**Lexical conditioning on tense/aspect variation in Australian English narratives**

Variationist research on English quotation has focused primarily on how the quotative system operates when all quotative variants are considered. For instance, *be like* (example 1) has been prolifically studied with respect to all other quotatives in the vernacular of diverse speech communities (e.g. Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999). Additionally, the study of tense/aspect variation, which examines how different tense/aspect configurations are deployed in discourse (e.g. Levey, 2006), has brought to light how tense/aspect variability interacts with specific lexical items, including quotative verbs.

We follow Labov & Walezky (1967) and analyse all complicating action clauses stemming from 275 performed narratives produced by 96 Perth-based speakers aged 13-81 for whom mainstream Australian English (AusE) is their first language. Our analysis reveals a significant interaction between tense/aspect configurations and quotative verbs. Both *go* and *be like* are used with the Historical Present (HP); however, *be like* exerts a stronger effect on HP choice (75%) (example 1) than does *go* (52%). The Narrative Present Perfect (NPP) is predicted in the presence of quotative *go* (example 2) but is wholly unattested with *be like*.

We attribute the latter distributions to structural considerations. *Be like* is a stative predicate and – because of this – it is dispreferred with the NPP; in fact, *be like* never occurs with the NPP in our 10.5-hour narrative corpus. By contrast, the NPP is favoured with eventive predicates (Ritz & Engel, 2008: 141) and, although *go*’s lexical status is ‘quite diminished’ when it participates in the quotative *go* construction (Bybee, 2010: 2), its co-occurrence with the NPP is structurally predictable.

The frequent collocations noted in our corpus can be seen as constituting conventionalised multi-word expressions which have been ‘established (tacitly, through repetition) as the appropriate way to say something in a particular community’ (Bybee, 2010: 35). We suggest that, rather than speakers making a tense choice anew every time performed storytelling comes to the fore – and in addition to the structure imposed by the narrative genre itself (e.g. through priming) – tense/aspect + quotative combinations, including NPP-*go* and HP-*be like*, are used formulaically. As argued by Bybee & Torres Cacoullos (2008: 404), ‘grammatical domains are contoured by lexical units’.

**Examples**

(1) I got a phone call from my housemate. […] And I’**m like**, ‘What’s happened?’ She’**s like**, ‘My boyfriend’s car’s rolled down into the front of our house and smashed the whole front of the house down’. (Female, 25)

(2) We had three bags when we got off the plane. And when we got off the bus we had two. […] And I’**ve gone**, ‘You’re kidding! Are you kidding? Oh my God’. (Male, 33)

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