

## **A rapidly re-configured Variable: Quotatives in Appalachia**

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This paper examines the construction of discourse through an investigation of the fluctuations in the use of direct quotes in a traditional vernacular US dialect. At the end of the twentieth century, a rapid change in the quotative system unfolded across the English speaking world. Specifically, quotative *be like* became the primary choice for many younger speakers in urban and suburban areas. Buchstaller and D'Arcy (2009) argue for the weak transfer of global constraints to fit the specific sociolinguistic profiles and previously entrenched quotative systems of local communities. Following their lead, this paper examines the social and linguistic constraints on the ascendance of quotative *be like* in the predominantly rural West Virginia region of Appalachia to assess those global constraints. This paper further demonstrates how local conditions mediate the spread of innovative discourse forms.

An evenly balanced corpus of sociolinguistic interviews from 67 native Appalachians was meticulously examined for seven dependent variants, 14 linguistic factor groups, and six social factor groups. A logistic regression analysis of 2,666 tokens of quotative verbs yields a clear view of the statistically significant language variation patterns for these speakers. An important part of this quotative story is that the distribution of tokens is not even across the subject pool, with some speakers producing 200 quotatives in an interview and some producing less than 5. The most decisive trend is the ascension of *be like*: Older speakers produce less than 1% *be like*, in sharp contrast to the middle-aged group (31%) and the youngest speakers (69%). To some extent, for these Appalachian speakers, the rise of *be like* came at the expense of *say*, which declined from 70% for the oldest speakers to 13% for the youngest. This reversal of quotative verbs did not occur in a smooth curve. On closer inspection, the females and males took different paths. Those speakers born after 1980 were the first to adopt the external variant, and they illustrate this idea particularly well. While the females in this age group dropped their rate of *say* 50%, the males differentiated themselves by nearly doubling their rate of zero quotatives (e.g. and then “that was a blatantly sexist gesture”). These early *be-like* adopters use the phonological form [laɪk] as the quotative, even when they themselves were fully unglided in similar environments (e.g. [Anla:kli]). This phonological differentiation provides a sociolinguistic clue about its non-Southern origin for natives, and this status appears to have guided the global constraints as *be like* was adopted. In the end, despite their other vernacular features, Appalachians have rapidly aligned themselves with US norms in the use of quotative *be like*. At least for this discourse feature, US dialect differences are decreasing, even for one of the more traditional post-insular varieties.