New quotative markers in spoken discourse

In the last quarter of the 20th century, linguists signalled the use of new quotative markers in several languages. The English be like is the best known example of such a marker. The markers were also noticed as 'new' by native speakers, thus it seems that a real language change had started. The markers were not new in the sense that a new item had entered the language, rather, an existing item has become to be used in a new function, namely as a quotative marker.

In section 1 of this paper, I will present a survey of some of the languages in which such a marker has developed. Examples are taken from corpora, from the literature on quotative markers and were provided by native speakers. In section 2, I propose a typology of the markers and in section 3, I discuss the (difficult) question why languages across the world have acquired such a new quotative marker more or less simultaneously. Section 4 contains some concluding remarks.

1 A survey of quotative markers

1.1 English

Let us start with an example from the Santa Barbara corpus of spoken American English (2000):

(1) American English (Santa Barbara Corpus):
Richie: and I was like oh God, there was a door here before. (232.85 233.37)
Nathan: She's like leave me alone. do I deserve this? (128.75 129.20)

Be like is the best known new quotative marker in English, but there are other forms that seem to be still more recent than be like, namely the verb go and the phrase be all, cf. (2):

(2) American English
a. (Santa Barbara Corpus 575.25 576 10 ff.)
So! Cathy calls me up, and she wants -Jonathan's ph... address
And I go, for what.
(H) She goes well we have to invite him to the New Year's Eve party.
And I go why=
She goes well !Tommy ~Spencer opened his big mouth
And I said, oh.
So you're going to host them, are you?
(H) She goes what do you mean, host them.

b. (Santa Barbara Corpus, 910.68 911.18)
Ricky: He's all <Q okay, come with me come with me Q >
you know.
Rebecca: Okay, alright.
Although it is not possible to determine exactly when *be like* and the other markers started to be used in the context of quotation, there is agreement in the literature that the quotative markers in (1) and (2) are to be considered as a rather recent development. Schourup (1983) was one of the first who noted this use in recorded conversational material. The origin and spreading of these constructions clearly show sociolinguistic stratification. Blyth et al. (1990) were the first to study the use of *like* from a sociolinguistic perspective. The general picture seems to be as follows: the quotative use of *be like* originated in California in the seventies, in particular with young women, ‘Valley girls’, as they were called (cf. Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2007: 212). Later, the new quotatives were found in other social groups throughout the US, but also in the World Englishes. For example, Macaulay (2001) observed *be like* and *go* in the speech of young people in Glasgow, Scotland, cf. (3):

(3) English (Glasgow, Scotland, Macaulay 2001, p. 8-9):
   a. and I’m *like* ‘No that’s sick’
   and Kate *goes* ‘Oh yeah he’s in my big brother’s football team’
   she *went* ‘Who are you going with?’

Macaulay found an interesting variant in his material, namely the combination *be like* or *go* (*like*) with the demonstrative pronoun *that*:

(3) English (Glasgow, Scotland, Macaulay 2001):
   b. I *was like that* ‘On you go’
   she *went like that* ‘Do you no think that’s a bit two-faced?’

The upcoming use of *(be) like* and its variants did not go unnoticed by the speech community itself. In fact there was and is a strong metalinguistic awareness about the use of *(be) like*, and it has strong social connotations, cf. Tannen (1989: 213): ‘In a study of how dialogue is introduced in conversation and fiction, I found use of *be-like* to introduce dialogue to be fairly frequent in the conversational stories of college-age speakers (...). That this locution strikes adult ears as marked is encapsulated by a colleague’s remark that his teenage daughter is a “native speaker of like English”’. Dailey-O’Cain (2000: 75) reports the following connotations: “On the positive side, the use of *like* makes the speaker more ‘attractive’, ‘cheerful’, ‘friendly’, and ‘successful’. However, it is also associated with the speaker seeming less ‘educated’, ‘intelligent’, and ‘interesting’.”

1.2 Other Germanic languages

In Dutch, the new quotative marker *van* ‘from’ was signalled even earlier than English *be like*. Verkuyl (1976) was the first one who wrote a short piece about this use of *van*, and since then, there has been a continued, although not intensive, interest in this phenomenon, see Romijn (1999), Pascual (2003), and the state of the art overview in Foonen et al. (2006).

(4) Dutch: *van* ‘from, of’
   a. Die *denken van* ‘t is wel prima zo.
       They think from it is well good so.
       ‘They think like it’s ok like that’.
   b. Toen had ik zo *zien van* daar wil ik ook aan meedoen.
       Then had I such something from there will I also in participate
       ‘Then I was like I would like to participate in that as well’.
   c. Dat was gebaseerd op de gedachte *van* als de landen zo handelen
       That was based on the thought from if the countries so act
       ‘That was based on the thought “if the countries act like that”’.

Note that in (4c), *van* + complement is the complement of a matrix noun, instead of a verb. This is very common in Dutch. In (4b) the matrix contains ‘had zoiets *van*’, a fixed phrase which is often used when the quoted material pertains to feelings.

In contrast to the Dutch situation, the German quotative marker *so* has been observed by linguists only recently (Androustopoulos 2000, Golato 2000, 2002, Auer 2006) and it seems that its spread in the community is much more restricted than Dutch *van*. Whereas *van* can be heard these days in all age groups and all styles (in particular in informal styles, of course), German *so* is only used by adolescents and is restricted to particular conversational genres and contexts, cf. Golato (2002: 63): “ ‘The German quotative *und ich so* and er *so* ‘and I’m like/and he’s like’ is used to introduce both discourse and gestures as quotables, particularly in story-tellings when materials contributing to the climax of the story [are] quoted’.” One of Golato’s examples is the following:

(5) German (Golato 2000:43, 2002:40): *und er so* and ich so ‘and he like’
   und er so: jaa und ich will mal gucken ob ihr probleme habt.
   ‘And he was like “yeah and I just want to have a look whether you have any problems.”’

Note that the matrix clause in (5) does not contain a verb. According to Golato, this is typical for the German construction: the matrix consists of conjunction *(und* in this case), pronoun and *so*. In the Corpus of Spoken Dutch (CGN), I also found some examples in which the verb is missing, cf. (6):

(6) en hij zo *van* ja je moet morgen maar langskomen van zo.
   and he so from yes you must tomorrow just come along or so.
   ‘And he was like yes you better come along tomorrow or so’.

John Taylor (p.c., july 2007) reports that a South African colleague recently overheard (7) from a young teenage girl:

(7) Hy was *sos*, ‘wat moet ek daaromtrent doen?’
   He was so something ‘what have I about this do.’
   ‘He was like what should I do about this’.

Googling ‘sos’, Taylor found another example: *En ek was sos, ja, whatever*. The pattern *was sos* thus looks like a mix of the English *be like* and German *so*, without wanting to suggest, however, that English or German played any role in this development, and neither did Dutch.
For Peninsular Spanish, Schwenter (1996) mentions the use of a *sea* as a quotation marker:

(12) Spanish (Peninsular, Alicante, Schwenter 1996: 866) *o sea 'or be-SUBJ (d)*

A: ¿por qué ha pasado?
  'but, what happened?'
R: *que ha sonado el teléfono y cuando lo contestaste,=
  'the phone rang and when I answered,'*
  la mujer dice, *o sea*:
  'the woman says, O SEA*
  está, está Paco?
  'is, is Paco there?'
  y luego de repente se ha cortado
  'and then it suddenly got cut off.'

This use of *o sea* as a quotation marker has also been attested in Mexico (Margaret Lubbers, p.c.).

I have no Italian examples, but John Taylor (p.c.) reports that 'tipo' is the quotation marker in this language.

### 1.4 Other European languages

Russian uses *tiпа*, see (13):

(13) Russian (Nadeshda Sintotskaya, p.c.)

A: Э-э, думаете ли вы, что в России есть свободы, что хочешь, - подпишите, a ne
  хочешь/красная - подписи/подписи.
And he says like we have here democracy and freedom, want - sign, if not want - (I will)
  arrest ... (i) had to sign.
And he (policeman) says like we have democracy and freedom here, if you want to, then
  sign (the ticket), if not, then I will arrest you ... (i) had to sign (i).

And even a non Indo-European language like Finnish has developed a new quotation marker, see (14):

(14) Finnish (Karela Oujukangas, p.c.) *niitse, niin.ku, 'as like'; iban et 'quite that'; et is a
  shortened form of *etse 'that'.

a. Se mea-i niin.ku viuh
   "it go-PST.3SG as-like INTERJECTION
   'It went like ... (quick movement)"

b. Mä ol-i-n ihan et
   "I be-PST.1SG quite that wow"
   'I was like "wow!"'

### 1.5 Languages outside Europe

Maschler (2001, 2002) shows that a similar type of innovation as we have seen in
European languages, is going on in Hebrew. The relevant markers here are *ke'ilu* and *kazik*, cf. (15):

(15) Hebrew (Maschler 2001: 315): *ke'ilu 'like', lit. 'as if', kaze 'like', lit. k(е)-ze 'like this'

hu p'tom 'omer li kaze, ... 'h., ... tizamne 'til?
  he suddenly says to me like, u.h., will you marry me?
Maschler signals the same metalinguistic awareness about the use of these markers in Israel as is found for English. Israeli's speak about 'the kazee ke'lu generation', meaning the younger Israelis who employ these expressions frequently.

It is interesting to see that verb final languages like Turkish and Japanese also have a new quotative marker and that this item is placed after the quote, cf. (16) and (17):

(16) Turkish (Deniz Bekesaçlı, p.c.): gibi 'as if, like, similar'
    Pişman ol-du-n gibi birseyler söyledil... regretful be PASTSG like something say-PRES-3SG.
    'He/she was like I'm sorry'...

(17) Japanese (Hiroyuki Yamashita, p.c.): mitai-na 'as if' (cf. Fuji 2006)
    a. Watashi 'onaka saichara' mitai-na.
       I stomach empty like.
       I'm like I'm hungry
    b. Kare-gaichi onasaku-te 'mou hotontoite' mitai-na.
       be-NOM everything nosy-CONJ any more leave alone like.
       He is nosy in everything, and I'm like leave me alone

The phenomenon of the recent development of quotative markers in various languages does not mean that the quotative markers or constructions have been absent in languages before this recent innovation took place. On the contrary, it seems natural for a language to grammaticalize an item into a quotative marker. For African languages, Guldemann (2001) provides a rich documentation, and Matisoff (1973) provides (18) an example for Lahe:

(18) Lahe: Matisoff (1973: 467), qbe 'like, thus, so'
    Te me phe qbe qo pi ve yo.
    Cannot do it - thus said he.

In several languages it was the verb 'to say' which has become a quotative marker, for example the items kua (see 19) and fen (see 20) in the Austronesian languages Duri and Buru:

(19) Duri (related to Tukang Besi) (Klamer 2000: 85)
    Na-kuan-an ambeq-na Lajanak kua "..."
    3-say-Bea father-3Poss Lajanak Quote
    Lajanak said to his father "..."

(20) Buru (Klamer 2000: 76)
    Da prep/s fen, "sita nu kachak"
    It say FEN 3p two arrive
    She said 'The two of them came'

In the context where the matrix sentence already contains a verb of saying (kuan in 19 and prep/s in 20), kua and fen are interpreted as grammaticalized markers. They can introduce direct and indirect speech, cf. Klamer (2000: 71): "When it precedes an intonational break and an actual quote, it is interpreted as a quote marker, but when it precedes the second clause of a sentence without being separated from it by an intonational break, it is interpreted as a complementizer".

In summary, on the one hand, there is nothing new under the sun, as quotative markers have always been present in languages, see also Guldemann & von Roncador (eds., 2002). On the other hand, there is a remarkable recent innovation going on in which languages from different parts of the world participate.

2 An initial typology of quotative markers

Quotative markers, both new and old ones, are taken from the existing linguistic system. Their use as a quotative marker is the result of a grammaticalization process. Inspecting the examples that were presented in section 1, we see that the main sources from which the markers develop are the following:

1. Verbs (of speaking): Tukan Besi kua, Buns fen, Spanish o sea, English be and go.
2. Demonstrative and manner deictic markers: German deictic manner adverbial in, Portuguese asin, Spanish asi, Glasgow demonstrative pronoun that.
3. Quantifying markers: English all, Swedish all 'just, only', Finnish ihan 'totally' and uusin 'only, just'.
4. markers with a simulative meaning: E. like, Fr. genre and comme, Dutch van,
   Swedish typer, Russian tipa, Japanese mitai-na. Lahu qbe 'like, thus'. This fourth group is semantically based and the forms are categorically varied: adverb, noun, and preposition.

The first category is a natural candidate for quotative markers (cf. Lord 1993, ch. 7 for an overview, Loughnane 2005 on di 'say' in Golin). The other three categories are more puzzling, but seem to make sense as well.

The second category consists of (mainly modal) deictic markers. They point indexically to the quotative. They direct the hearer to pay attention to what follows. But to which aspect of the quotative in particular? It has often been observed that direct speech is 'performed', is an 'enactment' or as Clark (2004: 366) calls it, a display. In that perspective, a natural target of the deictic marker is this performative aspect. Boeder (2002: 6) pointed out that in Old Georgian 'direct speech is normally referred to by modal pronominals like sreer 'thus' where the pronoun is cataphoric and refers to the subsequent direct speech, or rather: to one of its aspects that has still to be determined (is it its propositional content or rather its locutionary aspect, 'how s/he put it?'). My answer would be that it is indeed the locutionary aspect, the 'how s/he put it'.

The third category of quotative markers consists of forms with a quantifying meaning like all', only', 'nothing but'. In my view, these markers can be related to the aspect of involvement of the speaker, who indicates that the reported speech, and with it the situation it was part of, can be totally characterized by what follows.

The speaker indicates how impressive the quote and the situation was, which, at the same time, makes it noteworthy for the hearer. In direct speech, the speaker has to give proof of the strong impact of what was said (thought, felt, done) by dramatic re-enactment. This aspect has been pointed out by several authors like, for example Tannen (1989), who calls this type of language use 'animation', and Clark & Gerrig (1990) who use the term 'demonstrations'.
3 Why new quotative markers?

The languages which developed new quotative markers in the last quarter of the 20th century were very well able to mark direct speech before they had these new markers. The verbs for speaking or thinking were probably the unmarked way to introduce direct speech. Why, then, this international new trend in language? If there is an explanation, we should try to find it outside of language, in developments in society.

One natural candidate are the new media. In the last 30 years, the impact of visual media has increased enormously, in particular among young people. One could speculate that this had an impact on the demands on narrative retelling: be as visual and dramatic as possible. One way to reach that goal is to use the direct rhetorical style, and this has stimulated the use of new quotative markers in different languages in parallel. Streeck (2002: 595) has formulated this idea as follows:

What seems to have happened is that, for reasons difficult to determine, the mimetic mode of narrative representation has gained new popularity in the U.S. and other societies, a mode of reporting experience and events that favors re-enactments, however stylized and brief, over descriptions. How massive this trend is – even how real it is – is difficult to ascertain. We would probably agree, however, that speakers are more likely to say "and I was like 'what is this?'" instead of "and I wanted to know what it was," than they were, say, 20 years ago. In this sense, there is a trend or a tendency.

In fact, Streeck only explains the increased preference for direct over indirect speech, he does not explain why new markers were needed. A more recent and more concrete proposal has been formulated in Tagliamonte and D’Arcy (2007: 211). In the last 65 years or so, there has been an increase in telling stories in which narrators focus on "a running stream of their own inner thought processes (...)" The explanation we would like to offer is that the rising stylistic option of inner monologue in narrative of personal experience was expanding before be like entered the system, setting the scene for a new development. The data that Tagliamonte and D’Arcy analyzed support the idea that be like followed the increase of 'inner dialogue' in spoken discourse. It would be interesting to see, whether analyses of corpora in other languages support this idea as well. However, if we look at German so, it seems that the context of a reported gesture is the typical original context, which would mean that so enters the system via a different functional route.

4 Conclusion

It will be clear that this short survey of new markers is only a first step. In future research, a more systematic survey should be made. Whether a convincing explanation for the simultaneous worldwide development of new quotative markers can be given is questionable, but it should be given a try. Analysis of corpora can be helpful in this respect: if we know which contents are typical for the initial uses
of the new quotative markers, then we have a better basis for discussing the social forces that might have played a role in the observed innovation. Further research should also pay attention to the syntagmatic context of the new quotative markers. It has been observed that they are typically followed by a pause and that the quote itself typically starts with an interrogation. What can we conclude from these concomitant features? To what extent do they fit together in a ‘quotative construction’? ‘Interactional linguistics’, as presented in Günthner and Imo (2006) seems to be an interesting paradigm for future research into the fascinating phenomenon of direct speech in modern spoken discourse.

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Deixis in Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit


Dieser einfachen Vorstellung hält Bühler mit der Analyse deiktischer Ausdrücke eine Kommunikations- und damit Sprachtheorie entgegen, derzufolge neben die Gruppe der Ausdrücke, mit denen Benennungen, Charakterisierungen und Identifizierungen von Gegenständen oder Sachverhalten vorgenommen werden, solche sprachlichen Zeichen treten, die eine Orientierungsfunktion für Sprecher und Hörer im interaktionalen Raum übernehmen: die deiktischen Ausdrücke oder Zeigwörter: „[D]ie geformten Zeigwörter […] steuern den Partner in zweckmäßiger Weise. Der Partner wird aufgerufen durch sie, und sein suchender Blick, allgemeiner seine suchende Wahrnehmungstätigkeit, seine sinnliche Rezeptionsbereitschaft wird durch die Zeigwörter auf Hilfen verwiesen, gestenartige Hinweise und deren Äquivalente, die seine Orientierung im Bereich der Situationsumstände verbessern, ergänzen.“ (Bühler 1934:1056)

Ihre orientierende Funktion erhalten die Zeigwörter Bühler zufolge durch ihre Eigenschaft, eine Origo zu etablieren, von der aus sie wie Wegweiser funktionieren: „Von der Origo des anschaulichen Hier aus werden sprachlich alle anderen Positionen gezeigt, von der Origo jetzt aus alle anderen Zeitpunkte.“ (Bühler 1934:107)

Erste analytische Komplikationen treten ein, wenn die Origo nicht mehr das Hier-and-Jetzt des Sprechers ist, sondern wenn sekundäre Origen (den Ausgangspunkt für deiktische Zeighandlungen bilden). Bühler führt die Unterscheidung zwischen der Deixis ad os autor und der Deixis am Phantasma ein; im ersten Fall bildet das