

The sociolinguistics of a short-lived innovation: quotative *all*

Sociolinguistic research on the U.S. quotative system has focused on a few, by now well-researched, variants, such as *be like* and *go* (Buchstaller 2004, Cukor-Avila 2002, Singler 2001). In this paper, we focus on the little-studied development of quotative *all*, as in (1):

(1) And she was **all** "*Were you in the church?*" and I was **all** "*yeah*".

Quotative *all* was first mentioned as being used by California adolescents in 1982 (Alford 1982), and recently compared with its adverbial intensifier use in Rickford et al. (2005). We investigate how much the quotative system of young Californian speakers has changed within the last fifteen years.

A distributional analysis of the quotative system across real time reveals a startling cross-over pattern: In data sets collected by Wimmer (1990) and by Carmen Fought in 1994, *all* is the predominant variant. However, by 2005 it has given way to an overwhelming preponderance of quotative *like*. We use a two-pronged method to trace the trajectory of quotative *all* in recent diachrony.

- VABRUL runs on real-time data spanning the years from 1990-2005.
- A new accountable search tool developed in collaboration with Google, which tracks the normalized frequency of occurrence for *all* per year in a corpus of internet newsgroups.

A differential analysis taking into account apparent and real time perspectives supports the conclusion that the use of quotative *all* has decreased. In the 1990-1995 data, *all* is categorically constrained by age, being used only by the high school students (46% among the quotative options) but not at all by the college-age speakers. By 2005, however, *all* has fallen back to below 10% and the younger cohort uses it even less than the college age speakers. Furthermore, *all* shows an important shift in constraints, in terms of ranking and direction of the constraints. Our Google searches confirm a rise-fall pattern of *all* from 1992-2005. We hypothesize that after a brisk rise in the 1990s, the overall use of quotative *all* is in decline.

Another finding is that *all* and *like* alternate as the primary *quotatives* across time whereas the other variants stay comparatively stable. The extent of the shift from *all* to *like* shows up in the development of the form *all like*. Wimmer's (1990) corpus contains no *all like* tokens but by the mid-1990s (Fought's corpus), one token of *all like* has emerged. In 2004/5, *all like* is the primary sequence in which quotative *all* is used (15 out of 23 *all* tokens), and the only one used by the younger speakers. Tracing the pattern of *all like* in real time therefore suggests that *all* has given way to *like* over the past years. The rise and fall of quotative *all* provides insight from language change in progress for similar short-term innovations and their actualization in earlier English (cf. *stinten* 'to stop V-ing' in Middle English).

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