

**Tagliamonte, Sali A. (2005). *So who? Like how? Just what?: Discourse markers in the conversations of English speaking youth. Journal of Pragmatics, 37 (11), 1896-1915.***

### **Introduction**

Exploration of salient discourse markers:

- *like, just*, intensifiers (*really, very, so* in particular)
- Hasn't been explored in Canadian youth
- Asking:
  - o What is the trajectory of linguistic change?
  - o Is this phenomenon truly linguistic change? Or is it simply a feature of "teen-talk" that distinguishes speakers from older/younger generations?

Use of quantitative method within traditional sociolinguistic variation theory

- Not normally an approach used for looking at discourse markers
- Attempts to adapt these methods to look at innovative features undergoing change in CanE

### **Corpus**

- Conversational data
- 26 Speakers from 10-20 years old (4-5 members/age group)
- Data from 2002-2003
- Investigation was limited to Toronto-born speakers
- Interviewers
  - o 20-22 years old
- Speakers
  - o 10-20 years old
  - o within the same social and familial networks as the interviewers

### **Hypothesis**

- Tagliamonte is working on the hypothesis that "an increase in an item's text frequency is an important indication of ongoing linguistic change". She also hopes to examine how age and sex interact with linguistic patterns of occurrence.

### **Data**

- Table 1 shows the breakdown of the 26 speakers according to sex and age grouping
- In total there were 200,000 words

### **Like**

- The most frequent feature at 9739 times in its non-verb, non-conjunction (non-standard) use

Fig.1

- *Like* occurs before a NP 30% of the time and before a S 23% of the time

- This was also found by Wolgemuth (2003)
- This may indicate that *like* is developing some function in the grammar
- *Like* also introduces a verb 9% of the time
  - These verbs are virtually all encoded with a preterit morphology
- This indicates that *like* may not occur just anywhere as some have suggested

Fig.2

- In every age group females used *like* the most

Fig. 3

- *Like* is clearly used most by 15-16 year olds
- The particular pattern Tagliamonte refers to as “age-grading”
  - Change correlated with a particular time in an individual’s life rather than “percolating” through generations as expected with an incoming grammatical change

***Just***

- This form is not as widely studied
- It occurs 1738 in this corpus
  - Some of these tokens have standard meaning (eg. “They’re just kissing”)
  - Others can have a standard reading of *just* but its use within the context is “somewhat strange” (eg. I *just* stayed home ‘cause someone was taking care of me. And then I was *just* watching TV. And I *just* took a nap”)
    - This suggests an expansion of its use beyond the standard meaning

Fig.4

- More highly circumscribed than *like*
  - 46% of tokens come before a verb
    - indicates ongoing linguistic change

Fig.5

- A steady, incremental increase from youngest to oldest
- This pattern is characteristic of “real” change in progress
- Unlike *like* it is percolating through the generations

Fig.6

- Females are way ahead of males
  - Females tend to lead linguistic change
    - Indicates ongoing linguistic change
- However: There is a reversal in university students
  - So the patterns seen in *just* do not adhere to all characteristics of ongoing change

Questions:

- What kind of change is this?
- What is *just* doing in grammar?
- How do the verbs that *just* precedes compare to verbs without *just*?

## Intensifiers

- In general, young people use them a lot compared to other age groups
- Thought to be increasing in recent times
- Associated with rapid turnover
  - o This makes them an excellent way to track language change and examine trends
- Examined intensifiers that occur with adjectives
- Used an established methodology for extraction
- Also looked at context where they could have been used but were not
  - o Allows us to compare findings with other studies on intensifiers

### Table 2

- 32.5% of the 4296 adjectives which could have been intensified were preceded by intensifiers
  - o This is about 10% higher compared to other studies
  - o Consistent across age groups

### Fig.8

- Intensifier use changes rapidly and constantly so it is important to look at which intensifiers are used by which age groups
- Most frequently used intensifiers were *very*, *really*, and *so*
- Distribution of *really* and *very* are consistent with their use among British youth
  - o Represent typical norms within the youth community
- *So* is close in numbers to *really* and *very* and increases in frequency from the youngest age group up until 15-16 year olds and then drops off

### Fig.9

- Females overwhelmingly use *so* more often from age 13-14 onwards
  - o Once again as seen in other research with females leading linguistic change, this may indicate use of *so* as a linguistic change in progress.

## Quick Summary of Data

<i>Like</i>	- Patterns like a classic example of age grading
<i>Just</i>	- Usage increases incrementally - Clear sex differentiation - Hallmarks of ongoing change
Intensifiers ( <i>so</i> )	- Concentrated among 15-16 yo - No regression to traditional intensifiers - Reversal of sex differences among university level students - Indication that <i>so</i> is expanding to include both male and female speakers

## Summary & Conclusions

- *Just* and *so* appear to be becoming new features of English
  - They represent true change progress
- All of the findings support the idea that the influence of the peer-group during teenage years is monumentally important in terms of linguistic
  - This age group is therefore is very important for studying change
- It is valuable to use a quantitative analysis (proportion and distribution) to examine innovating features
  - Stability or change can be identified only when frequencies of individual forms (despite their possibly having different grammatical functions) are calculated from total words according to individuals or groups
  - However it is still crucial to take into account functional categories in order to determine if the patterns of frequency still hold
- Females lead change, but not in every age group
  - Sex differences are created within the speech community or peer group
- Use of *like* and *just* are not random!
  - This is the type of pattern we would expect if the forms were becoming grammaticalized
    - Is *like* becoming some sort of nominal marker?
    - Is *just* becoming some sort of verbal marker?
  - What were once thought of as discourse markers may be in the process of becoming part of a grammar of some new variety of English
    - This sort of change has been seen previously

## Further Research

- Exploration of hypotheses in which forms change from discourse to grammar
- Looking for similar findings in larger and more socially complex material
- What features might be connected to adolescence in general and linguistic behavior in particular