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. stőten ‘to stop V-ing’ in Middle English).