Like and African American English: Factors and Implications of Language Shift

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2. Abstract

In this study, I look at the vernacular uses of *like* and their shift into African American English. *Like* and AAE both possess their own extensive sets of ideologies, which would seem to be in conflict for a person using them, and thus, I asked the question of whether *like* had shifted into AAE despite these ideas, and if so, what kinds of social factors may have played a role in the shift. This question was explored through the use of interviews and surveys conducted at Westover High School, a high school in Albany, GA. These methods sought to understand the social structure of the school, where interviewees felt they stood within that structure, their opinions on their language use and that of the people around them, and their opinions on AAE and *like* in particular. Through this study, it was found that *like* did indeed shift into AAE, even to the point where grammatical change was evident. Additionally, it was determined that race may not at this point play a part in the use of *like*, and that the form has fully shifted into AAE. I also found that the phrase *it's like* may have frozen to form a new discourse marker. Finally, I took a closer look at the use of the focuser *like* in order to define it more carefully, and concluded that, with this new definition, the approximative use can be included within the focuser.

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4. Background

4.1. The Meanings and The Uses of *Like*

The word *like* has gained much attention, both within and without the linguistic community. *Like* itself has a broad range of semantic functions, which can account for some of the extensive amount of attention it has received. The Oxford English Dictionary gives proof of this fact, listing various meanings of the word, which has a history that stretches back to attestations as far back as Old English spoken at the end of the first millennium (OED). Although the OED offers many definitions, the precise range of meanings of the word, even within its uses in Standard American English (SAE), is difficult to characterize. The following examples include the major "standard" uses of *like* within SAE.

1. a.Verb: You LIKE people, you don't LIKE people. (TT5, Corpus Data)
   b. Noun: She has odd LIKES and dislikes.
   c. Adverb: They're not really LIKE me. (QH3, Corpus Data)
   d. Conjunction: I feel LIKE it's more of a social thing. (SB4, Corpus Data)
   e. Suffix: Does anyone have anything with mop-LIKE properties?

With these prescriptive uses in mind, it is reasonable to additionally say that the vernacular uses of *like* that are the subject of this paper (and are the uses of *like* that I refer to for the rest of the paper) have proven difficult to characterize and define for linguists as they have studied the word over the last three decades. Among these vernacular uses, I first note the difference between the quotative *like* and the non-quotative forms of *like*.

The main function of quotative *like*, is as a marker that introduces direct speech or thought within a conversation (Dailey-O'Cain 2000). There can also be a performative aspect to the use of the quotative *like*, in which the "quoted" material is non-lexical. The following examples show the use of the quotative *like* as it is used in these purposes.

2. a. My sister WAS LIKE, "What are you wearing?" (AP9, Corpus Data)
   b. You'll probably BE LIKE "Gah", stuff you saying and whatnot. (DH2, Corpus Data)
   c. He WAS LIKE "Naw, don't do this don't do that, you gon' look crazy…" (QH3, Corpus Data)
   d. Everybody WAS LIKE "You talk just like a white girl." (SB6, Corpus Data)
   e. It's like kind of weird when they say hey to me, I'M LIKE "whoa." (SB4, Corpus Data)

This form is realized as *be + like*, and it is this form that most overtly shows a grammatical purpose, acting as a synonym for other expressions used in speech reports, such as *said*, *thought*, or *asked*.

The non-quotative uses of *like*, on the other hand, are more varied in nature and difficult to define. D'Arcy (2007) divides the use of the non-standard *like* into four categories, including the quotative complementizer, discussed above, the approximative adverb, the discourse marker, and the discourse particle. In this paper, the latter three will be discussed within the group of non-quotative *like*, as well as within each of their individual categories. Examples of each of these three forms follow.

3. Approximative Adverb:
   a. It's LIKE 45 minutes up to Orlando and down to Miami. (QH3, Corpus Data)
   b. I got LIKE 9 brothers, 3 sisters. (SW7, Corpus Data)
   c. Most of my friends are black, I have LIKE one or two people outside of my race that I talk to. (TT5, Corpus Data)
4. Discourse Marker:
   a. LIKE, I think I understand what you're saying. (QH3, Corpus Data)
   b. But LIKE, when I'm with different groups of people as far as race I wouldn't change how way I talk, you know? (TT5, Corpus Data)
   c. LIKE my 9th grade year, I was always with the seniors. (AP9, Corpus Data)
5. Focuser (Discourse Particle):
   a. My mom, she talks, LIKE, "proper." (QH3, Corpus Data)
   b. That's what I like about LIKE Florida. (QH3, Corpus Data)
   c. I was like, thinking of LIKE the *new*, instead of the old and already happened. (QH3, Corpus Data)

The approximative adverb is used as a way of approximating amounts, and is capable of being glossed over as *approximately*, *about*, or *around*. This adverb is also capable of being used as a hedge, indicating a slight disconnection between the meaning of the proposition and its truth in the world. Hedging is used to indicate uncertainty about a proposition rather than committing to it in its most forceful form (Huang 2007).

The discourse marker is one of a group of connecting words in English discourse, which signals a relationship between parts of discourse. This can include acting as a way to introduce examples and sustain discourse (Dailey-O'Cain 2000). Additionally, the functions of the discourse marker *like* can include marking a boundary at the beginning of syntactic segments, due to its place in the adjunct position of a CP, and connecting the portions it marks. This use of *like* is in a class with other words such as *well*, *you know*, and *then* (D'Arcy 2007).

Finally, the focuser *like*, or the discourse particle in D'Arcy 2007, contributes meaning through its function as a highlighting device, adding non-contrastive focus to the words it precedes (Dailey-O'Cain 2000).

The earliest attestation of a *like* used adverbially is from the early17th century, in Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors* (1623), while the earliest discourse marker usage noted appears in 1778 (OED). The quotative complementizer is first attested in 1982 in the song Frank Zappa's song "Valley Girls". With this wide range of dates, it is clear that the word *like* and its many meanings and purposes have been developing for a very long time. However, today, many people believe that the vernacular uses of *like* are the creation of the Valley Girls in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

> *Yesterday I discovered a plot to overthrow the English language. It turns out that a verbal virus has been unleashed on our culture that threatens to destroy nearly 10,000 years of oral communication. This little linguistic black plague has infected nearly everyone in Generation Y, and it's only four letters long: L-I-K-E.* (Rank 2004)

In modern usage, *like* is associated with a certain stigma. Although the above is a particularly strong opinion on the word, this stigmatized view of *like* is not uncommon. The many attitudes surrounding *like* have made it an especially fascinating subject for several linguists, who have disproved many of the common misconceptions through their research over the past thirty years. In order to begin to address the subject of this paper, it is necessary to understand the social attitudes that exist towards *like*, as well as the information that linguists have found as it confirms or contradicts these attitudes.

In a study performed by Dailey-O'Cain, a matched-guise test was used to get an idea of the perceived attributes of a person based on a one-minute recording. Eight recordings were prepared, and the participants in the study listened to either the original recording, which possessed 12-15 occurrences of *like*, or the recording with each of the *like*s removed. The participants were then asked to rate the speaker on nine traits, including "attractiveness," "cheerfulness," "educatedness," "friendliness," "interestingness," "intelligence," "reliability," "responsibleness," and "successfulness." Dailey-O'Cain found that the use of *like* was associated with people seeming more attractive, cheerful, friendly, and successful. However, using *like* was also associated with seeming less educated, intelligent, and interesting (Dailey-O'Cain 2000). Additionally, according to this study by Dailey-O'Cain the use of *like* is often associated with women, and young people specifically, despite research showing that overall, there is no statistically significant difference in use between male and female speakers. Also, although young people do tend to use *like* more than older speakers, this does not mean that older speakers do not use it at all. D'Arcy takes note of older speakers in Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, as well as those in the United States, using *like*.

Although the Oxford English Dictionary refers to the vernacular uses of *like* as a meaningless interjection, linguists have found that *like* is used regularly and does have a function. The word is culturally salient to the point where online articles exist detailing how to effectively avoid using *like* and the opinions that surround it,

including a WikiHow page titled "How to Stop Saying the Word 'Like'," [1] which states "Know that using the word 'like' a lot makes you sound uncertain or unsure of yourself." In 1975, Lakoff discussed the idea that women speak in a certain way in order to reinforce an idea of their subordinate role in society. This way of speaking included hedges, tag-questions, and other methods of seeming to question one's own assertion. This idea and the idea that women use *like* more than men contributed to the belief that people who use *like* are less certain of the statement they are making (D'Arcy 2007).

Many of these ideologies were bundled up into the perceptions of Valley Girls, a stereotype of middle-class young women in southern California that developed and became popular in the 1980s. This social group was characterized as "ditzy" and "superficial," and came to be associated with the use of Valspeak, a sociolect that notably used *like*. One common misconception about *like* is that it is one word that is being recycled repeatedly in conversations. This misconception often cites Valley Girls as the original users of the vernacular forms of *like*, and their rise in prominence in the 1980s as the reason it spread to the rest of English-speakers. However, only one form of *like* can be attributed to this speech community. The quotative *like* is first attested in southern California in the early 1980s, and represents the continued process of language change in this new grammaticalization. However, the other forms of *like* discussed in this paper, as mentioned above, have a long history in the English language.

As discussed above, the notion that *like* doesn't have a meaning at all has been proven baseless, as linguists have found not only a variety of meanings that the word is associated with, but also defined the regularity with which *like* appears in these contexts. Furthermore, although there is a great increase in the number of people using *like*, notably in adolescents and young adults, as shown by Dailey-O'Cain (2000), this merely reflects the natural process of language innovation and variation. Young people tend to lead trends in popularizing features, which then

[1] http://www.wikihow.com/Stop-Saying-the-Word-%22Like%22 The website takes note of the various grammatical environments in which *like* appears, showing awareness of the versatility of the word, but despite this, the attitudes that it represents overshadows the utility of the word. It also mentions the variety of people who say it, including "teachers, professors, even President Obama."

spread to the older generations. Although there is a significant difference in age group related populations, *like* does not appear to be an age-graded feature that people grow out of. To learn more about the use of *like* across lines of gender, D'Arcy (2007) performs additional analysis and finds that there is some difference in production. That is, there is a statistically significant preference for women to use the quotative and the discourse marker more than men, but the use of the approximator is not favored statistically by either gender. Finally, men produced the discourse particle more than women. When all forms of *like* are discussed, there is not a statistically significant difference in favor of either gender.

Overall, *like* is a part of English with a rich variety of meanings and possible environments. It is also very culturally salient, due to its association with a variety of traits, although its actual production differs greatly from many of the perceptions people hold.

4.2. African American English

African American English is a dialect of English, spoken largely, but not exclusively, by African-Americans. This dialect has been the subject of study for over a century, from the writings of African-American authors who wished to accurately portray their experience in the language they spoke, to the Ebonics controversy of the 1990s, in which a school board ruled that Ebonics was a separate language, and that classes should be taught with this difference in mind.

Although its origins are still disputed, many linguists believe that African American English arose out of one of the creoles formed due to the Trans-Atlantic African slave trade, which brought many West African people and their languages into close contact with one another, as well as with the speech of British traders. Pidgins necessary for working closely together developed and were later creolized, with the West African languages forming the substrate, and English as the superstrate (Rickford 1999). Later on, the creole developed into a dialect that was spread geographically by migrations of African-Americans throughout the history of slavery, the Civil War, and other economic movements. Because of the prevalence of

segregation, both official and unofficial, AAE had the opportunity to develop as a separate dialect associated with a single ethnic group. In his studies, notably one in 2010, Labov found that residential segregation is a major factor in the use of features of AAE. Findings such as these have led to one of the major questions about African American English within sociolinguistics: Is the dialect converging or diverging with SAE? The question remains a polarizing one for the linguists who study the dialect.

In the following section, some of the main grammatical characteristics will be briefly discussed.

4.2.1. Characteristics of AAE

Because AAE is one of many dialects of English, and because it is geographically widespread, it shares many characteristics with other American dialects, notably Southern American English. Many of the characteristics that are distinctive of AAE are grammatical, including its tense and aspect system, rather than phonological. Considering this knowledge and the fact that this study was conducted in southern Georgia, this section focuses on grammatical features of AAE.

Copula deletion: AAE may delete the copula "be" in present tense usage. Additionally, if the copula was originally stressed, or if it is a situation in which the SAE counterpart could not be contracted, then the copula may not be deleted. The copula is not deleted in situations that are marked for tense or negation, since those markers are attached to the copula, as shown in the following examples from Rickford 1999.

6. a. He Ø tall.
   b. He is tall.
7. a. They Ø running.
   b. They are running.
8. a. He Ø talkin'.
   b. He is talking.

Habitual "be": African American English also has an aspectual marker that is absent from Standard American English. Some Niger-Congo languages, much like the creoles that arose from them to later develop into AAE, use the same preverbal marker to indicate habitual aspect as for the progressive aspect (Holm 1991). In the case of AAE, this preverbal marker is the word "be". However, the *be* of the habitual aspect is a frozen form, whereas the auxiliary *be* of the progressive aspect is subject to copula deletion. Examples of the habitual "be", a use of "be" that denotes that an action occurs with relative frequency, in contrast with the present progressive are given from Lisa Green's 1993 dissertation.

9. a. Bruce Ø crying.
   b. Bruce BE crying.
10. a. Mice Ø squeaking.
    b. Mice BE squeaking.
11. a. Bruce Ø wearing a hat with a hole in the top.
    b. Bruce BE wearing a hat with a hole in the top.

Verbs unmarked for 3rd person: The third person present tense *–s* ending can be absent on verbs, yielding forms such as "He walkØ" rather than "He walks", and "She don't do that" rather than "She doesn't do that."

Existential Constructions: In AAE, "it is" can replace "there is" or "there are" as a general statement of the presence of something. For example:

12. a. I feel IT'S like a lot of division. (SB4, Corpus Data)
    b. IT'S a school up there. (Labov et al., 1968)
    c. IT'S my brother in the front row. (Smitherman 1985)
    d. IT'S my momma right there. (Smitherman 1985)

4.2.2. Social Factors Affecting the Use of AAE

Studies regarding the use of African American English have taken note, not only of the features in use, but also their distribution and the attitudes surrounding them. In looking at such data, researchers have found that, although the sociolect is often attributed to poor, uneducated African-Americans, factors affecting its usage vary far more. First, it is important to note that not every African-American uses the forms mentioned above, and that there is a range of use within those who do. That

is, those who do speak AAE do not use its features consistently (Rickford 1999). In general, the convention used for papers on AAE is that they take note not only of the features used, but the percentage of usage compared with their SAE counterparts.

For example, studies have shown that African-Americans of all classes and socioeconomic groups, as well as people who are not African-American, may speak the dialect. In Speicher 1992, 16 African-Americans affiliated with a university are interviewed, and each defines his or her relationship with the dialect independently, demonstrating that there is no single approach to understanding its significance to speakers.

One notable social phenomenon however, is that AAE is generally spoken within African-American communities, whether the speakers are able to communicate in another dialect or not. That is, the greatest determiner of which dialect a speaker uses, if given the choice, is the dialect of the interlocutors in a specific discourse In his study on the Sea Islands off the coast South Carolina and Georgia, Rickford (1999) found that what he called "social distance" was a significant factor in the differences exhibited in his informants, rather than geography or socioeconomic difference. This social difference was created largely by segregation on the island during the informants' lifetime.

However, throughout the nation, to this day, residential segregation is still a major factor determining the society in which African-Americans live. Labov (2010) takes note of it in his paper when he observes that AAE is diverging from other dialects by not participating in regional sound changes that are occurring in neighboring vernaculars. He connected this linguistic situation with the fact that residential segregation has not decreased significantly in the last 40 years, and that it, in combination with increasing poverty, is a major factor in the separation of AAE from the rest of the linguistic communities of the United States, and its continuing divergence from standard American English.

In addition to the geographic and social divisions between African-Americans and their counterparts, there is yet another social factor within the AAE speaking community that encourages its use among its members. There is the idea that speaking and acting in a certain manner lends authenticity to a person as member of

this community, creating an in-group distinction for those who conform. Historically, there has been pressure on African-Americans to be able to perform the roles associated with "whiteness" as well as "blackness", especially in order to attain success outside of their immediate community. However, if a person does this too well, it is common for the label of "acting white" or "talking white" to be applied and to be looked negatively upon, as though the person in question were intentionally removing himself from the African-American community. This phenomenon has implications for education as well, but for this paper, it is important to note that for this reason, in order to maintain in-group status, many African-American youth feel may feel motivated to omit features of language associated with "talking white" in order to avoid negative peer pressure (Ogbu 2004).

Some would argue that African American English exists in a diglossic relationship with Standard American English (Mufwene 1997). AAE is the low language of homes and friends, whereas SAE is the high language reserved for business and education. The distinction of prestige outside of the community is reserved for speakers of SAE, adding a value to those people who are able to speak "proper English" fluently. Alternatively, AAE is often devalued even within the African-American community, who say that the inability to speak "properly" is one of the things holding African-Americans back in the world (Cosby 2004). There is even an unwillingness to recognize the dialect as systematic and logical; instead, many people simply state that "talking black" means using slang or swearing.

These perceptions, which counter those that promote the use of AAE over SAE in order to be a part of the community, function as part of a complex set of ideas on the use of AAE. Part of the ambiguity stems from the lack of singular definition for "talking black" or "talking white". This will be demonstrated later in the paper, in which people who use features defined by the linguistic community as AAE talk about how they have been told that they "talk white".

4.3. On Sociolinguistic Mechanisms of Linguistic Variation and Shift

Eckert (1989) discusses the differences between Jocks and Burnouts in a Detroit suburb, outlining some of the distinctions that the high school students create for themselves, and how they perform their identity in their dress, activities, and speech. This study helped initiate the third wave of sociolinguistic variation studies, in which the use of specific phonological variants helps index students into their social groups. Studies such as these have played a major role in understanding motivations for linguistic change. Rather than placing people in previously formed categories and observing their linguistic behavior along those lines, Eckert observed how the students categorized themselves and saw how this information fit with their use of linguistic features. The third wave of sociolinguistics does not restrict itself to the macro-sociological variables of socioeconomic class, education, or gender. Rather it examines the ways in which sociological categories and ideological stances that are specific to a particular setting determine the linguistic choices of speakers. Eckert's study investigates the social structures of the school where she was doing research, and demonstrates that linguistic features could be chosen as a way to place oneself along the spectrum of identities for students at the school.

In the study presented here, a combination of ethnographic and linguistic methods were used in order to try to come to an understanding of the role identity might be playing in the speech of young African American students. Because the salience of the idea of "acting white" is already present and partly tied to use of language, understanding the ways in which constructing identity around linguistic and non-linguistic traits was very useful in preparing for the study.

5. Experimental Section

5.1.Research Question

Like is a form that has received extensive attention within the linguistic community as linguists have worked to understand the many meanings it can take on. It has shifted from being a largely stigmatized word in its vernacular uses to being a seemingly ubiquitous part of English. This study attempts to understand several questions regarding *like*'s relationship to AAE.

Because of the conflicting social pressures at work within AAE, notably the stigma against "talking white", and the culturally relevant image of a "Valley Girl" using the word *like*, this paper questions whether *like* has shifted from WEV into AAE, and if so, to what extent. The paper will look at *like* within each of its distinctions. Additionally, this research seeks to understand what some of the social factors affecting the shift may have been, as well as what the perspectives on the word *like* are.

Like was chosen as the lens to examine variation through because, much like AAE, it is host to a variety of language ideologies, but it also carries many meanings, making it possible to look at both the social aspects and the distribution of the word itself. Furthermore, it is hoped that through understanding this phenomenon, more information on the changes occurring in AAE will come to light. Because the ideologies surrounding *like* are relatively recent, this is also an opportunity to analyze a linguistic shift in progress.

5.2. Hypothesis

Like has shifted into AAE, despite the social factors listed above, but the extent to which it has shifted is determined by the individual's attitudes towards those factors. Thus, a speaker who exhibits more of the speech traits of AAE will be one who is more connected to the African-American community and thus wishes to avoid being identified as someone who "acts white", and will exclude white speech

traits, such as *like*, more. Otherwise, speakers who feel less connected to this community will use *like* more than their counterparts.

Moreover, the quotative *like* is likely to be the form that has shifted the most, because of its less opaque role within grammar as a method of expressing reported speech and thought. Because its function is more overt, the quotative *like* may avoid some of the stigma that claims that *like* is meaningless.

5.3. Methods

In order to determine whether *like* had shifted, two studies were conducted. I interviewed nine African-American students at Westover High School in Albany, Georgia in order to gain understanding of the social structures of the school and their families, as well as to collect tokens of *like* as they occurred in informal conversation. This location was chosen because it was my alma mater, where I had experience with the general social landscape, and connections to the administration and faculty, yielding access to the student population. However, by nature of the gap in time between the students and I, the connection was to the school itself, and not to the students.

Second, each student who was interviewed, as well some who were not interviewed, were asked to complete an online survey asking questions about their use of *like* and AAE. The high school students interviewed and surveyed were seniors, adding more social perspective as students who know the school and their friends well and as students who were preparing to leave.

This study attempted to combine methods in order to gather ethnographic data about the social milieu of the school and where the student placed him- or herself within that milieu, as well as quantitative data on the use of the word *like*. With this, the qualitative information gleaned from interviews could be used to aid in analyzing the data.

In each interview, I asked students to tell me first about themselves, their families, and their communities, so that we could start off with a topic with which they were familiar and so that they could become comfortable with being

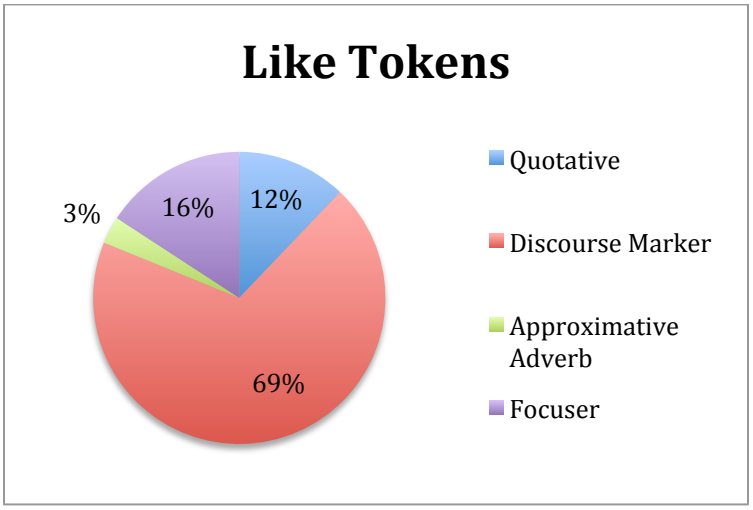
interviewed. Next, I shifted into discussing the social structure of the school, asking the students about their friend groups, popularity within the school, and where they fit into the whole system. Finally, we talked about speech and about the students' perception of their own speech. I asked first about their perceptions of what it means to "talk white" and "talk black", and where they fell on the spectrum of speech. I also asked about their perceptions on the word *like*, their use of it, and their perceptions of people who use it. In order to affect the production of *like* as little as possible, I saved discussion about language broadly and *like* specifically until the end of the interviews.

6. Results

6.1. *Like* Distribution

After interviewing students, each of the interviews was transcribed, and every occurrence of *like* was placed into a corpus of data, including information about the token itself, as well as the person who produced it. The initial results were totaled and compared across the types of *likes* in order to get an idea of the proportions in which the vernacular *like* occurs. These results are depicted in Chart 5.1.

Chart 5.1 Production of *Like* Tokens



Next, the results were divided according to gender, and the results are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 *Like* Tokens by Gender

Type	Male	Female	Total
Quotative	11	45	56
Discourse Marker	206	113	319
Approximative Adverb	8	6	14
Focuser	52	20	72
Total vernacular "likes"	**277**	**184**	**461**

This data shows a great difference between male and female production of the quotative *like*. Male participants however led in production of the discourse marker and focuser by a great margin. Although the male participants produced approximative adverbs more than female participants, the numbers are very close, and once the difference in number of participants is taken into consideration, the difference is completely negligible.

The data from this table is mostly consistent with data obtained by D'Arcy (2007), in which she found that women produced quotative *like* significantly more than men, and that men produced the discourse particle *like*, which I label here as the focuser, significantly more than women. In her observations, male and female participants produce the approximative adverb almost equally, with a slight edge to the females, which is similar to the data obtained here. Finally, the discourse marker data that D'Arcy obtained has approximately equal discourse marker production across gender, with slightly more female usage than male, which is very different from the data obtained here.

In Table 5.2, the relative percentages of types of *like* are presented and divided by gender. That is, within the total production of vernacular *like*s by each gender, the percentage of each type is represented here. This shows, for example, that nearly a quarter of the occurrences of *like* in the female participants were quotative, whereas only about four percent of the *like*s were quotative for the male participants. This data is worth remarking upon, showing that the great difference in discourse markers and focusers across genders is actually proportionally closer than one might initially think based on the previous table, though those percentages for each are still very distant. It also confirms the observations from above about the greater tendency to use the quotative *like* by females than males, and the similarity across the genders in the use of the approximative adverb.

Table 5.2 *Like* Token Percentage by Gender

Type	Male (%)	Female (%)
Quotative	3.97	24.46
Discourse Marker	74.37	61.41
Approximative Adverb	2.88	3.26
Focuser	18.77	10.87

In order to get an idea of who was using *like* the most without biasing it towards the people who spoke the most, the number of *likes* per thousand words was calculated for each participant and collected into Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 *Like*s/1000 words for Each Participant

Participant	Likes/1K	Gender
QH3	80.4	m
SB4	53.4	m
TT5	40.3	f
AP9	29.8	f
DH2	29.2	m
TB1	27.1	m
SW7	19.2	m
KS8	16.4	f
SB6	15.6	f

This data was noteworthy, because contrary to the perception possessed by many people, including the students interviewed for this study, the males overall said *like* more than the females. The average number of *like*s per thousand words for males and females respectively was 48.2 and 26.0. Even the male participant who used *like* the least used it more than two of the female participants. Additionally, there is significantly less variation in usage among the females, which would be

expected, since the girls were all close friends, whereas there was more diversity in social groups of the male participants.

This diversity was evident in some of the remarks made by some of the participants. Participant 3, the male participant with the greatest number of *like*s overall, as well as in the metric given above, introduced himself as someone who is different from most others at the school.

> *I guess you know, ever since, I been different from everybody else, you know. Like, my whole high school year, I was like, thinking of like the new, instead of the old and already happened....I got my hair cut into like the arrow shaped Mohawk and everyone thought like "Oh my God why did you do that?" and all that, and I was like "Psh, cause I wanted to so you know," cause like my mom said like, I could do anything as long it don't get me to jail or locked up or involve the police. So you know I took that to heart.* (QL3, Corpus Data)

As someone who had moved from a more diverse community to the more homogenous Albany, he talked about having a diverse group of friends, loving anime, and intentionally altering his appearance to look different from everyone else. He was also the only participant who did not plan on going to college after high school, but instead hoped to go into the military in order to travel the world and gain exposure to different cultures. This student intentionally placed himself on the fringes of the school establishment.

On the other hand, Participant 7 used *like* the least out of the male participants, and additionally used the most features of AAE. He described himself as formerly being a "popular kid", though he doesn't hang out with people like he used to anymore. However, as an athlete and a popular person, he provided some contrast with the other participants. He used *like* rarely, and was not able to think of a time in which he would use it. He also described people in the Northside of Albany, where this study took place, as talking "bougie" [2], a word of AAE vernacular meaning upper class and referring to the "acting white" phenomenon discussed above.

[2] http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bougie Urban Dictionary defines "bougie" as "aspiring to be a higher than than one is" or "extravagant, often to the point of snobbery."

> *DT: Do you notice a difference even in the black people who live in the Northside? Do they still talk slang, or…*
> *SW7: No…They talk bougie. I got a couple of kinfolk that stay out there. They just…I remember when I was little they used to be the baddest people I could think of. Now they all bougie and all that stuff.* (SW7, Corpus Data)

Another result of interest was that of Participant 6, who produced the fewest likes per thousand words out of everyone. She is part of a military family, which has led to her family moving several times throughout her childhood. She was considered someone who "talks white" within Albany, but also told that she was "country" and that she "talked black" while living in Oklahoma. Even more noteworthy however was the fact that she said that she does not connect with most students of her age, with the exception of a couple of best friends, but that she feels like she has the most in common with her mom and her mom's friends. "I don't have a lot in common with the kids at my school for some reason. I have a lot of—a lot in common with my mom and her friends, which is really weird, so…" (SB6, Corpus Data) She also described herself as the "mom" in her friend group, and said that this scared other students away. If this is the case, then it is possible that her speech patterns are affected by the speech of her mother. Since in general adults are less likely to use vernacular *like* than adolescents (Dailey-O'Cain, 2000), it is possible that her use of *like* is a result of this connection with her mom. However, it is not possible to verify or deny this information with the current data. In future studies, it could be enlightening to interview students and their parents, as well as their friend groups to get an idea of the social interactions affecting language use.

6.2. Survey Responses

The survey given to students sought to quantify some of the ideas about language use discussed in the interview. Because there were very few respondents, however, it is difficult to make any generalizations. However, the results can be presented and discussed with the aforementioned limitations in mind.

For example, in general, the students agreed that women and white people were more likely to use *like* in the ways given in the examples, and disagreed that men and black people were likely to use it. However, the agreement was more striking in both cases than the disagreement.

Chart 5.2

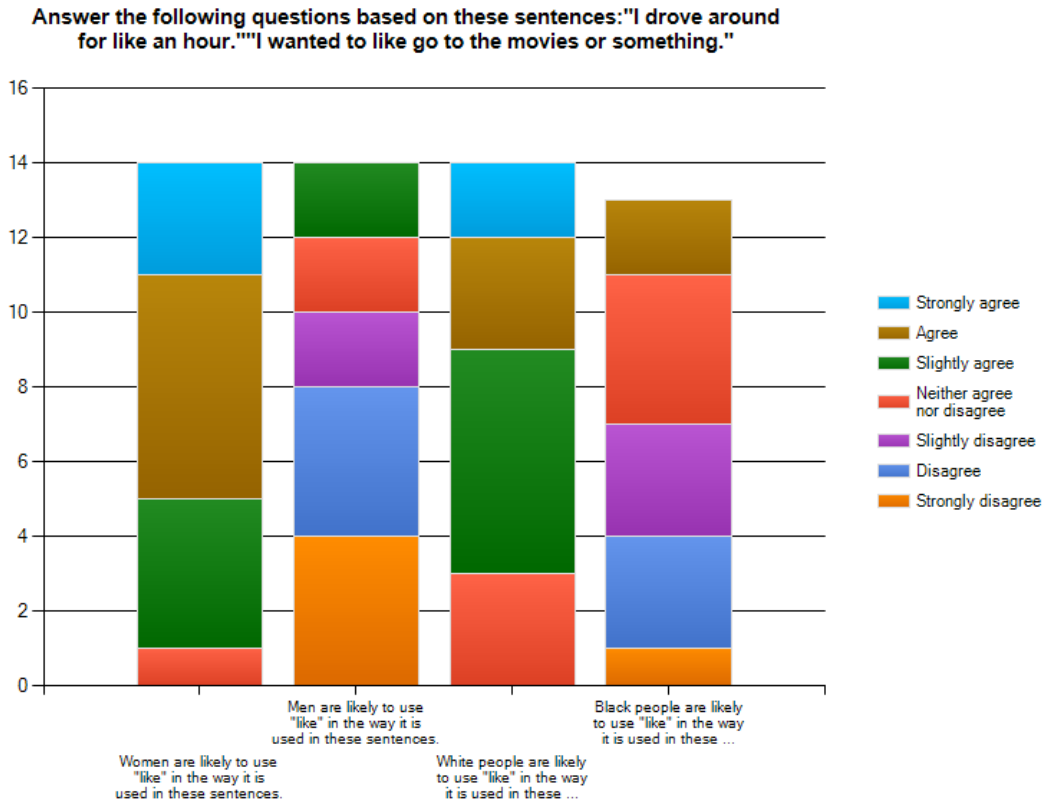
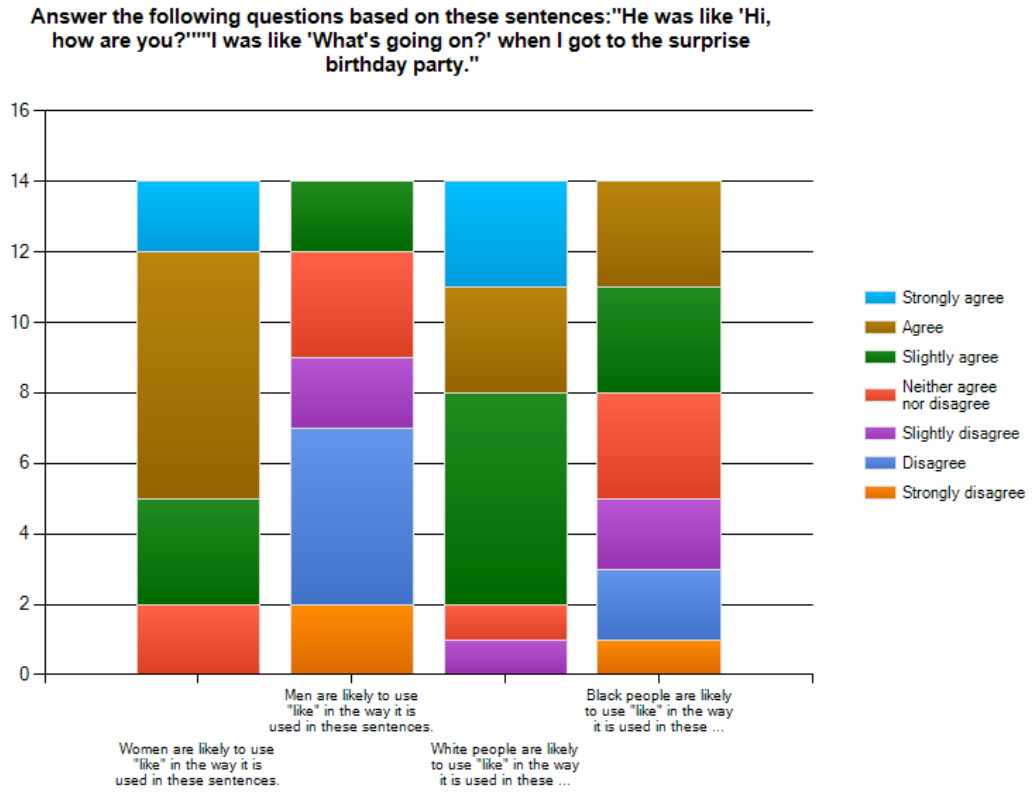


Chart 5.3



Some other information of interest that the survey provided was that female participants did not feel that being female altered their speech, though male participants in general thought that their gender did indeed affect their speech. It also appeared that the female survey responses indicate that the female participants were less likely to racialize their speech by labeling it “black” or “white”. This is common in the case of people who are told that they “talk white” and later decide that they do not prioritize this idea of who they are. This is consistent with one of the responses to the peer pressure of “talking white” that Ogbu mentions in his 2004 paper.

7. Discussion

7.1. The Shift of *Like* into AAE

Something noteworthy about examining *like* in this study is that many previous studies involving AAE were only able to show features of AAE or SAE, but not generally both. This includes phonological studies, as well as grammatical studies. In each of these, one could expect to find results in which features could be categorized as [+black, -white] or [-black, +white], because each feature discussed involved the absence of the other. While this is useful information for the study of AAE, it is also interesting to look at how features of one dialect may be assimilated into the other. This occurred in this study with the use of the habitual be and the quotative *like*. Instead of using additional lexical items to express the frequency of certain items of speech, as SAE must, the habitual be was used with the quotative form of "be + like," lending the same effect.

13. a. They BE LIKE "You too preppy," "You too all this." (SW7, Corpus Data)
    b. I BE LIKE, "Well it's her, I guess she been raised like around that." (QH3, Corpus Data)
    c. I BE LIKE "I don't know. It's like the attitude of y'all." (QH3, Corpus Data)
    d. Now for white folk, hear black folk, BE LIKE "What you talking bout?" (SW7, Corpus Data)
    e. I notice that I BE LIKE "Ok, 'and like' 'and like' 'and like'" and I have to make myself stop doing it. (AP9, Corpus Data)

This is especially interesting considering that this change exists within the quotative paradigm, because the quotative *like* only came into existence in the 1980s, meaning that this form is completely novel. If this grammatical shift occurred within the use of a non-quotative form of *like*, it would be more difficult to be certain that the form was not left over from older versions of English, since *like* as it is used non-quotatively has existed at earlier stages of AAE development. Because the quotative *like* is the one that has changed, we can say that this change has come to pass very recently, within the past three decades.

On the other hand, the non-quotative forms of *like* rarely occur in the presence of copula-deletion, another of the distinctive features of AAE. There is one example of it present in this corpus, so a pattern does not exist for us to look at this phenomenon.

> 14. It Ø LIKE if someone talks like you might call it slang if someone you can you hear it like really strong like you might call it slang. (TB1, Corpus Data)

It also appears that *like* has shifted fully into the speech of the AAE speakers interviewed, though in different degrees, much like in SAE. The shift mirrors the distribution of *like*s to the point that male and female usage is similar to that in previous studies, rather than in a transitional state, as would be expected if the shift were ongoing.

7.2. Discourse Marker *It's Like*

While coding the data in the corpus, there were moments of ambiguity in the meaning associated with the phrase "it's like." Initially, I interpreted it as "it is as though" or "it is the case that it is similar to." These interpretations would place this form of *like* into the category of standard, accepted forms. However, there are cases in the corpus in which the form *it's like* appears to be providing a parenthetical introduction of a statement, rather than participating in the statement itself. For example:

> 15. a. So IT'S JUST LIKE I don't have a problem hanging out with y'all that's what I love being around. (AP9, Corpus Data)
> b. IT'S LIKE, let's say you talk white, you have more grammar. (DH2, Corpus Data)
> c. IT'S LIKE, I got my grades, I got my sport, I got my scholarship, I don't need nothing else. (AP9, Corpus Data)
> d. But IT'S LIKE I feel like in whatever setting they'll probably feel like talking proper is more presentable in a way. (SB4, Corpus Data)
> e. IT'S LIKE, I don't really like to go to parties. (SB4, Corpus Data)

Although this information is preliminary, *it's like* does appear to be serving some of the functions that discourse marker *like* serves. This includes connecting statements and clauses within discourse, and even acting as a way to introduce explanations or examples of a situation. Compare the above sentences with the examples in 16, in which *it's like* is replaced by other known discourse markers.

16. a. So, YOU KNOW, I don't have a problem hanging out with y'all that's what I love being around.
    b. LIKE, let's say you talk white, you have more grammar.
    c. WELL, I got my grades, I got my sport, I got my scholarship, I don't need nothing else.
    d. But, YOU KNOW I feel like in whatever setting they'll probably feel like talking proper is more presentable in a way.
    e. I MEAN, I don't really like to go to parties.

Note that *it's like* can be replaced by these other discourse markers with little or no change in the meaning of the statement. *It's like* is sometimes broken up by the word "just", forming *It's just like*, but even so, a similar function seems to be served by the phrase, in that it contributes a frame for the following statement to occur within without contributing much to the overall meaning. Additionally, *it's like* can occur in the presence of other discourse markers such as *and*, *but*, and *so*.

It is necessary to note that in the examples given and noted in this corpus, the "it's" of the phrase possesses the expletive "it", rather than a pronoun with a referent in the world or discourse. This is shown by its ability to co-exist with a separate subject within the statement that it introduces. For example, in the following statement by SB4, only the *it's like* construction can introduce a new sentence, whereas *it's, like*, in which the "it's" has an assumed referent and the "like" that is left is a discourse marker, cannot grammatically introduce a sentence.

17. a. The so-called "talking white," IT'S LIKE, I feel it's more presentable in a way.
    b. The so-called "talking white," Ø I feel it's more presentable in a way.
    c. *The so-called "talking white," it's LIKE, I feel it's more presentable in a way.
    d. *The so-called "talking white," it's Ø, I feel it's more presentable in a way.

Note that in these examples, only the full marker *it's like* can be deleted. Although the initial part of the statement seems like a possible candidate for an antecedent, in examples 17c, a different reading is necessary to make the sentence read at all, and even so, there is the sense that the *like* does not introduce the next sentence, but instead that the sentences were broken off by an ungrammatical pause, and started anew. This is more obvious in 17d in which *like* has been deleted, also producing an ungrammatical statement. Examples 17a and 17b however, retain the same meaning across both of them, and form grammatical statements.

It is also notable that *it's like* as a discourse marker appears to be overwhelmingly used before propositions that are in the first person. The difference in *like* and *it's like* is also one of scope, in that *it's like* takes scope over an entire sentence, rather than on one part of a sentence. In 17, this is shown by *it's like* serving as a marker for the statement "I feel it's more presentable in a way," whereas in the presence of a referential "it's," the scope of the following *like* would be limited to whatever predicate follows it, rather than including a full sentence.

Also, for the purpose of studying this phenomenon in AAE, it is important to note that this discourse marker is also distinct from the existential marker "it's," because even in such examples, there is still a referent, though it is not before the *like*. For example, in example 12a, "I feel IT'S like a lot of division. (SB4, Corpus Data)," *it's* and *like* are performing different functions within the sentence, rather working together to introduce a sentence.

If it is indeed the case that this form has become a discourse marker, then we can conclude that this is an example of grammaticalization, in which the phrase "it's like" has frozen and been bleached of its original meaning in order to become a discourse marker that introduces a proposition.

7.3. Focuser *Like*

While other forms of *like* have received much attention and study, yielding clearly defined meanings, one form of *like* remains ambiguously defined. D'Arcy's

discourse particle, what is here discussed as the "focuser," is almost completely ignored as a meaningless particle that is not possible to gloss. In completing this research, I became interested in attempting refine previous discussions on the role that focuser *like* plays in discourse.

First, it is important to grasp the part that focus itself plays in understanding a statement, before applying it to the focuser *like*. In English, focus is marked by a nuclear pitch accent. For instance, in a discourse like the following, the new information communicated is associated with prosodic prominence.

18. a. What is Harvard like?
    b. Harvard is *ugly*.

In this case, Harvard is not just ugly, but it is very much so, and the emphasis placed on this information, tells the listener that this particular attribute is very important.

Previously, D'Arcy discussed the discourse particle form of *like*, which I will continue to discuss as the focuser *like*, saying that it "operates in the interpersonal realm, aiding in cooperative aspects of communication such as checking or expressing understanding." (D'Arcy 2007) In Dailey-O'Cain's 2000 analysis, she discusses the focuser as giving non-contrastive focus and as a highlighting device, indicating new information given within discourse. She also includes the discourse marker's purpose within the focuser's definition, indicating that the same type of *like* lends focus to whatever follows it and also acts as a connective between segments of discourse. In my analysis, I use the paradigm that D'Arcy gives to divide the functions of *like*, including the quotative complementizer, the approximative adverb, the discourse marker, and the discourse particle. However, in the case of the discourse particle, I returned to the terminology given by Dailey-O'Cain by calling it the focuser, due to the properties of focus that she highlights in her paper, rather than the interpersonal qualities that D'Arcy mentions. By re-analyzing some of the previous approaches to understanding focuser *like*, it is possible to come closer to understanding a bigger picture of *like*'s purpose within discourse.

19. a. I dyed my hair LIKE, blue (QH3, Corpus Data)
    b. That's what I like about LIKE Florida. (QH3, Corpus Data)

c. But like, my mom, she talks LIKE "proper". (QH3, Corpus Data)
d. I feel it's LIKE a lot of division (SB4, Corpus Data)
e. They kind of LIKE fell behind. (SB4, Corpus Data)

In these examples and other uses of the focuser *like*, *like* appears to be contributing above and beyond what is contributed by pitch accent. It can point to new information, introducing new alternatives or distinctions where they did not previously exist. For example:

20. *DT: Anywhere along the lines of black and white speech, where do you put yourself?*
KS8: I wouldn't put myself in the white, and I wouldn't put myself in the black…I say LIKE in the middle… (KS8, Corpus Data)

Note that in this example, the speaker specifies that she does not feel comfortable placing herself in either polar category, and she uses *like* to open up a third possible response. However, even beyond giving new information, focuser *like* contributes to the meaning in additional ways. In addition to pointing out new information, the focuser *like* has a role in adding further emphasis. I posit that the function of *like* is to introduce a scale of alternatives along which the proposition containing *like* is located. Take, for example, the sentences in example 21.

21. a. Harvard is ugly.
b. Harvard is LIKE, ugly.
c. Harvard is LIKE, *ugly*.

In example 21a, we can describe Harvard's attributes on a linear scale. There are various options for where Harvard can be placed, including "hideous," "ugly," "unremarkable," "pretty," and "beautiful." However, in my reanalysis of the focuser *like*, *like* performs a separate function in the statement. *Like* creates a scale that can be visualized not as a line, but instead by considering a set of things. Looking at Example 21a again, Harvard can be considered a member of the set of ugly things. By adding the focuser *like* into the statement, we shift to a broader set of "like ugly" things. From there, the emphasis and speaker-oriented judgments specify which part of this broader set we are speaking of. In 21b, Harvard is one of the less ugly

things within the "like ugly" set, whereas in 21c, Harvard is one of the more ugly things.

Shifting our understanding of the scales in which focuser *like* operates makes it easier to interpret its role in a given sentence. For example, in 19a, the student's hair is "like blue," and the detailed understanding of what kind of blue this is comes from the speaker's emphasis. Without emphasis, it would be possible to interpret the color he describes as on the fringe of blue-ness, a color that is barely blue. However, with emphasis, the blue described is one that is the most prototypical and extreme. This function of *like* is interesting because it first broadens the possible options for meanings, and then allows the speaker to fine-tune their meaning through emphasis. This is different from previous thoughts that the focuser *like* is meaningless, and instead shows that it possesses more of a purpose than a meaning by itself.

Another example of the flexibility of focuser *like* is its ability to create a scale for things that do not inherently exist on a scale. Although ugliness exists on a scale, the color blue arguably does not, but is not very difficult to create a scale for the color blue. However, focuser *like* modifies things other than adjectives, which are more difficult to place on a scale. For example, in 19e, *like* modifies "fell behind" in order to create a wider range of situations of "falling behind." Within this larger-scaled meaning, the speaker's intonation dampened the meaning of his sentence so that the falling behind that occurred appears to have been a smaller situation than might have otherwise been indicated.

This re-analysis of focuser *like* is important because of the part it plays within pragmatics and discourse. By creating a scale that is broader than the denoted meaning of a word, there is more leeway for satisfying truth conditions. This takes away some of the responsibility of the speaker for the statement's truth, allowing the ability to state something without committing to its denoted meaning.

By coming to an understanding of focuser *like*, we now have a new tool for understanding how *like* functions in its role as an approximative adverb and hedge. These are roles that *like* fulfills by estimating amounts, indicating that something

exists in an amount near the stated amount. In example 22, we can see how the approximative *like* functions.

22. a. I have LIKE 9 sisters and 3 brothers. (SW7, Corpus Data)
    b. It's LIKE a predominantly black school. (DH2, Corpus Data)
    c. It's LIKE 106 degrees out.
    d. I have LIKE no more candy to give out.
    e. The one who talks improper will start getting LIKE offended or something. (SB4, Corpus Data)
    f. But you know I got LIKE crazy contacts. (QH3, Corpus Data)

These examples show that there is a similarity between the approximative *like* and the focuser *like*. In each of these, *like* creates a scale, with an understood range of possibilities, and speakers indicate where on the scale something exists through manipulation. In 22a, the student has *like nine* sisters, rather than nine, in order indicate that there is a range of possibilities. Or, as in 22c, it is *like 106 degrees* out, but it is equally possible that it is 105 or 107 degrees. *Like* gives the speaker the opportunity to estimate by creating a scale of possible meanings. Intonation can indicate certainty of the estimation, or allow the range to be wide. There is great flexibility in the meanings that can come from *like* after it has notified the participants in the discourse of the presence of a scale. Previously, it was easier to place the approximative *like* on a scale because approximation often takes place on a numerical scale or something else easily measured. However, this new way of examining focuser *like* makes it possible to understand the connection between focuser and approximative *like*.

Overall, the focuser *like* has several purposes. These include pointing out new information within discourse and emphasizing it, but it also can have the effect of dampening or exaggerating the qualities of something. In this analysis, it was determined that the ability of focuser *like* to adjust to the speaker's intentions is derived from a creation of a scale. Focuser *like* creates a new set of entities, whether it is *like ugly*, *like fell behind*, *like blue*, or any other thing represented within discourse. Then, within this new, broader set, the speaker is able to deviate from the denoted meaning of the entity in specific, fine-tuned ways. With this analysis, I also

concluded that the approximative adverb form of *like* acts by the same method of creating a broader range of entities, and that it can be included among our definition of the focuser *like*.

7.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the data from this research was very interesting, there were many limitations inherent in the study that made it difficult to confidently make generalizations. In the case of Westover High School, permission was sought by the school for each of the students in order to participate. This limited the number of students to those who remembered to ask their parents and bring back permission slips. Additionally, the experimental plan was set for students who were 18 years and older, in order to avoid using minors for the research. This also greatly limited the number of students who were able to participate. For this reason, though the collected survey responses point to a trend, it is not possible to make any claims that can be applied elsewhere. Another limitation that existed was that some of the later participants were in their classes when the survey was administered, so they took it with their classmates before their interview. This might have altered their speech behaviors later on, which could have affected the data.

Within the interviews, there was also less variation within the students' social groups than would have been preferred. The female participants all seemed to be friends with each other. Additionally many of the participants were chosen by their teachers, so several of them were Advanced Placement or Honors/Gifted students. This resulted in less diversity of goals and social status than might have existed otherwise.

Despite these limitations, this study yielded thought-provoking results. If further research were to be conducted, the researchers should be certain to communicate more clearly with the school to ensure that interviewees do not take the survey before the interview. It would also be interesting if other schools in Albany were added to the study, in order to represent a more diverse array of goals,

socioeconomic status, and other factors that might be playing a role in the sociolinguistic dynamics of the students.

8. Conclusion

The data obtained in this experiment allowed us to examine both the shift of *like* into AAE as well as explore the contribution of *like* within discourse. Despite the size of the sample data, there are some conclusions to take away from this experiment.

This experiment yielded interesting data in the usage of the quotative *like*, which was assimilated into AAE by creating a habitual quotation of the form "[habitual] be + like." This assimilation showed that *like* is not just a loanword from SAE, but also a participant in grammatical change. Beyond the use of the habitual quotative *like*, there is extensive evidence of *like* having shifted across all four of the distinctions for both genders.

It appears that the racialized discussion of *like* is now outdated to current high school students, who were born a full decade after the "Valley Girls" came into being. Although there was some variation within the speakers that correlated with some attitudes, overall, *like* had shifted into all of the participants' speeches. Moreover, most denied that *like* was a part of their conception of "talking white", and they stated instead that they heard most people saying it. Interestingly, the perception that females use *like* more than males is still very much in existence, and some of the male participants even denied that they used *like*, while the female participants stated that they rarely heard males use it. Despite their ideas about production, the male participants used *like* more than the female participants in every measurement.

This research has some thought-provoking implications for the question of whether AAE is converging with SAE over time. To this day, the greatest factor in determining the speakers of AAE is still residential segregation and other socioeconomic factors (Labov 2010). With this in mind, there is a chance that conclusions for this research would be vastly different if data had been obtained in different areas of Albany, Georgia. Some of the participants even mentioned that they were in more diverse friend groups than many of their peers, or that they lived in white neighborhoods, both of which could be factors in their use of language.

However, *like*'s ability to shift into the grammar of AAE could be a method of convergence that slips past the barrier of "talking white" for those who might still observe it. Vernacular forms seem to go from the non-standard to the standard dialect, notably in English, which got colloquialisms such as "cool", "swag", and "bad" (meaning "good") from AAE. Yet here we have an example of vernacular forms travelling in the opposite direction, making it appear that AAE may be poised at a place in which it can undergo the process of convergence with SAE. Considering the participants' view of AAE as way of using slang or a style of speech, it seems possible for AAE to converge with SAE without much notice being taken.

Also in this research, I noted the development of a new discourse marker, *it's like*, which introduces new statements and connects items of discourse. This form, which appears on the surface to have been derived the prescriptive use of *like*, is an example of a recent grammaticalization and the continued process of language change.

Finally, the data from this study, once compiled into a corpus, proved useful for the examination of the contribution of the focuser *like*, which has been previously discussed, but still remained difficult to define. By looking at several examples of the focuser, it was possible to understand the role that it plays as particle that can emphasize or dampen the effect of whatever it modifies, in part based on the value judgments of the speaker. Focuser *like* can function by indicating that there is a new scale on which we are defining a particular attribute. On this new scale, the speaker can specify what particular meaning is intended by using emphasis or other manipulations to convey a meaning. By analyzing this usage of *like*, I also concluded that the approximative adverbial usage of *like* can be included within the category of the focuser, because it accomplishes a similar goal, but on a numerical, and thus, more easily defined, scale.

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10. Appendix I – Survey

African American Vernacular English Perspectives

1. What is your gender?

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Other

***2. How old are you?**

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

African American Vernacular English Perspectives

4. What can you tell me about your speech community?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I know what people mean when they say "talk black/white" or "act black/white".	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I talk black.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I talk white.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Most of my friends are black.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Most of my friends are white.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My family talks black.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My race/ethnicity is a very important part of who I am.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My race/ethnicity affects the way I talk.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My gender affects the way I talk.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

5. What can you tell me about your ability to speak Black English and White English?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I can speak Black English better than White English.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I can speak White English better than Black English.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I can speak both Black and White English equally well.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I mix Black and White English.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I switch between Black and White English.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I talk differently depending on with whom I'm speaking.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel pressured to talk a certain way when I'm with certain people.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
If I change the way I speak with certain people, it's an easy switch.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
If I change the way I speak with certain people, I have to think about it.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

African American Vernacular English Perspectives

6. Answer the following question based on these sentences:

"I drove around for like an hour."

"I wanted to like go to the movies or something."

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I would use "like" as it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My friends would use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My family would use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

7. Answer the following questions based on these sentences:

"I drove around for like an hour."

"I wanted to like go to the movies or something."

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Women are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Men are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
White people are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Black people are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

African American Vernacular English Perspectives

8. Answer the following questions based on these sentences:

"He was like 'Hi, how are you?'"

"I was like 'What's going on?' when I got to the surprise birthday party."

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I would use "like" as it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My friends would use "like" as it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My family would use "like" as it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

9. Answer the following questions based on these sentences:

"He was like 'Hi, how are you?'"

"I was like 'What's going on?' when I got to the surprise birthday party."

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Women are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Men are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
White people are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Black people are likely to use "like" in the way it is used in these sentences.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

11. Appendix II – Interview Summaries

QH3, M
Likes/1000 words: 80.4

QH3 has made a point of distinguishing himself from other people in the school. He says that he is focused on the new, instead of things that have already happened, and he shows this by dressing differently, wearing "crazy contacts," and cutting and dyeing his hair in interesting ways. He is originally from Florida, and he lives now in Albany with his mom, his step-dad, and his step-brother. He misses Florida a lot, and is looking forward to leaving Albany, GA. Although he would be considered different even in Florida, he feels like the people there would understand his motivations better. He mentions the diversity of Florida, and the fact that people across races hang out together, but that at Westover there is a racial divide. He also hangs out with mostly underclassmen, rather than seniors. He and his group of friends likes anime, the hair colors and styles that he's had, and so on. He plans on joining the military, and hopes to travel the world and understand various cultures. People say that he talks white, or that he talks black and white. He does not think that talk can be black or white, but does mention talking "ghetto-ish" or with "slang." He notes that his initial reaction to a white girl talking this way is negative, but that he then thinks to himself that it's about what she was raised around. He does use some slang, when he's trying to be funny, but in general doesn't note a change in speech styles in himself. Within his family, his mom talks "proper," and his dad speaks more "slang-ish." They currently live in a white neighborhood, and growing up he lived in a diverse community. He thinks everyone says the word "like," and thinks that people who stutter are more likely to use it, but otherwise doesn't specify a group of people who might use it more, or the presence of any positive or negative attitudes towards it.

SB4, M
Likes/1000 words: 53.4

SB4 lives with his parents, and has an older sister finishing her master's degree in Atlanta. He plays baseball and plays in the band, and he is hoping to go to Auburn University. He is interested in majoring in physical therapy and minoring in music. He is considering being a chiropractor or trainer in northern Florida, where he will still be pretty close to home and to his family. His friends are also planning on going to college. They are mostly on track to be honor graduates, but some "fell through the cracks" earlier on, and are making different decisions than they may have originally planned. The main thing that he feel separates him from some of his

friends is that he doesn't go to parties. He noticed that the popular people in the school tend to have similar hairstyles, dress similarly, and react the same way to things. He also notes that they are often cheerleaders or connected to cheerleaders. Within the social scheme of the school, he sees himself as a "middleman" who is well known throughout the junior and senior classes, and even known by some underclassmen. He has noticed some racial division within the school, as well as division within the girls, who do not get along well across groups. He feels like the girls are judgmental and do not accept people who are different. He has a diverse friend group. He sees "talking black/white" as a product of the speakers that people grow up with. He sees speaking "properly" as a more presentable way to talk, but doesn't see a problem with "talking black," except for when it is associated with an attitude. He mentions that if someone who talks properly speaks to someone who does not, then the person who talks improperly might be offended and think that they're being talked down to. They may also think the person who speaks properly is "uppity" or "sedity," that is, a person who thinks they are better than others. He thinks he talks somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, and thinks he can shift easily, but doesn't get really "improper" unless he's joking around. He sees a person who speaks properly shifting to speak improperly is likely to do it to fit in, but also sees speaking properly as the more presentable thing to do. On the subject of "like," he notices himself saying it, specifically as a filler word for when he's thinking. He thinks most people don't notice it anymore, and that it's not generally a negative thing. He does however think that if a person says it often and in a certain way, it can be seen as "talking white". He also thinks that in most cases women say it the most, but recognizes that he says it a lot.

TT5, F

Likes/1000 words: 40.3

TT5 lives with her mother and sister. All of her family lives in Albany, and she'll be the first to go away to college. She's pre-med and wants to major in biology. She wouldn't mind coming back to Albany after she's established as a doctor. Her friends at the school are people from the danceline, and people in her AP classes. She doesn't describe herself as very social. She doesn't think that there's a single popular group, but instead says that people just hang out with the people they like and are comfortable with. She also notes a division along racial lines because of what people are most comfortable with. Most of her friends are black, but she has a couple of white friends. She feels like she doesn't fall into the categories of "talking white/black," but that people have told her that she talks white. She recognizes that she changes her speech from friends to adults, but thinks that she is the same when talking to people of different races. She sees "talking black" as something that has negative associations, such as sounding "ghetto," and disagrees with putting people

"into one big pool." On the other hand, she sees "talking white" as the proper way to speak, and so she says that most people don't see that as a bad thing. On the topic of "like," she notices that she says it, as well as other black people around her. She thinks that girls use it a lot more than guys. She also says that as people mature, they are likely to grow out of saying "like" a lot. She recognizes the negative associations with "Valley Girls," but thinks that that doesn't really affect people, and that it's an old association.

AP9, F
Likes/1000 words: 29.8

AP9 lives with her mom, runs track, and plays basketball. She wants to go to college and major in physical therapy. She's ready to leave Albany and leave Westover. She doesn't see herself coming back to live in Albany in the future. Her friends are also ready to leave Albany. She's very social and has friends across the classes above and below her, as well as friends in her year and in all of her classes. As far as popularity goes, she says that the boys are laid back, but the girls are more likely to be in cliques that talk behind each others' backs. She says that the athletes are the people that everyone knows. She sees racial division in the school, though she herself has a diverse group of friends. She describes the school like the map from *Mean Girls*, in which everyone is divided into their cliques, except without the presence of a single clique above the others. When taking the survey, she was at first confused about the questions on "talking black/white," but interpreted it both as speech and the methods of communication, taking note of ways that people keep in contact, such as texting, calling, and instant messaging. When she thinks of "talking black," she thinks of swearing and slang words. She thinks that attitudes towards "talking white" depend on the person's response to it. She mentions the term "oreo," referring to a black person who "acts white." She also talks about her sister, who can switch between talking black and white depending on what friends she's with. Similarly, she sees herself changing effortlessly between hanging out with her athlete friends and hanging out with her friends from class. She doesn't feel pressured to talk one way or another, especially because she plans on leaving. Finally, on the subject of "like," she doesn't think attitudes towards it exist, and that people don't notice themselves saying it. She thinks girls say it more than boys, and does not notice a difference across age groups. She also mentions that she went to a white school for elementary school, and that that may be a part of her speech patterns, in her ability to switch from sounding like she's "from the surburbs" to sounding like she's "from the 'hood."

DH2, M
Likes/1000 words: 29.2

DH2 lives with his mom (parents divorced while he was in elementary school) and pole vaults for the school's track team. He has two sisters, one who works in Atlanta and one who attends the local community college. He hopes to get a track scholarship in order to go to college. He is looking at schools around Atlanta and hopes to major in biology and become a pharmacist or a dentist. Most of his friends also want to leave Albany, though they are undecided on where they want to go. He considers himself friendly and easy to get along with, as well as funny and a hard worker who gets good grades. He has a small group of close friends. He doesn't think that there is a single group that sits above the other groups of the school. He also sees the school as diverse and does not notice much division among races at the school. Initially he doesn't note changing his speech when he talks to different people, but then, after thinking about it, he realizes that he probably changes his persona a little depending on what group he is with. He sees "talking white" as having "more grammar," using more big words, and less slang. He also associates talking black with swearing, including the "n-word." He sees "talking white" as a completely positive thing because it is the proper way, while "talking black" might lead to some judgment from other people. He considers himself to be in the middle on the spectrum of speech. People in his family talk black, especially the older people, and he notes that it is probably because of the education levels available to the older members of his family. He says that he doesn't generally feel pressured to talk a certain way. On the subject of *like*, he does not feel like it is an example of "talking white" or "talking black." He has no issue with the word itself, but says that it shouldn't be repeated. He thinks that girls say it more than boys. He doesn't notice himself saying it, but doesn't deny that he does.

TB1, M

Likes/1000 words: 27.1

TB1 lives in a good neighborhood, and has four brothers who he is close to. He plans on going to Georgia Southern to study engineering, and hopes to live away from Albany, possibly near Atlanta. He has a small group of friends, and emphasized the importance of trust in his friendships. He describes the popular students of the school as cool, and not bullies, and says that there is little division in the school, but that people hang out with the people with whom they feel comfortable. He acknowledged a small amount of racial division within the school. On the topic of "talking black," he discusses it as "slang," but also as something he doesn't really pay attention to. He denies that he speaks in either distinction, of "black" or "white." He does, however describe his brothers as talking "like a black person would talk," and also mentions that they hang with different types of people and that they have different values. He feels that talking a certain way is part of how he presents himself, and that, if he wants to go to college, he has to talk a certain way. On the

subject of *like*, he notices that he says it, but thinks that people shouldn't say it a lot in professional settings. He thinks he and his brothers say *like* approximately the same amount. He also thinks that *like* can be used informally or used "the right way," but it is important not to say it repeatedly, which is something he avoids.

SW7, M
Likes/1000 words: 19.2

SW7 used to play football and basketball for Westover, until he suffered an ACL injury. His rather passed away 2 years ago, and he lives with his mom and some of his siblings. He wants to go to college and do physical therapy or athletic training. He wants to leave Albany, but he would consider coming back in the future. He used to be considered one of the popular people in the school, but in the past year he stopped hanging out with people as much, though they still try to get him to hang out. He describes popular people as people who are athletic or like to "clown around." He notes that the girls in the school tend to have contentious relationships, but says that the boys in the school are mostly friends or okay with each other. In his time at Westover, he has seen that previously there has been racial division at Westover, but he thinks that it's less divided now than before. He sees "talking black" as talking "ghetto" or with "slang to it." He thinks of "white talk" as a person talking country or talking as though he or she is better than everyone else. He thinks the positive attitudes exist towards "talking white" and that negative attitudes exist towards "black talk." However, he also says that the people he knows say things like "You too preppy," but that he doesn't care about those attitudes. However, white people, he thinks, hear black people speak and wonder what they're talking about. He notes that Albany is divided into four sections (Northside, Southside, Eastside, Westside), but that people in the Northside are bougie. He doesn't think he changes his speech depending on with whom he is speaking. He doesn't think that he uses the word "like" very often, and could not think of an example of when he might say it. He could not think of groups of people who use "like" more than others, such as race, or gender.

KS8, F
Likes/1000 words: 16.4

KS8 is also in a military family. She lives with her mom and step-father, and she's a varsity basketball cheerleader. She plans on attending college in the Atlanta area to study biology and later become a physician's assistant. She does not want to stay in Albany. Most of her friends are cheerleaders and danceline girls, and she says that what they have in common is that they are positive people and they want to go to college and do "big things." She says there's not really a popular group of people, but there are people that everyone knows, who are very friendly. She doesn't see a

major divide in the school, and that a racial divide exists, but that it's not a very big divide. She's been told that she acts and talks "white." She sees "talking black" as using incorrect English, speaking with a lot of slang, or mispronouncing words. She also adds that saying "like" a lot is a characteristic of white speech. (She later mentions that she had already taken the survey before the interview.) She doesn't note any attitudes towards one type of speech or the other, and says that she feels like she talks "in the middle." When talking to a professional person she tries to correct her English, and this is an easy switch to make for her. At home, her mom speaks very properly, and her step-dad doesn't talk "black," but instead swears a lot, she says, as a result of being the military. On the subject of "like," she doesn't think there are positive or negative attitudes towards it. She thinks all girls say it a lot, and that it is mostly 15-18 year old girls in particular. She notices that she says it when explaining things, but also when telling stories.

SB6, F
Likes/1000 words: 15.6

SB6 is not from Albany, and considers her family's presence there to be a mistake. Her father is in the military, which led to her family moving there. She's lived off- and on-base. She lives with her parents and two younger sisters. She loves Westover, but feels like there's not a lot to say about living in Albany. She moved from Oklahoma, but has lived in other places in Georgia as well. She has gone from a school that had approximately 5 white students to one where she was the only black girl in her class. She plans on going to college in the Atlanta area to major in biology. She characterizes herself as more of a mom in her friend group, so she doesn't have many friends. However, she is very close to a couple of other girls in her year. She feels like she has more in common with her mom and her mom's friends. Her friends are mostly AP students, who are studious and not caught up in drama. Later on she wants to live in either Atlanta or Florida, but she does not plan on coming back to Albany. She recognizes the presence of cliques, but there is not a single group that stands above the rest. She thinks that what she and her friends have in common is that they are very focused on the future, and they talk about college or work. She understands what people mean by "talking black/white," but does not believe in it. When she first moved to Oklahoma, people said that she was country and talked black, but after coming back to Georgia people said that she talked white. She considers herself in the middle of the spectrum and says that she could talk to someone who talks either way comfortably. Her family speaks similarly, but her step-dad speaks very properly. She thinks "like" is something that girls say, and says that white girls say it differently from black girls, but otherwise that everyone says it. She considers "like" to be a word for her "thinking time." She thinks that everyone says it but there are some ways of saying it that are inappropriate for work.

12. Appendix III – Selected Corpus Data

Sentence	Participant #	Type	Gender
Like everybody [like] even level.	DH2	aa	m
Yeah, like majority of our class are mostly black, cause you know it's [like] predominately black school.	DH2	aa	m
And let's see we been like sorta together [like] for 7 years.	QH3	aa	m
It's [like] 45 minutes up to Orlando and down to Miami.	QH3	aa	m
We live in a white neighborhood because like they was [like] five years ago like we was living over there like on the Eastside.	QH3	aa	m
Most of my friends are black, I have [like] one or two people outside of my race that I talk to.	TT5	aa	f
And I think throughout the whole business we may have had [like] 5 white kids.	SB6	aa	f
I got [like] 9 brothers, 3 sisters.	SW7	aa	m
From my side yes, but it's like Albany is [like] four different sections.	SW7	aa	m
I thought of it it's [like], two ways.	AP9	aa	f
I'm already, [like] I'm applying for housing.	TT5	dm	f
[Like], I think I understand what you're saying.	QH3	dm	m
But [like], when I'm with different groups of people as far as race I wouldn't change how way I talk, you know?	TT5	dm	f
[like] my 9th grade year, I was always with the seniors.	AP9	dm	f
[Like] if I want to go to college, I have to talk a certain way.	TB1	dm	m

Cause [like] my older people in my family never seen too much education when they were younger.	DH2	dm	m
So you know I love [like] *Bleach*, *Naruto*, all sorts of anime.	QH3	dm	m
So now they have to [like] kind of change what they wanna do.	SB4	dm	m
[Like], my 9th grade year, I ain't really see all the white people with the black people, the Hispanic people.	SW7	dm	m
It's moreso girls, [like], I don't hear boys say "like", like, a lot.	KS8	dm	f
It's like…the whole thing to me is….[like] kind of negative.	TT5	f	f
It's not [like] a big divide, but probably just a little, just a little.	KS8	f	f
I say [like] in the middle…	KS8	f	f
I dyed my hair [like], blue.	QH3	f	m
That's what I like about [like] Florida.	QH3	f	m
I was like, thinking of [like] the *new*, instead of the old and already happened.	QH3	f	m
but like, my mom, she talks [like] "proper".	QH3	f	m
And I mean I think if someone talks proper they look at them as being [like] sedity and uppity.	SB4	f	m
I feel it's [like] a lot of division.	SB4	f	m
Then it started turning [like] a little slushy.	QH3	f	m
You'll probably be [like] "Gah", stuff you saying and whatnot.	DH2	q	m
I was [like] "psh, cause I wanted to so you know."	QH3	q	m
I be [like] "I don't know. It's like the attitude of y'all.	QH3	q	m
I'm [like] "whoa".	SB4	q	m
They be [like], "you too preppy", "you too all this."	SW7	q	m
I remember one of our teachers was [like] "What does that mean?"	AP9	q	f

My sister was [like], “What are you wearing?”	AP9	q	f
Now for white folk, hear black folk, be [like] “what you talking bout?”	SW7	q	m
I don’t think they’d be [like] “What’s up with the blue hair?”	QH3	q	m
He was [like] “naw, don’t do this don’t do that, you gon’ look crazy…”	QH3	q	m
So [it’s just like] I don’t have a problem hanging out with y’all that’s what I love being around.	AP9	i	f
[It’s like], I don’t really like to go to parties.	SB4	i	m
[It’s like], let say you talk white, you have more grammar.	DH2	i	m
[It’s like], I got my grades, I got my sport, I got my scholarship, I don’t need nothing else.	AP9	i	f
The so-called “talking white” [it’s like], I feel it’s more presentable in a way.	SB4	i	m
But [it’s like] I feel like in whatever setting they’ll probably feel like talking proper is more presentable in a way.	SB4	i	m
[It’s like] they react the same way to everything.	SB4	i	m
[It’s like] they use that as ammo.	SB4	i	m
[It’s like] you find a best friend here—uh! It’s time to move	SB6	i	f
[It’s like]…They be wearing like Aeropostale or polo, something like that.	TB1	i	m

Legend:
aa: Approximative Adverb
dm: Discourse Marker
f: Focuser
q: Quotative
i: *it’s like* Discourse Marker
m: Male participant
f: Female participant