering the rather stark contrast in the use of *be like* quotatives by the one female speaker as opposed to the others, there seem to be many feasible explanations for this linguistic choice. Bearing in mind the interactive nature of quotatives in general and the status of *be like* as a marker of informality in particular, it is possible that the speaker is using the form as a politeness device to reduce social distance and create interpersonal rapport. The common association of *be like* with female speech could also indicate that the speaker uses this form as a means of gender performance or general identity construction. A more in-depth investigation into the use of quotatives by this speaker might shed further light on this matter.

Overall the data indicates that there are only small gender differences with regard to the use of quotatives, with females in same sex interactions using *be like* and zero quotatives slightly more than male speakers and males in M-M dyads producing more quotatives overall. The results for the female-male interactions were less conclusive. While male speakers seem to use quotatives at similar frequencies when talking to women, the female data is somewhat skewed by the markedly high frequency use of *be like* by one speaker. These differences, though, are so small that it seems safe to assume that there is no correlation between the gender of the speakers and quotative use in NZE.

## 6. Conclusion

The data presented in this paper is based on NZE, and a comparison of the results with previous literature suggest that the quotative systems in many varieties of English have become more and more alike over the last eight to ten years. Data from Canadian English from 1995 and 2003 and NZE data from 1995/1996, 2000 and 2005 illustrate the changes in the quotative systems of the two varieties. The earlier NZE data indicate a high proportion of the *go* and *say* quotatives, while Canadian English features more *be like* forms. This disparity seems to have disappeared in the more recent data from 2003 and 2005, as the use of *go* and *say* has dropped in NZE and the use of *be like* has markedly increased in both varieties. The spread of *be like* as a dominant quotative form from North American English to other varieties of English has also been observed by other researchers (Tagliamonte and Hudson 1999; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004). While the current study provides an initial description of the patterns of use of quotatives in NZE, an investigation of a larger corpus of more recent data is needed to confirm the trends observed here, and to establish functional uses in this variety of English.

The data collected for this study also reveals interesting patterns with regard to gender differences across the three sets. Contrary to popular belief that quotatives in general and the

*be like* form in particular are markers of female speech, the data did not yield any marked differences between the female-female and male-male interactions. The highest proportion of quotatives was found in the female-male conversations – most prominently with regard to *be like*. However, it was found that this result was the product of a single female speaker, highlighting the importance of considering individual variation when making more general claims. Overall, the results did not indicate any major gender differences in the use of quotatives, suggesting that gender is not a prominent variable for the use of quotatives in NZE. Considering the small size of the three groups, an investigation of gender differences in a larger corpus involving more speakers is needed to confirm or contest these trends and to produce more reliable and statistically significant results.

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## **Appendix A: Transcription convention**

[university name] used when real name is being withheld

[laughs] Paralinguistic features in square brackets

. Brief pause of less than a second

+ Pause of up to one second

↑ High rising terminal on declarative

ALL CAPS spoken with emphasis