

## ***Be like* and friends: Grammar, figuration and subjectivity**

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So-called ‘innovative’ quotatives in English, including *go*, *be like* and related forms such as *go like*, *be all*, *be all like*, or *be kinda*, have been extensively studied from a language variationist perspective mainly, with recent book-length publications both synthesizing this prominent research strand and pushing it forward into new directions, in particular showing localization at work in the global spread of the variants, and extending the diachronic reach of the analysis (Buchstaller 2014, D’Arcy 2017). My own past interest in quotative *go*, *be like* and related forms (Vandelanotte 2009, 2012; Vandelanotte & Davidse 2009) came from a different angle, as these forms provided an interesting point of comparison for a proposal to rethink the syntagmatic combinatorics of Direct Speech/Thought constructions generally (Vandelanotte 2008, 2009: Ch. 2). Where traditional analyses assumed a verbal complementation analysis not essentially different from that of nominal transitive complements, the alternative combined the idea, present in various guises in earlier literature (e.g. Halliday 1985, McGregor 1997), that the primary relation is between two whole clauses (not the verb individually), with Langacker’s (1987) approach to the structural assembly of complex structures from component parts.

While some important early studies on *be like* in particular (e.g. Romaine and Lange 1991) inscribed the phenomena observed within the developing framework of grammaticalization, I have questioned this (2012), while refocusing on the question surrounding the original emergence of the construction. This constructional emergence seems to have been made possible by deep-seated meaning relations between imitative and simulative meanings and the representation of speech and thought, allowing language innovators to apprehend the former as a special case of the latter. Frameworks viewing quotations as demonstrations (Clark & Gerrig 1990) or depictions (Clark 2016) provide a helpful lens through which to view these relations.

In a further, perhaps adventurous parallel, I propose to probe the idea of simulative meanings further, as part of a general move to re-value simile (see, e.g., Israel et al. 2004, Moder 2008, Dancygier & Sweetser 2014, Harding 2017), which has often been treated as the poor relation of metaphor. Simulative figuration appears to have become remarkably pervasive in contemporary online communication, as evidenced in various families of so-called Internet memes, including “be like” memes, but also other simile-based memes including “(that moment) when” memes and “me: ... also me: ...” memes (see, e.g., Lou 2017 and Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017). It could be conjectured that quotative *be like* and simulative meme uses both illustrate an underlying tendency in which simulative figuration is fundamental to how we express subjective attitudes and viewpoints, and intersubjectively elicit responses to these views.

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