

FACE, KNOWLEDGE AND FLOOR: ANALYZING *LIKE* USAGE THROUGH A COMBINED
VARIATIONIST, DISCOURSE ANALYTIC AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Linguistics

By

Katherine M. Hilton, B.A.

Washington, DC
May 20, 2012

Copyright 2012 by Katherine M. Hilton
All Rights Reserved

FACE, KNOWLEDGE AND FLOOR: ANALYZING *LIKE* USAGE THROUGH A COMBINED VARIATIONIST, DISCOURSE ANALYTIC AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Katherine M. Hilton, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Anna Marie Trester, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the distribution and functions of non-standard *like* in naturally occurring conversations among young Americans. Many of the past quantitative studies on *like* have focused exclusively on its correlations with age and gender. Meanwhile, within discourse analytic and pragmatics research, there has been considerable disagreement over *like*'s core meaning and functions. As a result, there remain several unanswered questions about *like*. I propose that combining methods and theories from sociolinguistic variation, pragmatics, and discourse analysis will offer insights into answering the following: how is *like* distributed within and across interactions, and how does this distribution reflect its core meaning and functions?

The data for this study come from four spontaneous conversations among friends aged 19-29. Each utterance from these interactions was coded for two dependent variables – presence of *like* in initial or medial position – and six independent variables – gender, turn length, epistemic rights to topic, face-threatening acts, narrative, and Speaker Involvement Index, which measures how much a speaker controls the conversational floor.

A multiple regression analysis of the 5656 utterances indicates that four of the above factors have a significant effect on *like* usage: epistemic rights to topic, face-threatening acts, turn length, and Speaker Involvement Index. In other words, speakers use *like* more often when they have exclusive knowledge of a topic, commit potentially face-threatening acts, speak in

extended turns, and hold the conversational floor more throughout the entire interaction.

Interestingly, gender had a relatively weak effect on *like* usage.

In light of these results and past work on discourse and epistemic markers, I argue that all of *like*'s functions derive from a core meaning of inexactness and that the patterns of its usage reflect this core meaning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and confidence of my advisor, Anna Marie Trester, who has offered unending guidance throughout this project and all of my endeavors at Georgetown. I would also like to thank Robert Podesva and Deborah Schiffrin for providing the knowledge that inspired this project. I am equally indebted to all of my friends and classmates who contributed their insights and voices to my research and tolerated my frequent tape-recording. I am especially thankful for the encouragement and hours of revisions that Francis Beringer offered throughout the writing process. Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to my parents and grandparents, whose tireless support has allowed me to pursue my passion for linguistic research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
2.1. Discourse Markers.....	4
2.2. Epistemic Markers.....	6
2.3. <i>Like</i>	11
2.3.1. Interspeaker variation studies on <i>like</i>	11
2.3.2. Functions of <i>like</i> in discourse.....	16
2.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	21
3. THE STUDY.....	23
3.1. The Data.....	23
3.2. Defining the Dependent Variable.....	26
3.3. Coding.....	28
4. RESULTS.....	36
4.1. Epistemic Rights.....	36
4.2. Face-threatening Acts.....	38
4.3. Turn length.....	40
4.4. Speaker Involvement Index.....	42
4.5. Narrative.....	46
4.6. Gender.....	47
5. DISCUSSION.....	49
5.1. Face-threatening Acts.....	51
5.2. Epistemic Rights.....	55
5.3. Turn Length and Speaker Involvement Index.....	60
5.4. Narrative.....	65
5.5. Gender and Interactional Styles.....	67
6. CONCLUSION.....	74
REFERENCES.....	77

1. INTRODUCTION

Like has received considerable attention in recent years from both academic literature and the broader societal discourse. A February 2011 feature on Dictionary.com titled “The truth behind one of the most disliked phrases in English” described *like* as an ungrammatical and cringe-worthy filler, deeming its use reprehensible and akin to “cross[ing] over to the dark side” (Dictionary.com 2011). *Like* also figured prominently in an April 2011 article in *Glamour* magazine that offered young women advice on sounding professional and competent in the workplace. The writer strongly advised women to avoid using *like* (along with creaky voice, up-speaking, profanity, and “squishy language,” or hedging), because it sounds juvenile, panicky, and is “one four-letter word that’s nails-on-the-chalkboard aggravating” (Belebeau 2011). One has to wonder, if *like* is such a meaningless and abhorrent word, then why does anyone use it at all?

A significant amount of research in linguistics has been dedicated to this question. Past work has analyzed the demographic patterns of *like*’s usage, the social perceptions of those users, and the roles it plays in talk. *Like* is associated with young people, both perceptually and in terms of actual usage (Dailey-O’Cain 2000; Singler 2001; Tagliamonte 2005; D’Arcy 2006, 2007). It is widely regarded as more popular among women than men, but quantitative research has found mixed gender patterns across studies (Dailey-O’Cain 2000; Tagliamonte 2005; D’Arcy 2007). In terms of function, broader society regards *like* as superfluous and meaningless, while linguists have described the numerous, and sometimes disparate, functions that it has in discourse. Despite this research, there exist gaps in the understanding of *like*’s distribution and functions.

Quantitative variationist studies have mostly considered *like*'s correlations with age and gender. This emphasis on gender, to the exclusion of other variables, provides an incomplete picture of *like*'s distribution; past work on identity (Ochs 1992; Bucholtz & Hall 2005) has shown that gender patterns are often mediated by interactionally constructed stances and roles, which more directly affect language choices. Little has been done to explore what stances, roles, and other interactionally emergent factors might correlate with *like* usage. In addition to this gap in quantitative studies, there is considerable disagreement within the body of qualitative work about *like*'s underlying meaning and functions. This discord results from the fact that *like* occurs in a variety of seemingly unrelated contexts. For instance, *like*'s clearest function is as a marker of approximation or inexactness, but it occurs most often in semantically literal contexts. This apparent contradiction has been difficult to reconcile. Some have argued that *like* signals inexactness at its core, while others contend that it primarily functions as a focuser that highlights new or important information. Because of these gaps, a number of questions remain. What motivates speakers to use *like*? What interactionally emergent factors contribute to the observed gender patterns? What is *like*'s core meaning? And, why do speakers use *like*, in particular, to accomplish the pragmatic and interactional functions that it serves?

In this study, I draw on both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer these questions, with particular emphasis on how the core meaning of *like* affects its distribution in local interactions and beyond. I consider all non-standard, non-quotative uses of *like*. Table 1 below provides examples of the uses that this study does and does not analyze:

INCLUDED IN ANALYSIS		EXCLUDED FROM ANALYSIS	
Type	Example	Type	Example
Initial <i>like</i>	“ Like , what do you mean?” “But like , that’s not how it started.”	Quotative <i>like</i>	“They were like , get out of here right now.” “I was like , what am I doing?”
Medial <i>like</i>	“It was like two miles.” “That’s like the worst idea.”	Comparative <i>like</i>	“You look just like twins.”

Table 1: Examples of *like* uses included and excluded from the present study

Specifically, this study looks at language choices made within interaction in order to understand how *like* patterns in conversation and across speakers. The goal of this project is to gain insight into the motivations behind *like* usage and the connections between these motivations and larger patterns of speaker identity. The methodological approach to this study is innovative, because it operationalizes discourse and interactionally emergent features. This allows for a multivariate analysis, comparing the relative effects of gender and interactional factors. Moreover, analyzing the statistical correlations between *like* and relevant discourse features provides insight into how it functions in conversation.

The following section reviews past work on *like* along with frameworks for studying discourse markers and epistemicity. Section 3 describes the data source, data collection, and coding process in detail. Finally, in sections 4 and 5, I present the results of the statistical analysis and discuss the significance of these results for understanding how *like* functions in discourse.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I review the literature that informs my project. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 review past work on discourse markers and markers of epistemic stance, respectively. These sections provide a framework for approaching semantically elusive, yet pragmatically essential expressions, such as *like*. Section 2.3 considers past research on *like*. Finally, section 2.4 presents the research questions and hypotheses that guide this study.

2.1. DISCOURSE MARKERS

In her 1987 work, Schiffrin describes the functions and distribution of eleven discourse markers (*oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, y'know, and I mean*) and defines several important characteristics that all of these markers share. Discourse markers (1) are syntactically independent, (2) often occur in initial position, (3) are multifunctional, (4) demonstrate how units of an interaction relate to one another, and (5) maintain a core meaning despite functional diversity (328). The last three characteristics will be discussed below, because they are essential for interpreting how *like* operates in conversation.

Discourse markers create coherence in conversation. In other words, they show how components of an interaction relate to one another. For example, they can indicate how two ideas relate to each other, or how speakers themselves relate to an idea, another participant, or an action. Schiffrin describes discourse as being composed of five planes – the exchange structure, action structure, idea structure, participation framework, and information state, the basic units of which are turns, acts, ideas, participants, and knowledge. Discourse markers connect units of interaction within and across these planes. The diagram in Figure 1 represents the relations between these planes and their units:

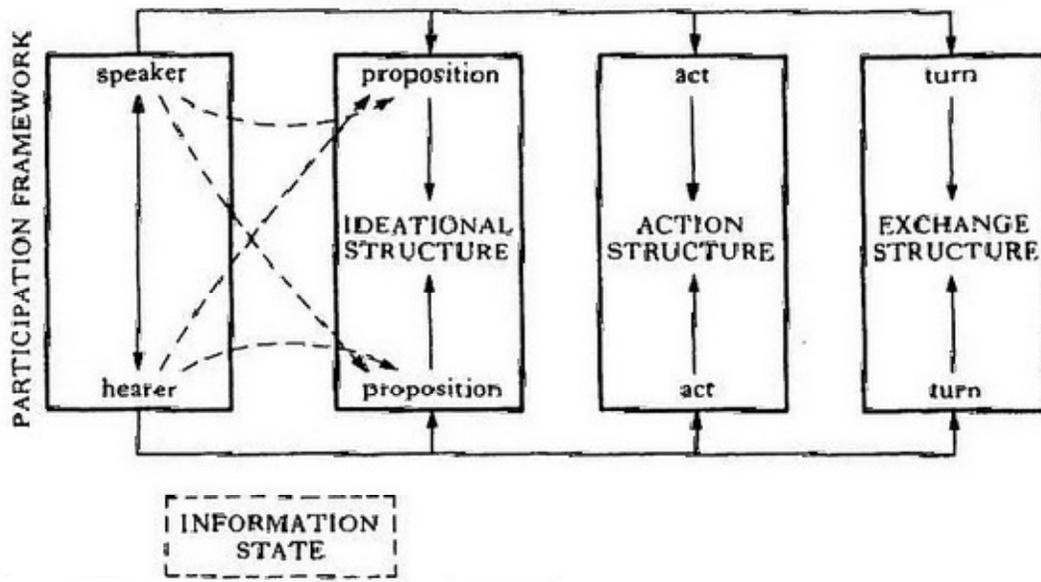


Figure 1: Planes of discourse (Schiffrin 1987: 25).

Discourse markers create coherence by showing how one unit of discourse connects with another. For example, *and* fundamentally marks a logical continuation (Schiffrin 1987); therefore, it can demonstrate that one speaker's turn or act is a logical continuation from another's or his or her own. *And* can also show that an idea or proposition is a continuation from a previous one, and it is often used to show sequential ordering of events. In order for a word or expression to be considered a discourse marker, it must be multifunctional, having the capacity to function in more than one plane of discourse. *And* fulfills this requirement by operating on three planes – the ideational, action, and exchange structures – to show a continuation between ideas, acts, and turns. Acknowledgment of this multifunctionality is important, as it shows that simply because a word or phrase serves a variety of purposes in discourse, it does not mean that each function belongs to a distinct word with a distinct meaning. In fact, Schiffrin argues just the opposite.

Schiffrin explains that the ability to operate on multiple planes and achieve different functions is not due to a multiplicity of meanings. Though by definition discourse markers are

semantically vague, they do have a stable core meaning. What creates the variety of functions is the context in which the marker occurs:

These core meanings do not fluctuate from use to use; rather, what changes is the discourse slot in which they appear – the position of that slot in an exchange, action, and idea structure, in a participation framework, and/or an information state. This suggests, then, that markers themselves do not convey social and/or expressive meanings. Rather, markers are situated in very different discourse slots, and it is the utterance within that discourse slot which is interpreted for social and/or expressive meaning (318).

For example, *well* can preface rejections, denials, disagreements, and failures to answer questions or fulfill requests. However, in each of these cases, *well* maintains a core meaning, signaling “moves that are in some way dispreferred” (102). It is not that *well* has numerous meanings, allowing it to provide coherence in each of its occurrences. Rather, it has a basic core meaning that is fleshed out by the context of its occurrence.

This defining attribute of discourse markers is essential to this project and the understanding of *like*. As will be discussed in section 2.3, past research on *like* has described several roles it plays in discourse, and there is considerable disagreement as to whether or not these various roles are united by a core meaning, and if so, what that meaning is. Schiffrin’s work on discourse markers shows that multifunctionality should be expected and does not imply that a marker lacks unity among its many uses.

2.2. EPISTEMIC MARKERS

Speakers have the option of indicating how they acquired the information in their talk and how much confidence they have in that information. Words and expressions that indicate a speaker’s orientation towards talk are markers of epistemic stance. This section reviews five basic ways that a speaker can acquire knowledge and then examines how and why speakers mark particular stances in relation to both their knowledge and its source. Understanding stance marking is

important, because past work has shown that *like* plays a role in communicating epistemic stance by signaling inexactness and a reduced commitment toward information (Andersen 1998, 2000).

As part of a larger study on grammatical and pragmatic epistemic stance marking, Mushin (2001) outlines five basic sources from which speakers can acquire knowledge: personal experience (private and perceptual), reportive, inferential, and factual (59). Knowledge derived from personal experience consists of perceptual experiences, private states, emotions, and sensations. Mushin writes that the use of this epistemological stance “gives an impression of certainty and confidence – it is the speaker’s own version of information,” which reflects “the speaker’s willingness to take responsibility for the information” (65). In other words, when speakers present information as deriving from personal experience (often with the use of first person reference) they are conveying a certain ownership of and commitment to that information. By contrast, a reportive stance distances or detaches the speaker from responsibility for the information. It attributes it to another speaker and often embeds it within a speech act predicate (69). Similarly, an inferential stance indicates that a speaker arrived at some conclusion through speculation or deduction, as opposed to direct experience. When an utterance lacks any overt marking of knowledge source, this is considered a factual stance. It assumes that the source of knowledge is irrelevant or that the knowledge is shared.

While the encoding of a knowledge source is an obligatory grammatical process in many languages, it serves important pragmatic, yet optional, purposes in English. As such, English speakers have flexibility in how or even if they indicate the source of their knowledge. Mushin explains that for all languages, even those with mandatory evidential marking, the actual source of information is not the only factor that determines the stance a speaker assumes towards it. Pragmatic and interactional factors, in addition to cultural conventions, contribute to the

encoding of a knowledge source. As a result, there is not always agreement between the actual and encoded sources of knowledge (82). The figure below, from Mushin, illustrates the factors that affect the ultimate form of evidential marking:

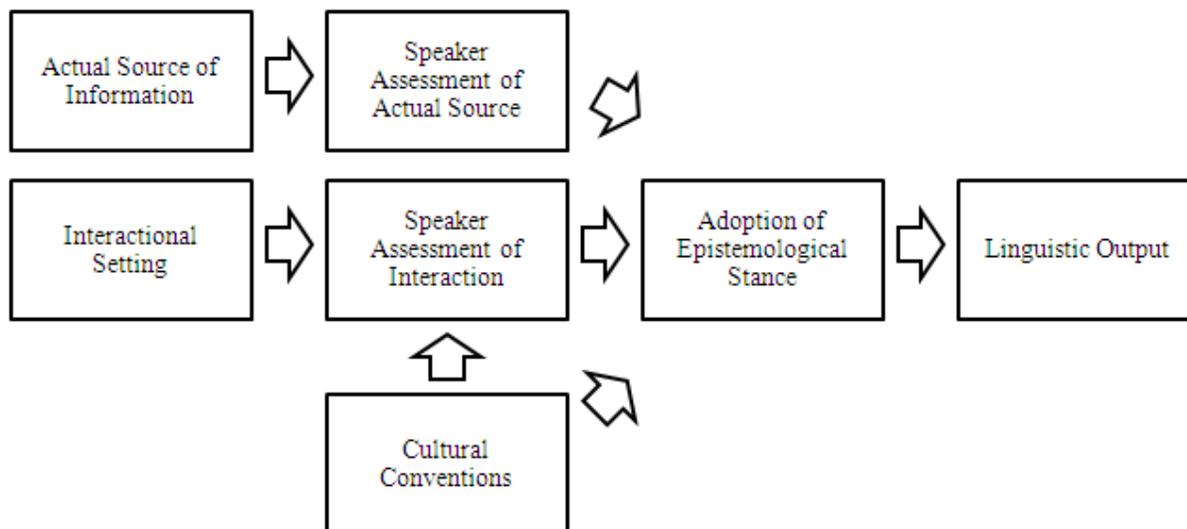


Figure 2: Adoption of epistemological stance and linguistic output (2001: 82)

When deciding how or if to mark units of talk for their epistemological source, speakers take into consideration the actual source of their information, their interactional setting, and cultural conventions. All of these factors contribute to the ultimate linguistic output in the form of evidentiality marking. For example, a speaker may use a reportive stance to mark information that was actually acquired by personal experience. Mushin explains that this strategy allows speakers to downplay their involvement and distance themselves from the information by attributing it to someone else (53). This research is relevant to the present study, because I use Mushin’s breakdown of knowledge sources to sort my data into two categories of information access: knowledge that is exclusive to the speaker (derived from private personal experience) and knowledge that is shared among the speakers (derived from any other source).

While Mushin’s work demonstrates that speakers often mark the source of their knowledge differently from how it was actually acquired due to interactional goals, others have

gone further to demonstrate that there is a pattern behind this perceived misalignment. Kärkkäinen (2003) also highlights the interactive role that epistemic marking plays in conversations. She too argues that speakers are motivated by interactional goals when deciding how to code for the source and reliability of their knowledge. With respect to misalignment between source and stance, she argues that speakers tend to communicate low confidence in the information they present, in terms of both reliability and their belief in it (54). This indication of reduced confidence occurs regardless of the actual reliability of the information. Many have used Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory in order to understand this phenomenon, arguing that the avoidance or mitigation of face-threatening acts causes speakers to downplay their confidence through epistemic marking. Kärkkäinen, though, questions this (over)application of Politeness Theory on the grounds that epistemic markers of reduced commitment frequently serve discourse organizational functions in situations that seem to lack face-threats.

From considering Kärkkäinen's analysis and my own data, it appears that speakers are indeed motivated to use epistemic markers of reduced confidence to mitigate impoliteness; however, the frequent occurrence of certain markers in particular discourse positions can cause them to acquire new discourse functions outside of mitigation. For instance, speakers can use a phrase like *I don't know* (discussed below) to minimize impoliteness, and if this phrase commonly occurs at turn boundaries, then it can come to signal mitigation and/or that the speaker is yielding the floor. This interpretation is supported by Schiffrin's (1987) explanation that discourse markers which primarily signal a speaker's stance or the connections between ideas can come to indicate the organization and sequencing of turns. Notwithstanding,

Schiffrin's work also emphasizes that the diverse, abstract functions of a discourse marker are always united by a common core meaning.

In her work on the phrase *I don't know*, Tsui (1991) describes how speakers can use this marker of doubt for a variety of discourse functions even though its core meaning remains constant. The phrase *I don't know* literally means that the speaker lacks sufficient information. However, it is used in a number of contexts, particularly ones where the speaker does not actually lack information. Tsui explains that it “functions as an avoidance of making an assessment, a preface to a disagreement, an avoidance of explicit disagreement, an avoidance of commitment, a minimization of impolite beliefs and a marker of uncertainty” (607). She argues that it is not polysemy that allows for this range of occurrences. Rather, the core meaning of *I don't know* as a “declaration of insufficient knowledge” (607) remains stable in each of its uses and is called upon to achieve the interactional function of avoiding face-threats to speaker and hearer.

Tsui's description of the meaning and functions of *I don't know* conforms to Schiffrin's (1987) framework for analyzing discourse markers, discussed in section 2.1 above. *I don't know* functions primarily in the information state to indicate insufficient information. However, this core meaning is also present when *I don't know* does not signal insufficiency in the information state, but rather the speaker's own orientation towards information, ideas, acts, and other participants. While in its primary role, it communicates a lack of knowledge, it is often used when the speaker does not lack knowledge at all. Instead, the core meaning of a marker of information deficit also implies a level of uncertainty, deniability, and lack of commitment to the information. These implied meanings allow uses of *I don't know* to be extended to cases where the speaker may not lack knowledge, but is nevertheless able to communicate uncertainty or

deniability and thereby distance him or herself from the ideas or acts of his or her talk. Based in part on this model of *I don't know*, I argue below in section 2.3.2 that *like*'s core meaning of inexactness also allows for distancing and reduced commitment to talk, even in cases when there is no semantic or lexical imprecision.

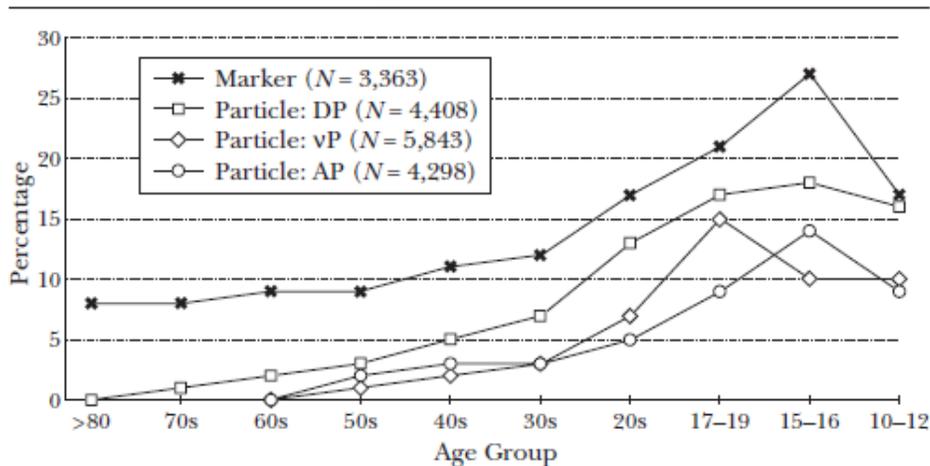
2.3. LIKE

The use of non-standard *like* has received significant attention over the past three decades within linguistic research and in the broader societal discourse. This is due, at least in part, to its frequency of use in spoken discourse and its increase in use over time. Past work has focused on both who uses it and why. Section 2.3.1 reviews the findings of interspeaker variation studies, and section 2.3.2 discusses past work on the various functions of *like* in discourse.

2.3.1 Interspeaker variation studies on like

Most interspeaker variation studies on *like* have analyzed its correlations with age and gender (Dailey-O'Cain 2000; Singler 2001; Tagliamonte 2005; D'Arcy 2006, 2007). Overall, these studies have found that it is used most frequently and in the widest variety of discourse contexts by adolescents and young adults. The data also indicate that its usage is increasing over time. Graph 1 below from D'Arcy (2007) illustrates these trends. The x-axis represents speaker age (ranging from 80-10), and the y-axis indicates the frequency of *like* found in either clause-initial position ("Marker" *like*) or before an individual noun, verb or adjective phrase ("Particle" *like*):

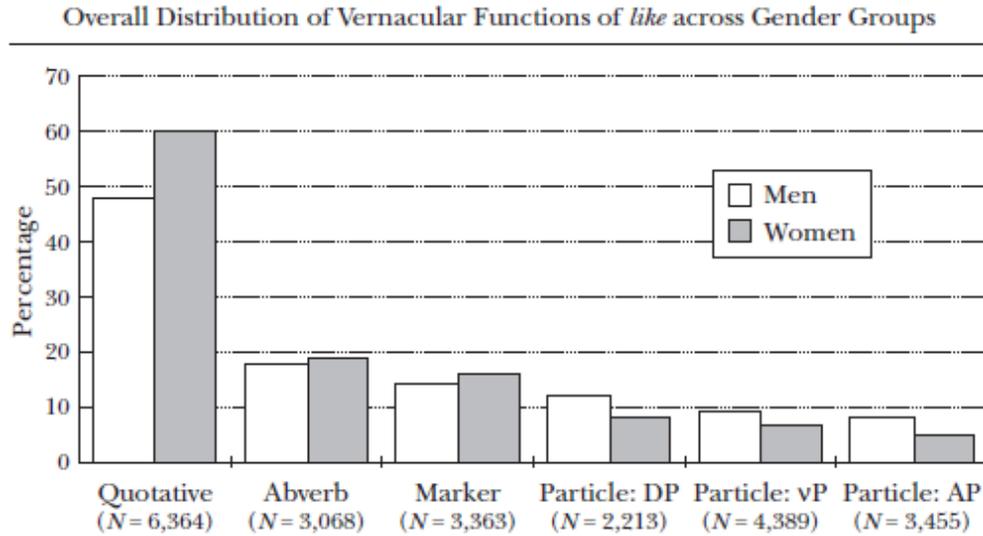
Frequencies of *like* as a Discourse Marker and a Discourse Particle across Apparent Time in Toronto



Graph 1: Discourse marker and particle *like* usage by age (D’Arcy 2007: 402)

Graph 1 demonstrates that nearly all participants use *like* in discourse marker and particle positions, but the youngest speakers do so more frequently and in the widest variety of contexts. For example, speakers between 10 and 29 years old use discourse marker *like* in approximately 20% of possible contexts, whereas speakers over 30 use it only half as frequently.

The correlations between *like* usage and gender, on the other hand, are not quite as straightforward. Dailey-O’Cain (2000) found that males aged 14-49 used both clause-initial discourse marker and quotative *like* more than females in the same age groups. Contrastively, in her study on the usage of discourse marker *like* among young Canadians, Tagliamonte (2005) observed that female teens and pre-teens typically used it more than their male counterparts. D’Arcy (2007), however, found a more complex gender pattern, in which female speakers used quotative and clause-initial discourse marker *like* more, but males used clause-medial discourse particle *like* more. The gender correlations from D’Arcy’s study are presented in Graph 2 below:



Graph 2: Use of *like* by gender and function (D’Arcy 2007: 396)

I suggest that one possible reason that the correlations between *like* and gender are varied across studies is because gender is only indirectly linked to its usage. Recent work in social-meaning approaches to sociolinguistic variation has shown that large-scale demographic categories are often not the most direct or best predictors of a linguistic feature’s distribution. As I will show, quantitative descriptions of a variable are more complete and accurate when they acknowledge the complexity of speaker identity and incorporate interactional factors such as stance and participant role in their analysis.

Traditional variationist studies and the majority of quantitative work on *like* analyze the correlations between the rate at which speakers use a variable and the demographic categories of those speakers. However, recent work in the field of sociolinguistics has called for a reconceptualization of speaker identity (Bucholtz & Hall 2005; Coupland 2007; Schilling-Estes 2002, 2004; Mendoza-Denton 2002). These researchers have argued that identity is complex, multidimensional, and emergent throughout interaction. Additionally, interaction is the site of linguistic meaning-making and both shapes and reflects larger patterns of language variation.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose that the complexity of identity can be captured by viewing it from various levels:

identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles (592).

Identity consists of not only demographic categories or community-defined roles, but is also created by the stances and participant roles that speakers take up during interaction. Thus, understanding a speaker is not only about who they are, but what they do.

Work on language variation and social meaning has also emphasized that identity categories do not exist independently from speakers or interactions, but are created and reinforced throughout interaction. Schilling-Estes (2002) underscores the idea that meanings are always embedded in concrete conversations:

Meaning is always situated and ... people utilize stylistic resources, not only to indicate relatively long-standing group affiliations and personal attributes but also to make temporary meanings in an ongoing interaction – in other words, to accomplish various conversational purposes (390).

It is within these interactions that meaning is reinforced and redefined. This applies to the meaning of both a linguistic variable and identity categories. Coupland (2007) explains that not only are the meanings of variable language use situated and negotiated in discourse, but so are the meanings of identities: “cultural belonging is itself an active, iterative, reconstructive process. It is not simply the perpetuation of an identity state” (107). As I will show in this analysis, an identity is not necessarily something that speakers have but rather is something that they create. Moreover, linguistic variables do not necessarily have static, predetermined meanings; instead a variable’s meaning is constructed and reconstructed throughout interaction.

This approach to identity and linguistic meaning is important, not only because it provides a more complete and accurate depiction of the speaker and their variable language use,

but also because these studies tap into the link between the individual speakers and the broader speech community. Schilling-Estes (2002) argues that the patterns that emerge in conversation have a reciprocal effect on the patterns observed across many speakers of community:

Since intra-speaker variation lies at the intersection of the individual and the communal, a better understanding of its patterns will lend valuable insight into how the two spheres interrelate – that is, how individuals internalize broad-based community language patterns and how these patterns are shaped and reshaped by individuals in everyday conversational interaction (376).

Language patterns observed at the community level in large-scale studies are all grounded in local interactions. It is within these interactions where social meanings are created and negotiated. Studying variation from inside the interaction allows us to observe this process.

The majority of quantitative analyses of *like* have defined speakers almost exclusively in terms of age and gender. While many studies have found that gender has a significant effect on *like*, the results across studies have been mixed. A possible explanation for this inconsistency is that gender is not directly linked to language choices in these interactions, but is mediated by other, more significant factors. Coupland (2007), Ochs (1992), and Moore and Podesva (2009) have argued this exact point with respect to gender, that elements of identity defined within the interaction or by the local community are likely to have a greater effect on language choices than demographically defined categories.

In accordance with the increasing emphasis placed on interaction in sociolinguistic variation, research on discourse markers and markers of epistemic stance (discussed in sections 2.1 and 2.2 above) also shows that discourse features are largely affected by discourse contexts, interactional goals, and speakers' stances towards talk and other participants. Using these approaches to study the distribution of *like* within and across interactions will not only improve

understanding of how it correlates with aspects of speaker identity, but will also clarify its meaning and functions in discourse, as I explore in the following section.

2.3.2 Functions of like in discourse

One of the clearest and most researched functions of *like* is the quotative complementizer BE+*like* (Schourup 1983; Blyth et al. 1990; Romaine & Lange 1991; Meehan 1991; Ferrara & Bell 1995; Buchstaller 2001; Lamerichs & Te Molder 2009). This form can be used to frame constructed dialogue (real or imaginary), inner thoughts, imitations, and non-linguistic sounds and signs. While the present study examined the use of quotative *like* informally, it was not included in the statistical analysis for two reasons. First, there is little variation in quotative choice among the participants of this study; if they used a quotative, the speakers almost exclusively choose BE+*like* to introduce constructed dialogue or inner thoughts. While this is noteworthy and reflects the trend of increasing *like* usage in all forms over time, it does not contribute to the goal of this study, which is to understand how variation at an interactional level affects and reflects the meaning and functions of *like*. Second, *like* as a quotative has been studied extensively, and its role in discourse is relatively well-understood. Focusing instead on *like* in other discourse contexts allows me to address the gaps and disagreements in the literature about its functions.

Another clear role that *like* plays in discourse is in conveying approximation. However, researchers do not agree upon the centrality of approximation to *like*'s core meaning. Some researchers have proposed that its core meaning is based on approximation, and that all of its various functions stem from this (Andersen 1997, 1998, 2000; Buchstaller 2001; Fox Tree 2007; Lamerichs & Te Molder 2009). Others claim that it primarily functions as a focusing or highlighting device which draws attention to new or salient information, and that its

approximative uses are ultimately derived from its role as a focuser (Underhill 1988; Miller & Weinert 1995; Dailey-O’Cain 2000; Miller 2009).

Andersen (2000) argues that semantic looseness and a lack of lexical commitment are at the core of *like*’s multiple functions, describing it as a marker of ‘loose talk.’ He explains that speakers use *like* to indicate a mismatch between the content of their talk and their underlying thought, signaling that what they say should not be taken too literally. He describes four types of semantic mismatches that *like* signals: approximation, hyperbole, metaphor, and examples out of a larger set of possible alternatives. Excerpts 1-4 below from my data set illustrate each of these four related functions:

Scarlett:	Maybe like twenty five people came?
Lola:	He's like black but not.

Excerpt 1: Approximation

Jason:	Like literally, Every game I had ever like played in or went
---------------	--

Excerpt 2: Hyperbole

Charlotte:	I think Maggie got like sucked into a line
-------------------	---

Excerpt 3: Metaphor

Jason:	Every time they play that? At like a sporting event, For warm ups,
---------------	---

Excerpt 4: Example out of a larger set

Having said that, semantic approximation does not account for all (or even most) occurrences of *like* in discourse. In fact, *like* frequently occurs when the phrase it follows is a precise semantic match to the underlying thought it represents. An example of this is presented below in Excerpt 5, where Jason recounts the events of a music video he watched:

Jason:	Her husband is <u>like</u> coming up the stairs, And so he hides in the closet. And then <u>like</u> her husband <u>like</u> finds him,
---------------	---

Excerpt 5: Examples of *like* in semantically literal contexts

In the above example, there does not seem to be anything inexact about Jason's description of the events in the video. Andersen recognizes the fact that *like* often does occur in semantically literal contexts and argues that it can also indicate discrepancy on a lexical or stylistic level. He states that in these cases, it signals that the wording or stylistic characteristics of an expression may be inappropriate, despite the fact that the semantic content accurately conveys the speaker's underlying thought (28). In these cases, *like* displays a mismatch between the lexical choice and the speaker's typical linguistic repertoire. However, others have proposed alternative interpretations for the numerous cases where *like* precedes semantically literal talk.

Miller (2009) points out that only one third of the occurrences of *like* in his data can be interpreted as signaling approximation (325). He cites this as justification for rejecting Andersen's (2000) description of *like* as primarily a marker of 'loose talk.' Instead, he proposes that it is a focuser, which highlights new or salient phrases and information. He explains that *like* is used to request or provide examples, explanations and clarifications, as well as to anticipate or introduce objections (336). These functions seem to eliminate the possibility that *like*'s core meaning signals approximation, because the acts of explaining, clarifying, or objecting seem to require and imply semantic precision. In order to address the number of cases where *like* does mark approximations or inexactness, Miller explains that this function is just one of many ways that a speaker can add focus to a phrase or the information it communicates.

Notwithstanding, the theory that *like* is primarily and at its core a focusing device conflicts with past work on discourse markers and markers of epistemic stance. Schiffrin (1987), Tsui (1991), and Kärkkäinen (2003) argue that markers derive their core meanings from the uses

that are the most propositional and least abstract or interactional in function. Therefore, it is more probable that *like*'s core meaning stems from its more propositional uses as an approximative adverb and comparative preposition than its role in abstract, interactional focusing. This position is supported by Buchstaller's (2001) work on *like*.

Buchstaller (2001) argues that all uses of *like*, whether as a quotative, approximator or focuser, are firmly linked to one core meaning. This core is rooted in *like*'s older usage as a comparative preposition, and all other uses branch out from this origin. One of the functions she describes is that of a pragmatic or epistemic hedge, which "does not fully commit the speaker to the content of what she says" (24). This aligns with Andersen's (2000) definition of *like* as a marker of reduced lexical commitment. However, the explanation that Buchstaller provides for how *like* has evolved from a comparative to a focuser is not well-supported.

Buchstaller (2001) provides two explanations for how the focusing function of *like* has stemmed from its core meaning as a comparative/approximative. The first is that it acts as a filler and gives the speaker time to think while preparing to present the important or new information:

The presentation of new or newly focused-on information can trigger problems of formulation. A marker with an approximative function, and especially one that is already semantically heavily bleached, seems an ideal particle to introduce focused material – marking it as such while giving the speaker time to mentally prepare his following speech (25).

While it is possible that instances of *like* as a filler do occur, this certainly does not account for the majority of cases, as argued by Miller (2009), who demonstrates that *like* should not be analyzed as a filler, because it is "not accompanied by hesitations, false starts and long pauses, which would indicate lexical indecision or problems in planning syntactic structure" (323). Furthermore, Buchstaller does not provide evidence that other fillers or markers of hesitation,

such as *um*, have been analyzed as focusers. Therefore, even if *like* were used as a filler, it is not clear that this would result in adding focus to the following talk. The second argument she offers is that *like* has undergone reanalysis from a comparative to a focuser, because elements that are compared are inherently focused (32). This is similar to Fuller's (2003) explanation that "information that is qualified is also simultaneously the focus of an utterance" (369). While this explanation is not false, it does not connect the core meaning of comparative/approximator to focuser.

Buchstaller proposes that *like* has been re-analyzed as a focuser from its core as a comparative, because comparison inherently adds focus. The fact that comparisons add focus may be true, but this does not demonstrate that these two different functions share a *core* meaning. The core of a comparative is *not* to put items into focus but to consider two or more items side-by-side in order to assess their similarities and differences. This core of comparison can be extended to approximation and inexactness, by drawing on the role of a comparative to assess difference. It is inconsistent to claim that a core meaning of all functions originates with comparison but then draws on the incidental quality of focus for further uses.

I propose an alternate theory to the ones discussed above that acknowledges the multifunctionality of *like* in semantically literal and approximate contexts and incorporates research on discourse markers and epistemic stance markers. Crucially, this analysis requires that these discourse items have a core meaning that motivates their numerous functions. Thus, at its core, *like* conveys inexactness, which stems from its use as a comparative and results in a reduced commitment. The fact that speakers use *like* so frequently to introduce talk that is semantically literal does not contradict its core meaning. Support for this interpretation comes from the work on epistemic stance marking discussed in section 2.2. Specifically, it is motivated

by (1) the observation that stances of complete confidence are disfavored – speakers typically communicate low confidence in the information they present, regardless of its actual reliability (Mushin 2001; Kärkkäinen 2003), and (2) the frequent use of markers of uncertainty, such as *I don't know*, to signal mitigation or a reduced commitment (Tsui 1991).

2.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

In the introduction to this study, I presented a series of questions about *like*'s distribution and functions that remain unanswered due to gaps in the literature. These questions are as follows:

- What motivates speakers to use *like*?
- What causes the observed gender patterns among *like* users?
- What is *like*'s core meaning?
- Why do speakers use *like*, in particular, to achieve the pragmatic and interactional functions that it serves?

These can be condensed into a single, two-part question around which the present analysis revolves:

Research Question

How is *like* distributed within and across interactions, and how does this distribution reflect its core meaning and functions?

In response to this question, I propose that:

Hypotheses

1. *Like* signals inexactness at its core, and all of its various functions are rooted in this inexactness.
2. The correlations between *like* usage and gender, in addition to *like*'s overall distribution in conversation, are primarily caused by interactionally emergent factors.

The current body of work on the distribution and functions of *like* spans multiple subfields of linguistics: sociolinguistic variation, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. Confining this study to the methods and theories of a single research tradition would restrict its capacity to fully address the central research question. It is for this reason that I seek to ground the study in both

discourse analytic and variationist traditions of research and utilize methodologies that are informed by both subfields.

3. THE STUDY

In this section, I discuss the data and methodological approaches used in this study. Section 3.1 describes the data collection, participants, and the relationships among participants. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 detail the selection of dependent and independent variables and the motivations for these methodological decisions.

3.1 THE DATA

The data for this study come from four spontaneous conversations among friends. Each conversation took place during a meal, and the entire interaction was recorded. While the participants agreed in advance to take part in the project, the data collection sessions were not planned, but occurred opportunistically. I carried a digital recorder often and asked permission to record when friends met for planned social gatherings or spontaneously for meals. The conversations took place among people who had friendly relationships prior to taping and would have met and interacted on these occasions independent of the data collection. This specific conversational data was selected over the conventional sociolinguistic interviews for several reasons.

As is explained in section 2 above, the relationships among participants have the potential to affect language use. For this reason, I only included interactions among participants with pre-existing friendships. I took part in each of the conversations and had well-established friendships with each of the participants prior to taping. Moreover, my relationships with the participants existed independently of this or any other academic research. While it is impossible to say that my role as a researcher and the introduction of a tape-recorder had no effect on the interactions, my primary relationship with the participants is as a friend. This is important, because the introduction of institutional relationships in an interaction can have a considerable

effect on the content and structure of conversation. Ten Have (1999) explains that “non-institutional data provide better examples of the purely local functioning of conversational devices and interactional formats” (8) and are ideal for studying interactional phenomena. Finally, past work has shown that discourse marker usage, and *like* in particular, is strongly affected by speaking situation. Miller (2009) found that *like* is much more frequent in spontaneous, private dialogue than any other context. Therefore, not only is spontaneous, casual conversation among friends well-suited for studying discourse phenomena in general, but it is also the context that occasions the greatest usage of *like*.

Another important characteristic of the data is that all speakers are between 19 and 29 years old. In some ways, this is a function of the friend groups and social gatherings that are most readily available to me and on which I would be least intrusive. Nevertheless, the selection of this age range was primarily motivated by past work on *like*, which demonstrates that its most frequent users are teenagers and young adults. D’Arcy’s (2007) work, discussed in section 2.3.1 above, shows that the speakers who use *like* the most frequently and in the widest variety of contexts were teenagers at the time of her recording in the mid 2000s. Teenagers in the mid 2000s were in their twenties at the time of my recording from 2009-2011. Focusing specifically on this age bracket of high *like* users ensures that the data will include a wide range of functions and contexts of use.

Each of the four conversations is labeled A-D, and all of the participants, except for me, are labeled with pseudonyms. Because some of the participants occur in more than one conversation, they are also labeled with the initial of the conversation they appear in. For example, Charlotte participates in conversations B and C, so she is labeled as Charlotte B during

conversation B and Charlotte C in conversation C. Details of each conversation and the participants are presented in Table 2:

CONVERSATION A		CONVERSATION B	
Place – college dining hall		Place – student center	
Time – April 2009		Time – January 2011	
Participants – college friends from campus musical group		Participants – graduate student classmates	
Pseudonym	Age	Pseudonym	Age
Arik A	19	Charlotte B	26
Dan A	21	Katherine B	24
Derek A	21	Lola B	27
Jason A	19	Maggie B	24
Katherine A	22	Mark B	29
Stew A	22	Sophie B	25
		Stan B	26
CONVERSATION C		CONVERSATION D	
Place – restaurant		Place – restaurant	
Time – February 2011		Time – December 2011	
Participants – graduate student classmates		Participants – high school and hometown friends	
Pseudonym	Age	Pseudonym	Age
Charlotte C	26	Brandon D	28
Chelsea C	25	Katherine D	25
Katherine C	24	Laura D	26
Scarlett C	26	Rebecca D	24

Table 2: Descriptions of conversations and participants

Conversation A took place in April 2009 at a college dining hall; conversation B took place in January 2011 over lunch at a university student center; conversation C took place at a restaurant in February 2011; and conversation D took place at a restaurant in December of 2011. The participants Charlotte, Chelsea, Scarlett, Lola, Maggie, Mark, Sophie, and Stan are all graduate student classmates and friends. Arik, Dan, Derek, Jason, and Stew are all friends from a college musical group. Brandon, Laura, and Rebecca grew up in the same neighborhood and participated on the same sports teams in high school.

After recording, I transcribed and analyzed one 30-minute segment from each of the conversations. I chose the segments that had the most participants present and the most joint contribution to a single topic. In other words, I tried to avoid parts of the recording where participants had left the area or had split off into separate, simultaneously occurring conversations.

3.2 DEFINING THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Applying the principles of quantitative variation analysis to discourse items presents a number of challenges, including the task of circumscribing the variable context and accounting for the multifunctionality of the variables. For this study, I did decide to define a variable context, because it is essential for analyzing the correlations between *like* and the interactionally emergent independent variables. Contrastively, Pichler (2010) has sought to resolve the difficulties of discourse variation studies by presenting a set of methodological practices for researchers to follow, including the elimination of the variable context. He suggests instead that researchers define the dependent variable as the relative frequency of the discourse item per word for each speaker. While this approach is well-suited for inter-speaker variation studies, using raw numbers per speaker does not allow for intra-speaker or intra-interactional analysis.

As for delineating the variable context for *like*, D'Arcy (2006, 2007) and Miller (2009) have defined it in relation to clausal structure. However, others have argued for the use of a prosodically defined, as opposed to syntactically defined, unit of analysis when studying pragmatic and discourse phenomena. Kärkkäinen (2003) uses the intonation unit (IU) as her basic unit of analysis for the study of epistemic marking, defining her variable in terms of its presence and position within the IU – initial, medial, or final. She argues that the IU is essential for discourse research, because it is a fundamental unit of interaction.

Although Miller (2009) used the clause as his basic unit of analysis, he too defined his variable relative to its position within the clause. Miller (2009) defined *like* in terms of its occurrence in clause-initial, medial, or final position. D’Arcy’s (2007) study also defined the variable context of *like* with respect to clausal structure, but in much greater detail. She analyzed *like* in six distinct positions – quotative, clause-initial discourse marker, clause-medial approximative adverb, and three clause-medial discourse particles preceding noun, adjective, and verb phrases. This study draws from both Miller’s and D’Arcy’s models, but with four notable exceptions.

First, I will use the intonation unit, not the clause, as the context of variation because of its relevance to interaction. Second, there are no instances of *like* in final position in the data for this study, so I will not adopt this category from Miller’s (2009) work. Miller’s studies were based on data from New Zealand, Australian, and Scottish English, where clause-final *like* is common; however, it seems that *like* does not occur in final position in American English. Third, working off of Schiffrin’s (1987) approach to discourse markers, I will count *like* as occurring in initial position if it preceded only by other discourse markers. Finally, I will collapse D’Arcy’s four categories of medial *like* into one, because it is not clear that they are immediately distinguishable. D’Arcy’s four distinct positions of clause-medial *like* can be more broadly distinguished as approximative adverbs and discourse particles. She states that discourse particle *like* is distinct from the other uses, because its meaning cannot be defined:

Unlike quotative *be like*, approximative adverb *like*, and discourse marker *like*, particle *like* cannot be glossed. This does not mean, however, that it serves no purpose. Whereas markers function at the textual level, particles operate in the interpersonal realm, aiding cooperative aspects of communication such as checking or expressing understanding (394-5).

From this description, along with the past work on *like*, discourse markers, and epistemicity discussed above, it is not obvious that discourse particle *like* is distinct from its use as an approximative adverb. Research on discourse and epistemic markers demonstrates that the same marker can operate within multiple planes of discourse. In other words, although approximative adverb *like* marks the semantic meaning of a phrase on the ideational plane, and discourse particle *like* signals interactional information on other planes of discourse, this does not mean that they are necessarily distinct. In fact, according to Schiffrin's (1987) definition of a discourse marker, it is expected to be multifunctional in this way. Work on epistemic marking has also shown that the same item can have both easily glossed propositional meanings and more abstract interactional and pragmatic functions (Kärkkäinen 2003). Finally, Buchstaller (2003) emphasizes that the different functions of *like* lack clear boundaries and are not categorical; they can overlap and serve multiple functions simultaneously. For these reasons, I have chosen to define the two dependent variables for this study as the presence of *like* in IU-initial position and IU-medial position.

3.3 CODING

The recordings were transcribed into intonation units (IU), which are primarily defined as the lexical material that occurs within a single pitch contour but can also be delineated by pauses and/or a change in loudness, voice quality or syllable duration (Chafe 1994). Each IU constitutes one token of data. There are 5656 total IUs, which have an average length of 10.68 words and a range of 1-24 words. I coded each IU for the two dependent variables – presence or absence of IU-initial and IU-medial *like*. Additionally, each IU was coded for the independent variables – gender, Speaker Involvement Index, narrative, turn length, epistemic rights, and face-threatening acts, as I will now describe. Speaker was also coded as a random effect.

In terms of speaker-level identity categories, I coded each token of data for the speaker's gender and his or her overall involvement in the conversation, as defined by influence over the conversational floor. I chose to examine speaker involvement, because preliminary observations of the data show that the speakers who talk the most tend to use *like* at disproportionately higher rates. It is possible that speaking often and being influential in topic development over the course of the entire conversation occasions greater *like* usage.

To quantify a speaker's involvement or influence over the conversational floor, I developed the Speaker Involvement Index (SII). The SII is a basic way of analyzing how involved and influential a speaker is relative to the other participants. In other words, it indicates how much of the conversational floor the speaker controls. Edelsky (1993) defines control of the floor as influence over turn-taking and topic development. Working off of this definition, SII incorporates both relative word per minute rates and topic-introduction rates as markers of a speaker's involvement in conversation. The SII equation, a detailed explanation of how to calculate it, and a table with each speaker's involvement index components are provided below:

Instructions for Calculating Speaker Involvement Index

$$\left[\left(\frac{\text{speaker wpm}}{\text{total wpm}} \right) + (.5) \left(\frac{\text{speaker tpm}}{\text{total tpm}} \right) \right] \times (100) =$$

- Find the speaker's average word per minute rate by dividing the total number of words spoken by the total number of minutes present in the conversation.
- Divide this number by the total word per minute rate of the conversation, which is the total number of words spoken by all participants divided by the length of the entire conversation. This gives you the speaker's word per minute rate relative to all other participants in the conversation.
- Repeat these steps for the number of topics that the speaker introduces into conversation which are maintained for at least 10 utterances by at least one other participant.
- Divide the topic introduction rate in half.
- Add both of these numbers together. Multiply by 100 to convert the number from a decimal, and round to the nearest integer.

CONVERSATION A						
Speaker	Total words spoken	Min present	Words per min	Topics introduced	Topics per min	SII
Jason A	560	5	112	2	0.40	64
Katherine A	1955	30	65.17	10	0.33	42
Stew A	1541	30	51.37	8	0.27	33
Dan A	1420	30	47.33	9	0.30	32
Derek A	1091	30	36.37	3	0.10	20
Arik A	429	27	15.89	5	0.18	14
Total	6996	30	233.20	37	1.23	

CONVERSATION B						
Speaker	Total words spoken	Min present	Words per min	Topics introduced	Topics per min	SII
Lola B	1459	26	56.12	21	0.81	48
Katherine B	1995	30	66.50	12	0.40	41
Sophie B	711	15	47.40	8	0.53	36
Maggie B	580	17	34.12	4	0.24	22
Mark B	893	23	37.21	3	0.12	21
Charlotte B	485	15	32.33	3	0.20	20
Stan B	446	29	15.38	4	0.14	11
Total	6569	30	218.97	55	1.83	

CONVERSATION C						
Speaker	Total words spoken	Min present	Words per min	Topics introduced	Topics per min	SII
Scarlett C	2629	30	87.63	8	0.27	61
Katherine C	2834	30	94.47	6	0.20	59
Charlotte C	897	30	29.90	5	0.17	27
Chelsea C	198	30	6.60	0	0	3
Total	6558	30	218.60	19	0.63	

CONVERSATION D						
Speaker	Total words spoken	Min present	Words per min	Topics introduced	Topics per min	SII
Brandon D	3117	29	107.48	15	0.52	58
Katherine D	3396	29	117.10	9	0.31	51
Laura D	1607	29	55.41	6	0.21	27
Rebecca D	1269	29	43.76	1	0.03	15
Total	9389	29	323.76	31	1.06	

Tables 3-6: Speaker Involvement Index breakdown for all participants

There are three important points to note about calculating the Speaker Involvement Index with regards to making SII values comparable across corpora, attributing topic introductions, and the unequal weighting of topic introduction and words per minute.

First, the equation was designed to make the SII values comparable among speakers from different conversations. This is accomplished by dividing individual word and topic introduction per minute rates by the total word and topic introduction per minute rates of all participants in that conversation. This means that the SII values represent each speaker's share of the floor relative to the other speakers, and it accounts for the fact that every conversation, even of the same time length, has different amounts of talk and topic shifts.

Second, in terms of defining topic boundaries, I labeled sections of the conversation with the main point of discussion, such as Mark's bus ride that morning, the increased price of tacos at the student center, or the meaning of the word 'supererogatory'. Introductions were attributed to the speaker (or speakers) who made first mention of the main referent, and an introduction only counted if it was taken up by at least one other speaker and continued for at least 10 intonation units.

Third, the word and topic introduction per minute rates in the SII equation are weighted unequally, because past work has demonstrated that the amount of talk that speakers contribute to a conversation has an effect on epistemic marking. As Kärkkäinen (2003) notes, speakers tend to express epistemic stance more often during longer turns at talk. The goal of coding for a speaker's involvement index is to see if those who tend to talk more overall mark epistemic stance more frequently overall, independent of the length of individual turns. I chose to also include the rate at which speakers successfully introduced new topics to account for the fact that sometimes participants speak, but no one seems to listen. According to Edelsky's (2003) definition of floor as influence over both turn-taking and topic development, the speaker does not hold the floor if his or her interlocutors are not listening. But, if the speaker does successfully contribute to topic development, then they do hold the floor.

It is also possible that the observed correlation between speaker involvement and *like* rates is actually caused by two other closely related factors – turn length and narrative. Speakers who talk more overall also tend to have longer individual turns and are more likely to tell stories. Additionally, past work suggests that these factors could have an effect on *like*. Kärkkäinen (2003) has demonstrated that turn length and epistemic stance marking are related: “speakers most commonly express their epistemic stance within extended turns, but less so at turn-initial position” (100). Second, much past work on *like* has described the important role that it plays in story-telling (Blyth, et al 1990; Romaine & Lange 1991; Fox Tree 2006; Lamerichs & Te Molder 2009). Therefore, it is possible that either of these factors (or both) might have a more direct effect on *like* than overall rates of speaker involvement. To address this overlap in factors, I also included turn length and narrative as independent variables.

Quantifying and coding for the concept of turn length initially presented some challenges, because turns are constructed in the moment, one IU at a time. Thus, upon uttering any IU, the speaker does not know if his or her turn will end there or continue on, and if it does continue, for how long. To account for the emergent nature of turn length, I coded each IU for the length of the turn-so-far at the moment it was uttered. This coding process for turn length is demonstrated below in Table 7:

Utterances	Length of turn-so-far
Scarlett: But like I had a fun weekend,	7
And so that was all right.	13
Like I did a race,	18
And like hung out with other people,	25

Table 7: Illustration of turn length calculation

Thus, in the table above, Scarlett begins her turn with an IU of seven words; therefore, the length of the turn-so-far for that IU is seven. Her next IU contains six words, so this is added to the

previous seven, and the length of her turn for this IU is thirteen. This process continues until another participant speaks, and the turn count resets.

In order to determine if telling stories increases the use of *like*, I coded each IU for whether or not it was part of a narrative. Following Labov's model (1972), narrative is defined as a sequence of at least two temporally ordered events and includes the abstract, orientation, evaluation, and coda, in addition to the actual retelling of events. All IUs that were spoken by the storyteller as part of a narrative structure were coded as narrative IUs, while all IUs that occurred elsewhere were coded as non-narrative.

In addition to speaker involvement, turn length, and narrative, I have also incorporated speaker stance as a factor. As was discussed in section 2.1 above, Schiffrin (1987) explains that discourse markers can signal a speaker's stance or orientation towards units on any of the five planes of discourse. In this project, I seek to understand if and how speakers use *like* to mark their stance towards information, ideas, acts, turn-taking, and other participants. Following Schiffrin's model for studying discourse markers, I coded the data for discourse contexts that are likely to occasion stance-taking. Specifically, I coded for exclusive epistemic rights to information and face-threatening acts. These particular contexts are relevant to the study of *like*, because past work has shown that they are likely to occasion hedging and mitigation strategies. If *like* does in fact act as a hedge or mitigator on multiple levels of discourse, then we would expect it to occur in contexts that call for mitigation but not necessarily semantic approximation. Furthermore, my preliminary observations of the data indicated that *like* seemed to occur more often when a speaker had exclusive access to information or was committing a potentially face-threatening act.

Each IU was labeled as either epistemically exclusive or not, depending on whether or not the content of that IU was known only to the speaker. The coding of epistemic rights mirrors Mushin’s (2001) categorization of knowledge sources in section 2.2 above. She describes private personal experience as talk about emotions, personal opinions, events that only the speaker was present for, and information about the speaker’s personal or family life; in this study, having exclusive rights to a topic is defined in the same way. The discussion of any topic outside of this is defined as not exclusive to the speaker. Examples of each of these coding categories are presented below in Table 8:

Utterance		Description of knowledge source	Coding of epistemic rights
Stew:	There were like six security guards, Screaming in her face.	Stew was only participant to experience event	Exclusive
Scarlett:	Like we would go out to lunch alone. We would hang out at his house alone.	Scarlett discusses her personal love life	Exclusive
Rebecca:	And then there was a giant blizzard, The next day, And we had to drive home.	Other participants experienced event with Rebecca	Not exclusive
Lola:	Yeah you have a dirty mouth. Like seriously. It’s up there with Maggie’s.	Referents are either present or friends with other participants	Not exclusive

Table 8: Examples of coding decisions for epistemic rights

These categories are not defined by the marking of a speaker’s stance towards information, such as using the first person or presenting information as reported speech. Instead, they are defined by the actual knowledge. The coding of these categories at times required background knowledge of the participants, to which I had access, in order to determine whether or not information was exclusive to the speaker or shared.

Finally, each IU was coded for presence or absence of face-threatening acts (FTAs). Specifically, I looked at cases where the speaker makes threats to the hearer’s positive face. Brown and Levinson (1987) define positive face as the image that people have of themselves, “crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of” by others

(61). Threats to a hearer's positive self-image occur when the speaker potentially demonstrates that he or she does not share or value the hearer's wants and feelings (66).

This study is not a comprehensive look at the interaction between *like* and face work. Rather, I have included FTAs in this study to determine whether *like* signals distance and inexactness beyond a semantic level. As Brown and Levinson discuss, friends generally wish to build each other's positive face and avoid making on-record threats. Therefore, when FTAs do occur, speakers are likely to minimize them in some way. If *like* does operate beyond a semantic level of interaction, extending the core meaning of inexactness to mark a stance toward acts, then one would expect to find a positive correlation between face-threatening acts and *like* usage. While Brown and Levinson provide an exhaustive list of potential FTAs, this study considers only four: insults, disagreements, boasts, and criticisms. These particular acts are relevant and useful for this study, because they are intrinsic threats to a hearer's positive face, and they typically occur within the bounds of a single IU or string of IUs. In contrast, it is not fruitful to code for many other FTAs, such as acting uncooperatively or excluding others, at the level of the intonation unit, because they may be manifested over the course of an entire conversation and might not be expressed lexically.

Once all of the data was coded, it was analyzed using the Rbrul multiple regression analysis program in order to determine which factors had a significant effect on the presence of *like* in each position and to what extent. I chose to use Rbrul over the more common GoldVarb, because it is able to analyze both binary and continuous factors, which accommodates the continuous Speaker Involvement Index and turn length variables. The results of this analysis are discussed below in Section 4.

4. RESULTS

Of the 5656 total intonation units in the data, 324 (5.73%) contain *like* in initial position, and 632 (11.17%) contain *like* in medial position. A multivariate analysis of the data indicates that four factors have a significant effect on the presence of *like* in both IU-initial and medial positions: epistemic rights to topic, face-threatening acts, turn length, and Speaker Involvement Index; gender was a significant factor for IU-medial *like* only, and narrative only had a significant effect on IU-initial *like*. The significant predictors of *like* in each position, ordered from greatest to least effect, are listed below in Table 9:

Significant predictors of initial <i>like</i>	p values	Significant predictors of medial <i>like</i>	p values
Epistemic rights to topic	2.26e ⁻¹¹	Turn length	2.43e ⁻¹⁷
Face-threatening acts	3.39e ⁻⁷	Epistemic rights to topic	5.22e ⁻¹⁴
Turn length	4.35e ⁻⁷	Face-threatening acts	2.23e ⁻¹⁰
Speaker Involvement Index	0.0127	Speaker Involvement Index	2.01e ⁻⁷
Narrative	0.0375	Gender	0.0073

Table 9: Statistically significant predictors of *like* in order of relative effect

The remainder of this section provides a detailed account of each independent variable's effect on the presence of *like*.

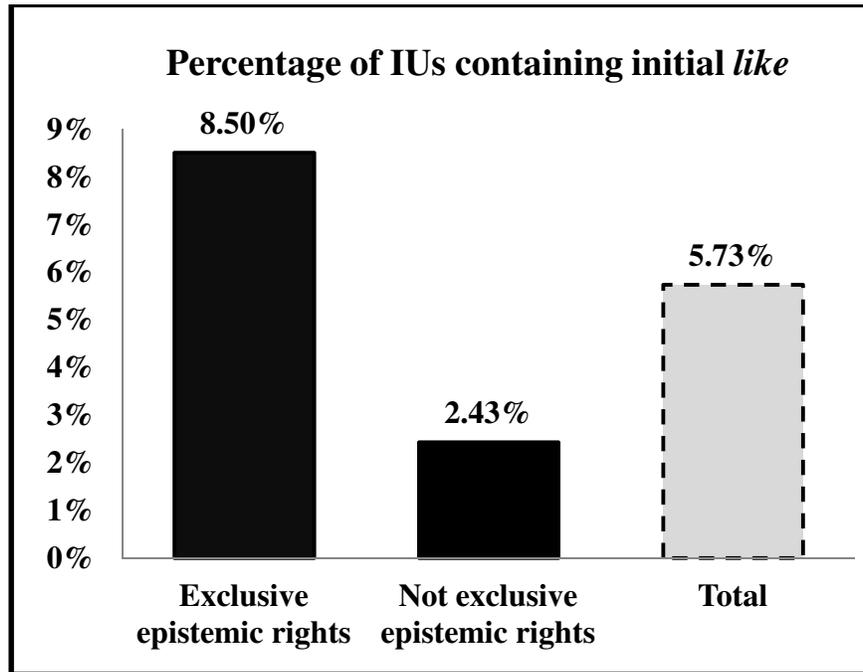
4.1. EPISTEMIC RIGHTS

A speaker's epistemic rights to a topic had the most significant effect on the occurrence of *like* in initial position and the second strongest effect on medial *like*. In 2965 IUs (52.42% of the total), the speaker held exclusive epistemic rights to the topic. Of these 2965 epistemically exclusive IUs, initial *like* occurred 252 times (8.50%), and *like* occurred medially 474 times (15.99%). During the 2691 IUs where the speaker did not have an exclusive claim to the topic, though, *like* only occurred initially 72 times (2.43%) and medially 158 times (5.87%). The rates at which

both initial and medial *like* occurred in epistemically exclusive and non-exclusive talk are presented graphically below in Tables 10 and 11 and Graphs 3 and 4:

Epistemic rights to topic	IUs with initial <i>like</i>	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds	Factor Weight
Exclusive	252	2965	8.50%	0.49	0.62
Not exclusive	72	2691	2.43%	-0.49	0.38
Total	324	5656	5.73%		

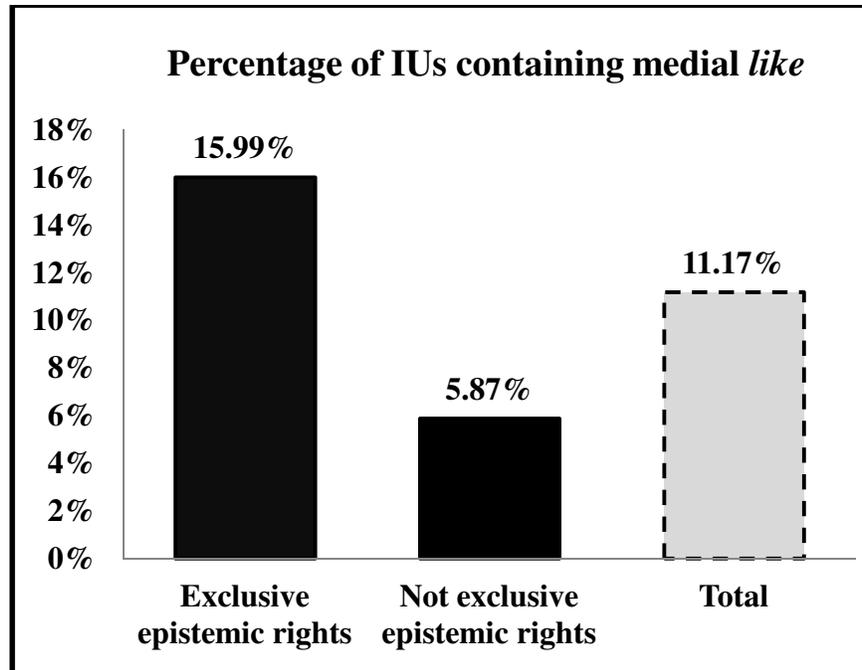
Table 10: Rates of IU-initial *like* usage during exclusive and non-exclusive talk



Graph 3: Rates of IU-initial *like* usage during exclusive and non-exclusive talk

Epistemic rights to topic	IUs with medial <i>like</i>	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds	Factor Weight
Exclusive	474	2965	15.99%	0.39	0.596
Not exclusive	158	2691	5.87%	-0.39	0.404
Total	632	5656	11.17%		

Table 11: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage during exclusive and non-exclusive talk



Graph 4: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage during exclusive and non-exclusive talk

These results demonstrate that *like* usage in both positions significantly increases when speakers have exclusive knowledge of a topic, such as when discussing their emotions, their private personal lives, or events that only they experienced. It may seem surprising at first that speakers would mark this type of talk with a marker of inexactness, because they are the sole “experts” on this particular information. However, I will explain below that there are pragmatic and interactional motivations for marking epistemically exclusive talk with *like*.

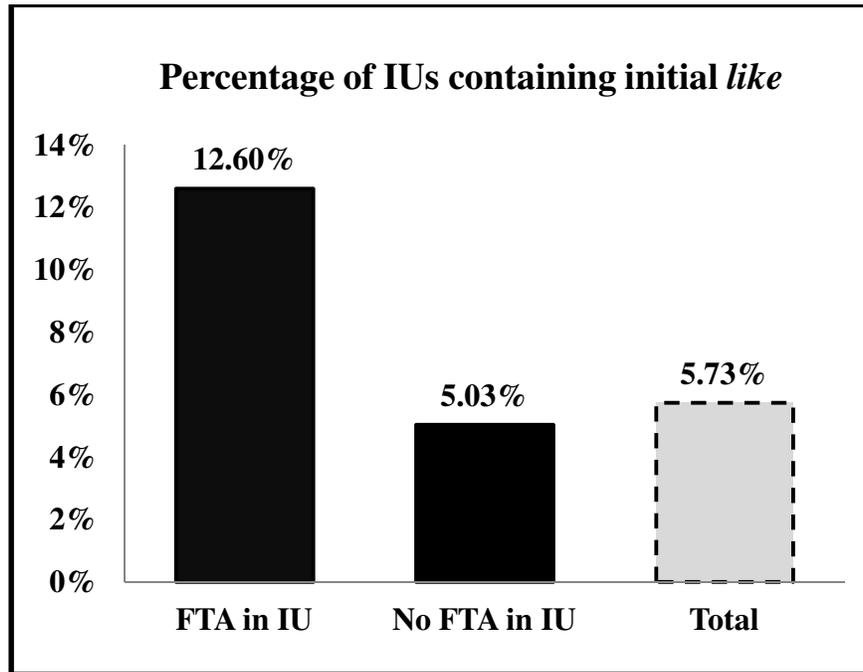
4.2. FACE-THREATENING ACTS

The presence of a face-threatening act increased *like* usage in both initial and medial positions. It was the second strongest factor effecting initial *like* and the third strongest on medial *like*. FTAs occurred in 534 (9.26%) out of the total 5656 IUs in the data. Among the 534 IUs containing FTAs, initial *like* occurred 66 times (12.60%), and *like* occurred medially 121 times (23.09%). In the 5122 cases where no FTA was committed, though, *like* only occurred initially

258 times (5.03%) and medially 511 times (9.96%). Tables 12 and 13 and Graphs 5 and 6 below demonstrate these correlations:

FTA in IU	IUs with initial like	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds	Factor Weight
Yes	66	524	12.60%	0.422	0.604
No	258	5132	5.03%	-0.422	0.396
Total	324	5656	5.73%		

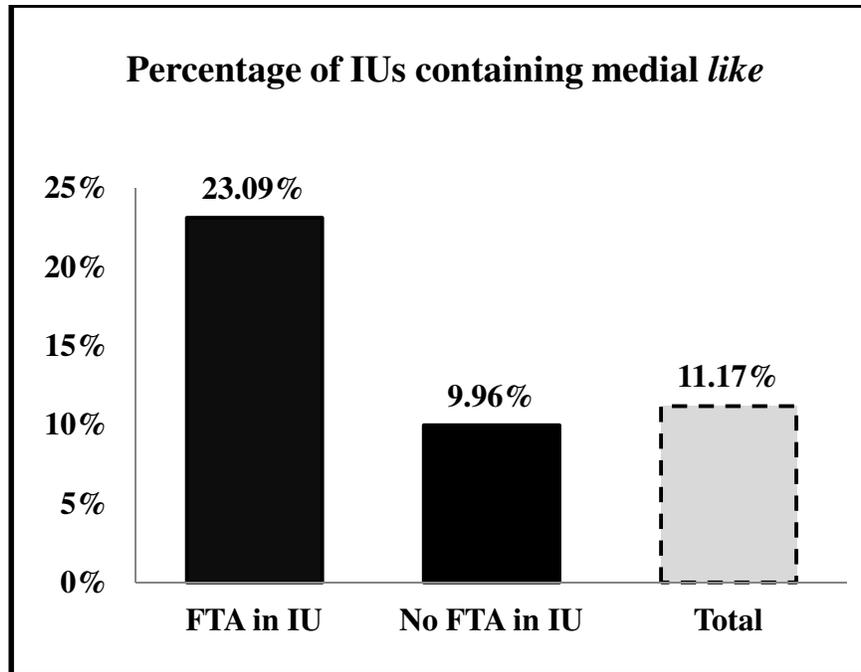
Table 12: Rates of IU-initial like usage during FTAs and non-FTAs



Graph 5: Rates of IU-initial like usage during FTAs and non-FTAs

FTA in IU	IUs with medial like	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds	Factor Weight
Yes	121	524	23.09%	0.409	0.601
No	511	5132	9.96%	-0.409	0.399
Total	632	5656	11.17%		

Table 13: Rates of IU-medial like usage during FTAs and non-FTAs



Graph 6: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage during FTAs and non-FTAs

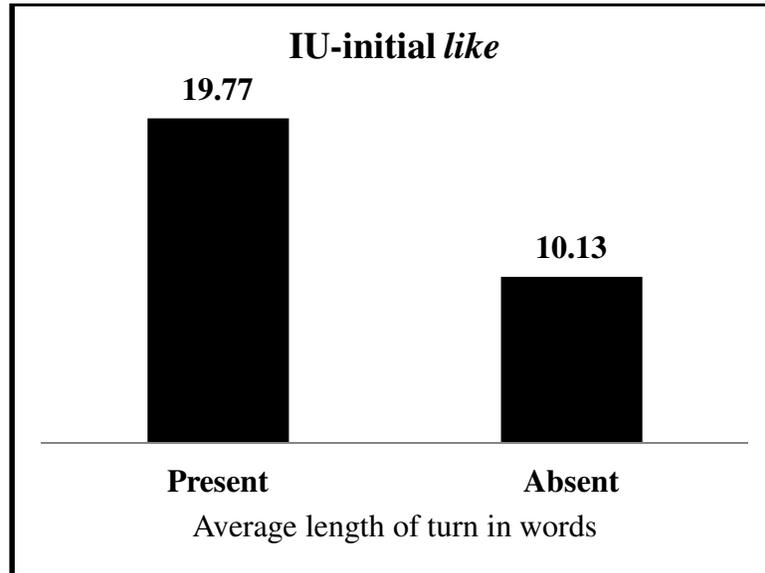
Although face-threatening acts did not occur very often in the data, their presence significantly affected *like* usage. Speakers used *like* in both initial and medial positions more often if they were committing a face-threatening act, such as a disagreement, boast, criticism, or insult. This pattern falls in line with past work which has shown that markers of uncertainty can be used to mitigate potentially impolite speech.

4.3. TURN LENGTH

Turn length had the greatest effect on the presence of *like* in medial position and the third strongest effect on initial *like*. Overall, the longer speakers talked, the more frequently they used *like* in both positions. The average length of the turn-so-far when an IU-initial *like* occurred was 19.77 words and 19.82 words for medial *like*. If an IU did not contain initial or medial *like*, though, the length of the turn up to that point averaged only 10.13 or 9.53 words, respectively. These averages are presented below in Tables 14 and 15 and Graphs 7 and 8:

IU-initial like present	Average turn length in words	Logodds
Yes	19.77	0.336
No	10.13	0.172
Total	10.68	

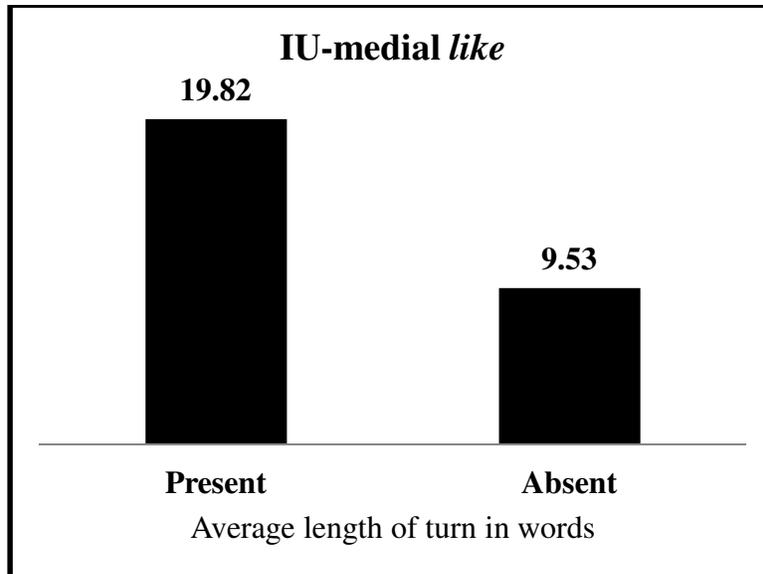
Table 14: Average length of turn-so-far and presence of IU-initial *like*



Graph 7: Average length of turn-so-far and presence of IU-initial *like*

IU-medial like present	Average turn length in words	Logodds
Yes	19.82	0.416
No	9.53	0.200
Total	10.68	

Table 15: Average length of turn-so-far and presence of IU-medial *like*



Graph 8: Average length of turn-so-far and presence of IU-medial *like*

It is striking that the average turn lengths when both initial and medial *like* are present are so similar; turns are roughly 20 words long when *like* occurs in either position and are about half that length if *like* has not been uttered yet. This is interesting, because medial *like* occurs about twice as often as initial *like* overall. That medial *like* does not generally occur sooner than initial *like* within turns is indicative of how significantly turn length affects its usage. This pattern supports Kärkkäinen's (2003) observation that epistemic marking occurs most often in extended turns and less often in turn-initial position. It also suggests that *like* in initial position may act less as an epistemic marker than medial *like* and, instead, may operate more often as a marker of discourse organization and sequencing. The functional differences between *like* in each position are elaborated below in section 5.

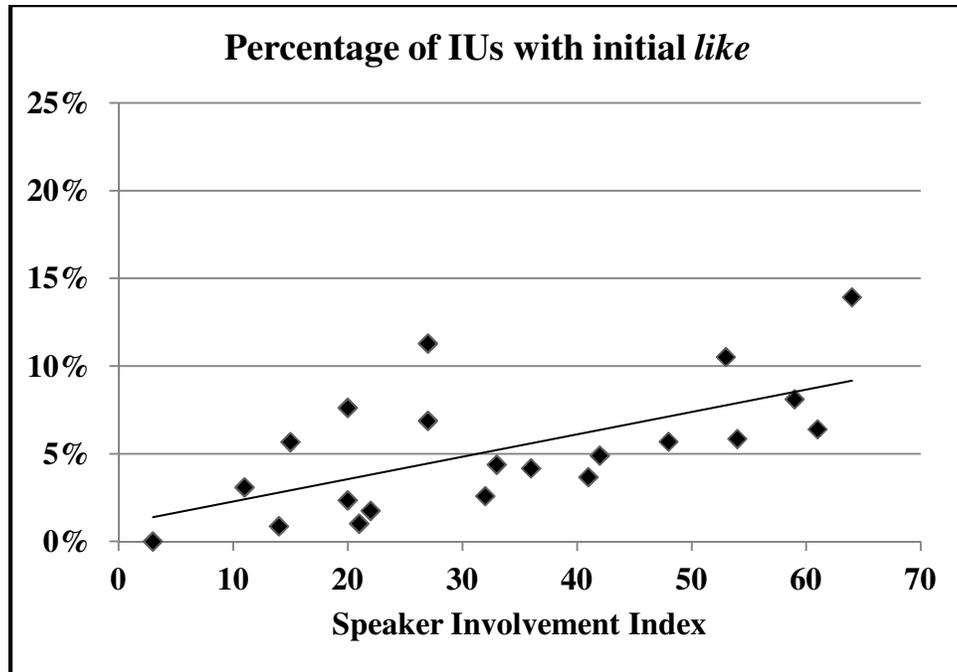
4.4. SPEAKER INVOLVEMENT INDEX

The Speaker Involvement Index had the fourth strongest effect on both IU-initial and medial *like*. It demonstrates a positive correlation with rates of *like* usage, where the higher a speaker's SII,

the more frequently he or she used *like*. The specific rates of *like* usage for each speaker are presented below in Tables 16 and 17 and Graphs 9 and 10:

SII	Speaker	IUs with initial <i>like</i>	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds
64	Jason A	17	122	13.93%	1.216
61	Scarlett C	29	453	6.40%	1.159
59	Katherine C	40	493	8.11%	1.121
54	Brandon D	23	393	5.85%	1.026
53	Katherine D	49	466	10.52%	1.007
48	Lola B	19	334	5.69%	0.912
42	Katherine A	25	510	4.90%	0.798
41	Katherine B	14	381	3.67%	0.779
36	Sophie B	5	120	4.17%	0.684
33	Stew A	18	411	4.38%	0.627
32	Dan A	9	347	2.59%	0.608
27	Charlotte C	13	189	6.88%	0.513
27	Laura D	28	248	11.29%	0.513
22	Maggie B	2	114	1.75%	0.418
21	Mark B	2	196	1.02%	0.399
20	Charlotte B	8	105	7.62%	0.380
20	Derek A	8	341	2.35%	0.380
15	Rebecca D	11	194	5.67%	0.285
14	Arik A	1	115	0.87%	0.266
11	Stan B	3	97	3.09%	0.209
3	Chelsea C	0	29	0.00%	0.057
	Total	324	5656	5.73%	

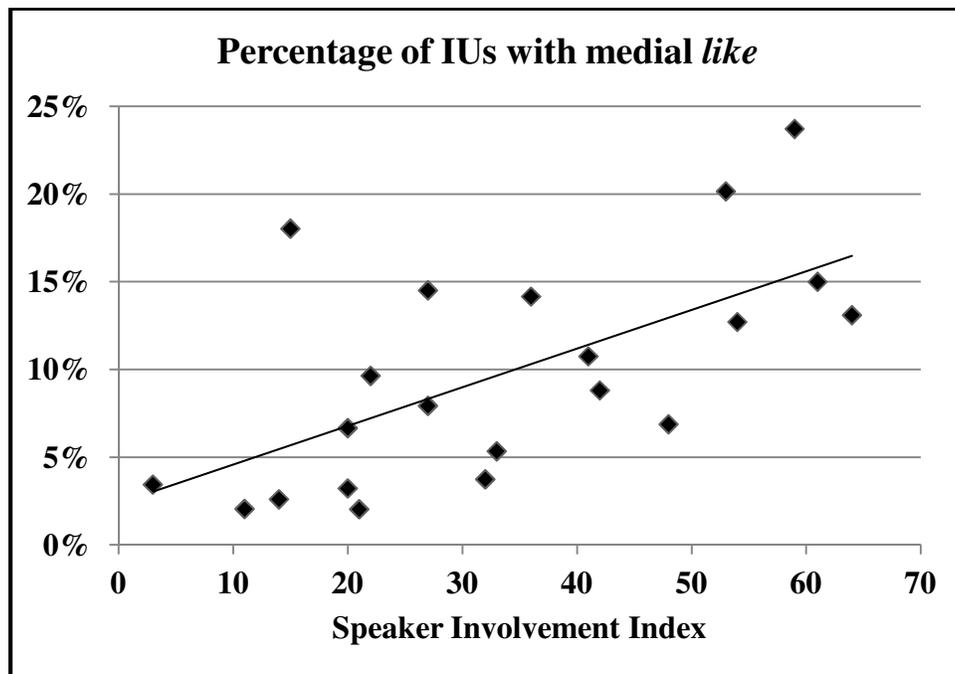
Table 16: Rates of IU-initial *like* usage by SII



Graph 9: Rates of IU-initial *like* usage by SII

SII	Speaker	IUs with medial <i>like</i>	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds
64	Jason A	16	122	13.11%	1.92
61	Scarlett C	68	453	15.01%	1.83
59	Katherine C	117	493	23.73%	1.77
54	Brandon D	50	393	12.72%	1.62
53	Katherine D	94	466	20.17%	1.59
48	Lola B	23	334	6.89%	1.44
42	Katherine A	45	510	8.82%	1.26
41	Katherine B	41	381	10.76%	1.23
36	Sophie B	17	120	14.17%	1.08
33	Stew A	22	411	5.35%	0.99
32	Dan A	13	347	3.75%	0.96
27	Charlotte C	15	189	7.94%	0.81
27	Laura D	36	248	14.52%	0.81
22	Maggie B	11	114	9.65%	0.66
21	Mark B	4	196	2.04%	0.63
20	Charlotte B	7	105	6.67%	0.60
20	Derek A	11	341	3.23%	0.60
15	Rebecca D	35	194	18.04%	0.45
14	Arik C	3	115	2.61%	0.42
11	Stan B	2	97	2.06%	0.33
3	Chelsea C	1	29	3.45%	0.09
	Total	632	5656	11.17%	

Table 17: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage by SII



Graph 10: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage by SII

The above results for Speaker Involvement Index demonstrate that speakers tend to use *like* at higher frequencies in both positions when they have a greater influence on the conversational floor. It is somewhat surprising that both SII and turn length significantly affect *like* usage, because the categories overlap – the participants with high SII values tend to take longer turns than those with low SII values. However, as I will explain below in section 5.3, these correlations indicate that length of floor control, not turn length per se, may have an important underlying effect on epistemic marking.

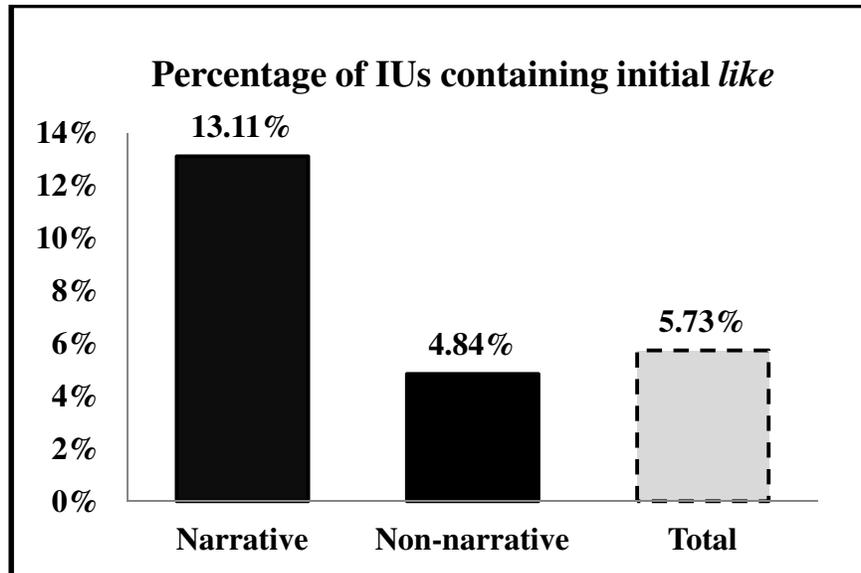
Another interesting finding, which Graphs 9 and 10 illustrate, is that there seems to be greater interspeaker variation in medial *like* usage than initial *like* usage. This can be attributed, in part, to a gender effect on the use of medial *like* (presented in section 4.6). However, as I will argue below in section 5.5, this gender effect is more directly caused by interactional styles and broader patterns of mitigation strategies.

4.5. NARRATIVE

Presence of the IU in a narrative significantly affected the occurrence of *like* in initial position only. IU-initial *like* occurred more frequently during narratives than elsewhere. Of the 5656 total IUs in the data, 610 (10.79%) were part of a narrative, and 80 IUs out of these 610 (13.11%) contained initial *like*. Contrastively, only 244 (4.84%) of the 5046 non-narrative IUs contained *like* in this position. Table 18 and Graph 11 below illustrate these correlations:

Part of narrative	IUs with initial <i>like</i>	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds	Factor Weight
Yes	80	610	13.11%	0.182	0.545
No	244	5046	4.84%	-0.182	0.455
Total	324	5656	5.73%		

Table 18: Rates of IU-initial *like* usage during narrative and non-narrative talk



Graph 11: Rates of IU-initial *like* usage during narrative and non-narrative talk

It is interesting to note that narrative is the weakest predictor of IU-initial *like*, even though *like* occurs in this context most frequently. For instance, 13.11% of narrative IUs contain initial *like*, compared to 8.50% of epistemically exclusive IUs. Moreover, narrative did not have a significant effect on the use of medial *like* at all. This is particularly surprising, because IU-medial *like* occurs more frequently in narratives than anywhere else – 146 (23.94%) of the 610

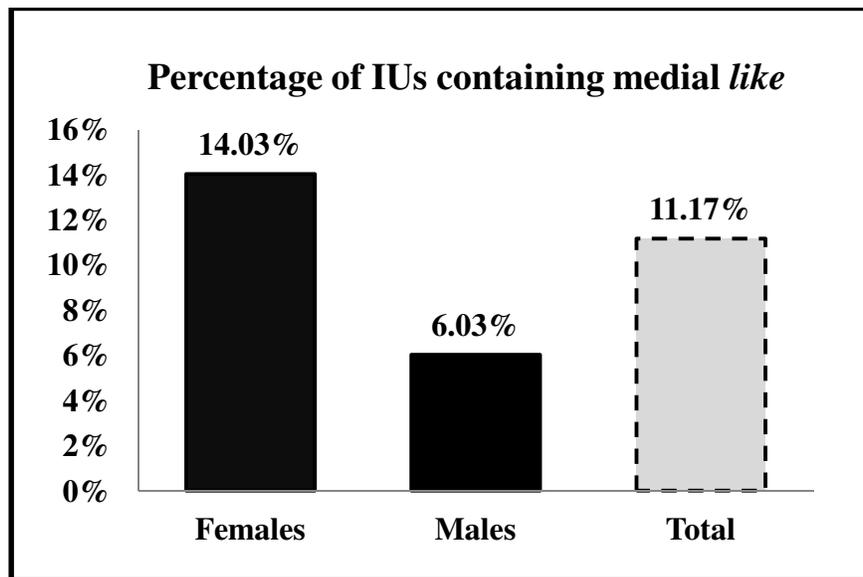
narrative IUs contain medial *like*, while only 486 (9.63%) of the 5046 non-narrative IUs do. These findings highlight the fact that narratives in themselves do not occasion greater *like* usage. Rather, the high rates of *like* usage during storytelling are more directly caused by the epistemic exclusivity and extended turns that typically coincide with narratives.

4.6. GENDER

Gender had a significant effect on the presence of IU-medial *like* only and was its weakest predictor of those selected as conditioning the variation by Rbrul. On average, women in this study used medial *like* significantly more than the men. 3634 total IUs were spoken by women, and of these, 510 (14.03%) contained medial *like*. Men, on the other hand, used medial *like* in only 122 (6.03%) of the 2022 IUs they uttered. This information is presented below in Table 19 and Graph 12:

Gender	IUs with medial <i>like</i>	Total IUs	Percentage	Logodds	Factor Weight
Female	510	3634	14.03%	0.389	0.596
Male	122	2022	6.03%	-0.389	0.404
Total	632	5656	11.17%		

Table 19: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage by gender



Graph 12: Rates of IU-medial *like* usage by gender

The finding that females use medial *like* more often aligns with past quantitative work on *like* and with the popular conception that *like* is something women say more than men. Nevertheless, the relatively low significance of gender as a predictor marks a departure from past quantitative studies, which have focused heavily on the correlations between gender and *like* usage, illustrating that the perceived gender correlations are more directly affected by interactionally emergent factors.

Overall, the results demonstrate that *like* usage is strongly affected by discourse features and speaker roles and stances. *Like* occurs more often in all positions when speakers have exclusive knowledge of a topic, commit a face-threatening act, talk for an extended turn, or generally hold the floor more throughout the conversation. The presence of IU-initial *like* also increases during narratives, and IU-medial *like* is used more by the women in the study than the men.

5. DISCUSSION

The correlations presented above both reflect and are affected by the core meaning of *like*; however, there has been disagreement in the literature as to what that core meaning is. This discord is based on the seeming contradiction between two key aspects of *like*: (1) it is a marker of approximation, and (2) it mostly occurs in semantically literal contexts. I contend, however, that these two facts do not contradict one another, because discourse and epistemic markers tend to become more abstract and less propositional in their usage over time, diversifying from their original functions in the semantic or propositional realm.

It is clear that *like* can mark semantic or lexical material as inexact. This function allows the speaker to communicate that the information or propositional content of his or her talk might be inaccurate and should not be taken too literally, thereby distancing the speaker from the talk. Schiffrin explains, however, that discourse markers necessarily operate on multiple planes of discourse. I propose that *like* can signal a speaker's stance towards acts, turns, and other participants, along with information and ideas. It can also establish the connection between turns and ideas. While *like*'s functions are varied, all of them stem from its core meaning as a marker of inexactness.

A discourse analytic approach to the present data confirms much of the past work, which has shown that *like* frequently accompanies talk that is both semantically literal and important. Miller (2009) states that the majority of instances of *like* in his data cannot be glossed as approximative, and Andersen (2000) observes that "*like* usually precedes lexical material with a high information value" (31). These patterns have led many to interpret *like* as a focusing device that highlights new or salient information. However, the results of this study do not support that

analysis, for it is essential to consider both the type of salient information that *like* accompanies as well as how speakers tend to deal with that type of information.

First, the data demonstrate that *like* co-occurs with talk that is face-threatening to other participants. Although the information in these FTAs may be highly salient, it is unlikely that speakers would be using *like* here to call additional attention to it. Instead, as Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, speakers use strategies to minimize face-threatening acts in order to mitigate their impoliteness and the potential harm to others and to self. One such strategy for minimizing an FTA is through epistemic hedging. Therefore, when *like* precedes face-threatening talk, it is more probable that it is used in an attempt to reduce focus, not increase it.

Second, this study found that *like* usage is greater when the speaker has knowledge of a topic which the other participants lack. Kärkkäinen (2003) observes that speakers generally express a reduced commitment to the information they present. In addition to this, I argue below that there are motivations for downgrading epistemic stance when knowledge is unequally distributed among interlocutors. Accordingly, the fact that speakers use *like* at higher rates when they have exclusive knowledge of a topic is not likely an attempt to add extra focus to the information. Rather, *like* does just the opposite, expressing a reduced commitment to it.

The remainder of this section explores the various discourse functions that contribute to *like*'s correlations with each of the six independent variables. For each of the independent variables, I have selected focused examples that are representative of the broader data. I will provide discourse analytic support for each example that illustrates how the speakers use *like* to accomplish various interactional goals.

5.1. FACE-THREATENING ACTS

Like not only marks a speaker's stance towards the information or semantic content of talk; it can also mark a stance towards acts. In these cases, the core meaning of inexactness is extended to apply to an act, and in particular, a face-threatening act. Although speakers may intend a literal interpretation of the semantic content of their FTA, they typically make an attempt to minimize the face-threatening aspects of it. Using *like* allows them to signal a reduced commitment, not to the propositional content, but to the face-threatening act that results from the utterance.

Depending on the position of *like* relative to the IU, whether initial or medial, speakers can indicate their stance towards either the entire IU or a specific phrase within it. Medial *like* attaches to individual phrases and seems to occur frequently with criticisms, insults, and boasts, where it marks the specific, face-threatening noun or adjective phrase in the utterance. Initial *like*, on the other hand, includes the entire IU within its scope and frequently accompanies disagreements.

In general, IU-medial *like* attaches to and mitigates the particular noun or adjective phrase that is most face-threatening in a criticism, insult, or boast. On a propositional level, *like* shows that the semantic content of talk might not be accurate or what the speaker intends, because it is an approximation or an example out of a larger set. This reduces the speaker's commitment to that phrase and creates an element of deniability. If a speaker uses the same strategy to mark phrases that are semantically precise, but impolite, it still communicates the same reduced commitment and deniability. Instead of telling the hearers not to interpret the semantic meaning too literally, though, it indicates the speaker's stance towards the act and signals that they should not take the face-threat too literally. This interpretation is supported by Tsui's (1991) work on *I don't know*, a phrase which literally refers to a lack of knowledge, but is

used to mitigate impolite beliefs and disagreements by drawing on the aspect of deniability that it communicates. Similarly, in their research on interactions among adolescent peers, Lemerichs and Te Molder (2009) found that *like* is used to introduce and mitigate contentious assessments made about peers by drawing on its approximative function.

The excerpt below from conversation C illustrates how *like* is used to mark the specific face-threatening phrase within an utterance. In this conversation, the participants discuss new romantic interests and tell each other stories about recent dates, and in the following excerpt, Scarlett asks Katherine about the state of her romantic life. She is noticeably nervous to ask her this, because the last time they had talked, Katherine was upset about a blind date that had gone poorly. Scarlett was afraid to hear more bad news, especially because she was responsible for arranging the blind date. In response to this, Katherine assures Scarlett that she has nothing to worry about, because everything has been going well with her most recent romantic interest, Devin. She feels bad that Scarlett feels responsible for the unsuccessful date and wants to reassure her that it has not caused any lasting harm. She achieves this by providing details about how well everything is going now. However, over the course of reassuring Scarlett, when her talk verges on sounding boastful, Katherine marks this boast with *like*:

Scarlett:	And wha- s- how are things,
Katherine:	Good.
Scarlett:	Goo- okay.
Katherine:	That was like a scared face. @@
Scarlett:	I was scared. Cuz I felt like that last time I talked to you, You were not--
Katherine:	You were like <@ how are thi-- @>
Scarlett:	I like don't wanna hear anything bad,
Katherine:	So um good. No good um, So I hung out with uh Devin on Saturday.
Scarlett:	Okay,
Katherine:	Um so that was our fifth date.
Scarlett:	Ooh.
Katherine:	And um, .. So yeah, I mean he's <u>like</u> really into me,

Excerpt 6: Use of IU-medial *like* to mitigate boast

In Excerpt 6, Scarlett asks Katherine “how are things.” She asks this hesitantly and with what Katherine refers to as “a scared face.” Scarlett explains why she was afraid to ask, and Katherine responds by explaining how well her dates with Devin have been going. For example, Katherine says that she has gone on five dates with Devin and that, “he’s like really into me.” At this point, Katherine is caught between two conflicting motivations: wanting to reassure Scarlett that things are going well with Devin, but not wanting to boast. Both of these motivations are rooted in the desire to satisfy Scarlett’s positive face needs. Reassuring her builds her positive face, while boasting threatens hers, Charlotte’s and Chelsea’s. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain how boasting is face-threatening, because raising the speaker’s image implies a lowering of the hearer’s image. Marking the most face-threatening phrase of the boast with *like*, though, allows Katherine to balance these conflicting needs and minimize the face-threat.

While *like* in medial position attaches to specific phrases, IU-initial *like* has scope over the entire utterance. Therefore, it frequently co-occurs with FTAs that are expressed over the course of an utterance. An examination of the present data shows that IU-initial *like* is often

used to introduce and mitigate disagreements. This follows with Miller's (2009) observation that *like* introduces disagreements and objections. Miller argues that *like* functions in this capacity, because it acts as a focuser that highlights the upcoming salient information. However, I propose that *like* acts as a mitigator when prefacing this type of talk.

When marking semantic imprecision, *like* can signal that the upcoming talk presents only one example out of a larger set of alternatives. This function can be extended to introduce and mitigate disagreements or objections. Thus, by framing a disagreement as one possible perspective or interpretation, speakers avoid positioning their argument in direct opposition with the previous statement. Instead, it seems to present the disagreement as a possible alternative to the previous point, meaning that it could conceivably coexist alongside it and may not be the best among alternative arguments. Regardless of whether or not the speaker actually views his or her disagreement as a non-oppositional alternative to the hearer's statement, presenting it as such reduces the face-threat to the hearer, as was seen above.

Speakers can use *like* on its own to preface disagreements; however, it commonly co-occurs with *but*. The example below from conversation B demonstrates this pattern. In Excerpt 7, Katherine tells the group about a date she had earlier in the week with Tariq. She tries explaining to Charlotte and Lola why she did not particularly enjoy the date. However, they are unwilling to accept this fact after seeing a picture of him. When Katherine tells them that "this guy's really dorky," Charlotte responds by saying, "But like this is an eight point four," referring to Tariq's attractiveness on a ten point scale. Lola agrees with Charlotte. She had previously remarked that, "If you're any hotter than like an eight point four, then you get to do whatever you want." Charlotte objects to the idea that Katherine would judge Tariq unfavorably on the grounds that he is too attractive, according to Lola's previously mentioned criteria, to be disliked

on personality alone. She introduces this disagreement with *but like*, where *but* signals an upcoming objection and *like* mitigates the disagreement.

Katherine:	Um and this guy's really dorky?
Charlotte:	But like this is an eight point four.
Lola:	Exactly.

Excerpt 7: Use of IU-initial *like* to introduce disagreement

Sequences of *but like* similar to the above example are common throughout the data. Although the use of *like* in this discourse strategy is rooted in its capacity to minimize impoliteness, it is possible that it might not always serve a face-saving purpose. Due to its ubiquity in this position, it may have become conventionalized as a way to signal upcoming disagreement without conveying mitigation. Even so, *like* in this function is ultimately linked to the core meaning of inexactness, and it is not likely an accident that it is used for this particular purpose.

5.2. EPISTEMIC RIGHTS

The exclusivity of a speaker's epistemic rights to a topic is one of the most significant predictors of *like* in both initial and medial positions. Speakers hold exclusive epistemic rights when they discuss emotions, opinions, events that only they experienced, and aspects of their personal or family life. As my quantitative data have shown, speakers use *like* much more frequently when talking about these particular topics. This correlation can be understood in part by the fact that speakers generally downgrade the reliability of and their confidence in the information they present (Kärkkäinen 2003). In addition, I argue that speakers use *like* to minimize the absoluteness of their claims, assessments, and descriptions in order to promote inclusivity at times when the topic at hand and the unequal access to knowledge have the potential to exclude.

As has been explained previously, *like* can signal that upcoming talk is merely one option among many alternatives and may not even be a perfectly accurate depiction of reality. Even

when speakers intend a literal semantic interpretation of their talk, they can use *like* to communicate that their claim, assessment, or description may not be the absolute, final truth. This leaves room for other speakers to present alternative takes on the topic and promotes participation and inclusivity. This function is especially useful when a speaker has exclusive knowledge of a topic. In these situations, the other participants have limited access to the knowledge required to comment on the topic. But, if the speaker marks his or her talk as if it were not the only interpretation or the final say on matters, then it allows for the hearers to contribute to the conversation as well. This interpretation is supported by Brown and Levinson's (1987) work on Politeness Theory and research on the perception of *like* use.

Brown and Levinson (1987) demonstrate that it threatens hearers' positive face to exclude them from an activity and threatens their negative face to constrain their ability to contribute to conversation. In other words, it is potentially face-threatening to the hearers when knowledge of a topic is unequally distributed among participants. I propose that speakers can minimize this potential face-threat and promote inclusivity by mitigating their epistemically exclusive talk with *like*. Additionally, past work indicates that *like* usage is associated with positive social attributes. Dailey-O'Cain (2000) conducted a matched-guise test to analyze the perceptions of *like* users, finding that people perceived *like* users as more friendly, cheerful, attractive, and successful, although less educated, than speakers who did not use *like*. It is possible that these positive social perceptions are influenced in part by the fact that *like* promotes inclusivity and minimizes impoliteness in conversation.

Within the present data, speakers frequently marked opinions and assessments with IU-medial *like*, particularly when these were negative and/or accompanied by intensifiers. Brown and Levinson (1987) note that speakers often hedge their opinions in order to avoid

disagreement. An example of a negative assessment marked with *like* is presented below in Excerpt 8. During conversation B, Lola asks Sophie, who used to be a figure skater, if she has seen the reality TV show *Skating with the Stars*. Sophie responds, “Oh worst show ever.” Lola remarks that she has never seen it but likes one of the contestants from the show. Sophie then explains that it is not entertaining, because figure skating is too difficult to learn in a short amount of time, unlike dancing in the related TV show *Dancing with the Stars*. The initial negative assessment that Sophie presents is unmarked. However, she then learns that Lola does not know much about the show and that the little she does know about it, she likes. After hearing this, Sophie marks her negative assessment with *like*:

Lola:	Did you watch Skating with the Stars?
Sophie:	Oh worst show ever.
Lola:	Oh I've never seen it, I just liked that girl Bethany that was on it.
Sophie:	Okay it's like really terrible because it's not like dancing,

Excerpt 8: Use of IU-medial *like* to mark negative assessment

By prefacing “really terrible” with *like*, Sophie presents her claim as if it were not the only option and possibly not the most accurate assessment. Although it is clear that she wholeheartedly dislikes the show, this strategy allows for her to avoid disagreement with Lola and leaves room for others, who might not have as much experience with figure skating or the TV show, to contribute to the discussion.

Though epistemic rights have a significant effect on the presence of IU-medial *like*, this factor group most strongly correlates with *like* rates in IU-initial position. This pattern is largely influenced by the frequent use of *like* to introduce clarifications, explanations, and elaborations of previous talk. Miller (2009) has also observed that this is a common function of *like* in conversation, and he attributes it to the notion that it acts as a focusing device. His interpretation seems particularly apt for describing this phenomenon, because this type of talk is highly salient

and aims for semantic precision. However, I maintain that this function is still rooted in *like*'s core as a marker of inexactness.

In their work on adverbial stance marking, Biber and Finegan (1988) found that the literal meanings of stance markers often contrast with the level of certainty or doubt expressed by the speaker. They explain that this happens because stance markers are often used for interactional purposes and are not always meant to be interpreted as semantically literal. As Kärkkäinen (2003) explains, "certainty and doubt are sometimes expressed side by side" (23-4). It is not uncommon for speakers to use expressions of doubt at moments of complete certainty and to mark their talk as inexact when it is, in fact, semantically precise.

The acts of clarifying, explaining, and elaborating typically involve an attempt to increase semantic accuracy. As we have seen, speakers tend to convey a reduced belief and confidence in their own knowledge. When demonstrating enhanced knowledge of a topic, by clarifying, explaining or elaborating, speakers may wish to simultaneously minimize this apparent knowledge. Introducing this type of talk with a marker of inexactness allows for them to maintain a balance between conveying necessary information and downplaying commitment to that information. Similar to its use in signaling disagreements, though, it is likely that the use of *like* in IU-initial position has become conventionalized as a marker of upcoming clarifications, explanations or elaborations, as is suggested by the prevalence of this function throughout the data. Another parallel between these functions is that while *like* before disagreements pairs with *but*, *like* before clarifications, explanations, and elaborations frequently pairs with *and*. The use of *and* in these contexts aids in signaling that upcoming talk is a continuation of previous ideas.

The example below in Excerpt 9 demonstrates the use of *like* to introduce clarifications, explanations, and elaborations. In this excerpt from conversation D, Brandon is telling Rebecca

and Katherine about Laura’s boyfriend Max and his hometown friends. He describes Max’s friends as “real dudes,” who “like drink beer, and like talk about sports.” Brandon uses *like* before each of these descriptions to mark them as elaborations and clarifications of what it means to be a real dude. Laura agrees and adds to this description by saying, “like they’re like more like Maine guys,” to clarify that the friends are not merely dudes who drink beer and talk about sports, but embrace the lifestyle of living in a small town. She then clarifies that her boyfriend is unlike them in this way, saying “where like Max is so different.” Brandon speculates that Max’s lifestyle choice is a result of where he grew up and begins to clarify, “like you know like his immediate--” when Laura interrupts. She explains that Max is different from everyone else he knows, because none of his friends or siblings moved away from home: “yeah but like everyone-- most of his friends like hung around.” She elaborates, “and like his sisters hung around, like and didn’t go to college:”

Brandon:	Oh but a- you said that all of his friends are like real dudes. <u>Like</u> drink beer, <u>And like</u> talk about sports,
Laura:	Yeah, It's so funny, Max's friends are like-- Yeah like big like beer drinkers,
Katherine:	That'll be so funny.
Laura:	<u>Like</u> they're like more like Maine guys, Where <u>like</u> Max is so different.
Brandon:	It's probably like a complete product of like where he grew up or something, <u>Like</u> you know <u>like</u> his immediate--
Laura:	Yeah <u>but like</u> everyone- most of his friends like hung around, And they still live in the area, <u>And like</u> his sisters hung around, <u>Like</u> and didn't go to college,

Excerpt 9: Use of IU-initial *like* to introduce clarifications, explanations, and elaborations

In each of these moments of clarification, explanation, and elaboration, the speakers use *like*.

Also, utterances such as, “all of his friends are like real dudes, like drink beer, and like talk about sports,” indicate that *like* can often be glossed as “for example” or “for instance.” This use

directly stems from *like*'s core of inexactness, indicating that the descriptions presented are merely examples out of a larger set of possible alternatives.

5.3. TURN LENGTH AND SPEAKER INVOLVEMENT

The results of this study show that *like* usage increases as turn length increases. The longer a speaker talks without being interrupted or yielding the floor, the more frequently he or she uses *like*. In particular, turn length has the strongest effect on IU-medial *like* and is its most significant predictor. These findings support Kärkkäinen's (2003) observation that epistemic stance marking is most common within longer turns. There are two possible explanations for this pattern. First, the longer a speaker talks, the more material there is to epistemically qualify. Second, extended turns can be a site for mitigation, because they constrain the other participants' ability to contribute to conversation. Therefore, there may be a greater need to epistemically qualify talk in order to minimize the potential impoliteness of a long turn. The example below from conversation C illustrates a typical pattern of *like* usage within an extended turn:

<p>Scarlett: Yeah exactly. But it was good. And on Saturday night, I like went over to see these like really good old friends of mine who I've known forever, Who live in Mount Pleasant. And they like basically curated a show at their house? And had like three like folk rock bands come and play a show at their house? Which sounds really bizarre, But actually worked super well, And they g- they had like totally rearranged all the furniture to like seat, I can't remember how many there was. Maybe like twenty five people came? And it was just really fun.</p>

Excerpt 10: Greater IU-medial *like* usage in extended turns

As the results of this study and Kärkkäinen's (2003) work would predict, *like* is absent from the first few lines of Scarlett's turn. However, *like* usage appears as her turn goes on, particularly in IU-medial position.

In addition to turn length, the Speaker Involvement Index is also a significant predictor of *like* in both positions. This is somewhat surprising, because the two categories overlap – speakers with high SII values tend to take longer turns, and speaking in extended turns increases a speaker's SII. However, there are two important factors that contribute to the relationship between SII and *like* usage. First, the correlation between turn length and epistemic stance marking may be more fundamentally linked to a speaker's control of the conversational floor. Second, *like* can be used as a floor reclaiming device.

While past work and the present study indicate that turn length has a strong effect on *like* usage, the independent correlation between *like* and SII suggests that this pattern may be ultimately linked to control of the conversational floor. Typically, taking a turn at talk and holding the floor coincide with each other. However, holding the floor involves more than just talking, and not all turns necessarily involve a shift in floor control. Edelsky (1993) defines control of the conversational floor as influence over both turn-taking and topic development. Therefore, one could argue that a participant does not take control of the floor when simply saying *oh* or *yeah* between another speaker's more substantial turns. If so, the original speaker maintains continuous, uninterrupted control of the floor for the duration of both turns. Although back-channeling, such as *oh* or *yeah*, does reset the turn length count within the present study, the rate of *like* usage often remains relatively high across turns, as if there were no interruption. This suggests that turn length alone may not occasion higher epistemic stance marking. Rather,

a more significant underlying factor may be the length of time that a speaker has held the conversational floor.

The present data support the interpretation that epistemic stance marking is occasioned by longer periods of floor control, in addition to longer individual turns. Speakers with higher SII values tend to take longer turns and hold the floor for longer periods of time. Even though the conversations in the study are highly interactive with frequent interruptions and contributions from all participants, there are periods when the floor seems to be dominated by one speaker and one topic. For instance, much of the talk in conversation C is devoted to a discussion of Scarlett's romantic interests. While all of the participants contribute to this discussion, it seems that Scarlett has special rights to the floor during this time – all questions or comments are directed at her, and she is the only participant who speaks in extended turns. Also, her rate of *like* usage while she holds the floor remains consistently higher than that of other participants and than her rates elsewhere in the conversation. The excerpt below from conversation C illustrates this pattern:

Charlotte:	So were you like offended when he broke it off? Or like did he,
Scarlett:	Well there was nothing to break off really.
Charlotte:	Yeah.
Scarlett:	Because it--
Katherine:	Well how did you react I guess,
Scarlett:	I reacted in my head with <u>like</u> what? And in my face <u>like</u> oh.
Katherine:	@@ Yeah.
Scarlett:	There <u>like</u> -- Because I- the first thing that I could think of was that I had just so-- Again that- that it was <u>like</u> my fault.
Katherine:	Yeah.
Scarlett:	<u>Like</u> I had so severely misinterpreted the situation that it was embarrassing.
Katherine:	Yeah yeah,
Scarlett:	But, I- <u>like</u> in hindsight I think if I <u>like</u> explained it to anyone else male or female, They would have been like yeah that was weird, Why was he doing-- It's not even like they were group settings when I hung out with him.
Katherine:	No. Yeah.
Scarlett:	<u>Like</u> we would go out to lunch alone. We would hang out at his house alone. <u>Like</u> it was never I dunno.

Excerpt 11: Correlation of high *like* rate and length of time holding the conversational floor

As this excerpt shows, Scarlett's epistemic marking with *like* does not seem to be affected by the length of individual turns. Instead, it is stable across turns of varying length and often occurs within the first IU of a turn. I argue that this pattern reflects the fact that she has multiple turns at talk during this excerpt, but one long turn at holding the floor of conversation, and epistemic stance marking is influenced by both turn length and length of time holding the floor.

The second factor that contributes to the independent correlations of SII and *like* usage is that *like* can be used in initial position as a floor reclaiming device. Schiffrin explains that the discourse markers *but* and *and* primarily demonstrate the connections between ideas and acts. However, the core of *and* to signal continuation and the core of *but* to convey contrast can also operate on turns within the exchange structure, allowing speakers to signal a reclaiming of the floor. Using *and* indicates that a speaker's turn is a continuation of a previous one that might

have been interrupted. Similarly, *but* can be used to mark a return to the floor by showing that a speaker objects to another participant's claim to the floor.

Like too signals continuation and contrast in initial position when introducing clarifications and disagreements and is often paired with *and* or *but* to achieve these functions. Because of this, it can also be used as a floor reclaiming device. This accounts for the higher rates of IU-initial *like* among speakers with high SII values, because they tend to make more bids for the floor. The example below in Excerpt 12 illustrates this function. During conversation A, Jason tells the group about "Trapped in the Closet," an infamous music video by the musical artist R. Kelly. He spends two minutes recounting the events of the video and providing his evaluations of it. Throughout his retelling, other participants interrupt him to ask questions, provide their own evaluations, and attempt to redirect the conversation. In order to reclaim the floor and complete his story, Jason has to interrupt others' turns and redirect the talk, and when doing so, he typically marks his bid for the floor with *like*:

Jason:	And I think the package is supposed to be AIDS. ... So like basically the end of the story is everyone has AIDS @. ... It's like terrible,
Stew:	Better than the whole--
Dan:	Maybe it's a- maybe it's a .. less serious STD,
Katherine:	Maybe it's like the clap.
Dan:	Exactly.
Jason:	Yeah, <u>No but like,</u>
Katherine:	We've all gotta go get some antibiotics, .. Clear this up.
Jason:	Yeah, <u>No but like</u> uh-- No so at the end of like the first episode?
Derek:	I mean,
Dan:	There's a little more to it than that.
Jason:	<u>Like</u> each episode's like three or four minutes long.
Stew:	What's this called?
Jason:	<u>And so like,</u> At the end?

Excerpt 12: Use of IU-initial *like* as a floor reclaiming device

While Jason's overall rate of IU-initial *like* usage throughout the conversation is 13.93%, his rate of turn-initial *like* during this retelling is 48%; he begins a turn with *like* 12 out of the 25 times that he reclaims the floor after his story is interrupted. Frequently, *like* co-occurs with other discourse markers – *and*, *but*, *then*, *so* – which help to signal the continuation of previous talk or the objection to interruptions. It is possible that the use of *like* as part of these floor reclaiming moves provides mitigation. However, it is also possible that, because *like* has become conventionalized as a marker of clarification or disagreement, that it merely aids in signaling the continuation or objection.

5.4. NARRATIVE

Rates of *like* usage are relatively high within narratives, in part because they typically co-occur with three other significant predictors: epistemic rights, turn length, and Speaker Involvement Index. When telling stories, speakers often have exclusive knowledge of the topic, speak in extended turns, and have high SII rates. The multivariate analysis with Rbrul demonstrated that much of the increase in *like* usage during narratives is actually caused by these three aforementioned predictors. However, independently of these, the presence of IU-initial *like* is significantly greater during narratives. This correlation reflects the highly interactive quality of the narratives in the present data, which include frequent interruptions and requests for clarification. The storytellers often use IU-initial *like* when responding to both of these.

The example in Excerpt 13 below illustrates how *like* is used to introduce clarification and elaboration as part of a narrative. During conversation D, Brandon explains how he usually drinks responsibly, but his friends tend to drink to the point of vomiting before even arriving at a bar. Laura and Katherine are shocked to hear this, and Katherine asks Brandon for clarification

on how his friends manage to become that inebriated. In response to her request for clarification, he tells a story that exemplifies his friends' habits:

Brandon:	Yeah someone puked like at the- out in the bushes at Bubba's, And someone else puked on the doorstep of some other bar,
Laura:	Oh my God,
Katherine:	Why, Are they really drinking--
Brandon:	And then Janie- Janie--
Katherine:	What are they drinking,
Brandon:	<u>Oh well like</u> one night, The last time when two people puked was because we were at the bar? <u>And like</u> everyone there, <u>Like</u> Janie was like oh .. I wanna get Long Island iced teas, <u>And like</u> I was the only one who bought a b- a beer,

Excerpt 13: Use of IU-initial *like* to introduce clarifications and elaborations during a narrative

Brandon begins his explanation and story with “Oh well like one night.” *Like* in this instance can be glossed as “for example” and indicates that the story he is about to tell is one example, out of a larger set, that provides clarification. He continues to mark the elaborations of this with *like*, such as that everyone there and his friend Janie decided to drink Long Island iced teas and that he was the only one who decided to drink beer.

Additionally, because the conversations in the present data are highly interactive, speakers are frequently interrupted by other participants. This increases the likelihood that storytellers will need to employ a floor reclaiming strategy in order to continue with their narratives. This strategy was illustrated above in Excerpt 12, where Jason repeatedly reclaims the floor with IU-initial *like* to finish his retelling of the R. Kelly music video. Similarly, Stew uses *but like* in Excerpt 14 below to redirect the floor back to his story after Dan interrupts him to ask for clarification. During conversation A, Stew tells the group a story about a medical emergency he witnessed the previous night outside of a college party. He explains that he saw a girl lying on the ground with six security guards crowded around her. Dan interrupts the story to

ask if the girl was unresponsive. Stew responds, “Well yeah, that’s my guess. But like, so this one security guard came running out:”

Stew:	There were like six security guards, Screaming in her face. And like one guy he yells out--
Dan:	Was she not responding?
Stew:	.. Well yeah, That’s my guess. ... But like , So this one security guard came running out,

Excerpt 14: Use of *but like* to reclaim floor and redirect topic during interrupted narrative

Here, Stew answers Dan’s question and then uses *but like* to signal that he is reclaiming the floor and redirecting the topic back to his narrative. The fact that *but like* occurs in its own intonation unit and does not mark any lexical material further suggests that it is functioning here on an interactional level to show a shift in topic and floor control. Schiffrin explains that *but* can serve a similar purpose as *anyway*, marking previous talk as tangential and signaling a return to the main point. *But like* in this excerpt seems to be acting in this way as well.

5.5. GENDER AND INTERACTIONAL STYLES

Past work has focused heavily on the correlations between gender and *like* usage. However, the results of the present study show that gender only influences the presence of IU-medial *like* and is its least significant predictor. These findings support the notion that static, demographic identity categories, such as gender, are only indirectly linked to language choices and that interactionally grounded factors can have a greater effect on variation. In other words, it is not as much who you are, but what you do in interaction that influences your language choices. This is particularly true for discourse features, such as *like*, which have obvious interactional and discourse functions.

One reason that gender does have a significant effect on the presence of IU-medial *like* is that, in this position, it acts as an epistemic or pragmatic hedge and serves a number of face-saving purposes. Contrastively, *like* in initial position seems to be somewhat pragmatically bleached; it serves fewer face-saving functions, and instead, largely marks the sequencing and structuring of turns and ideas. The fact that the women in this study do more epistemic and pragmatic hedging follows with past work on gender and politeness, which shows that women tend to employ these strategies more often than men to negotiate potentially face-threatening interactional moves (Holmes 1995). Notwithstanding, it is important to emphasize that gender itself does not directly or most significantly drive its observed correlations with *like* usage. Instead, the data demonstrate that participant role (high speaker involvement) and the use of particular discourse structures and contexts (extended turns, epistemic exclusivity, and potentially face-threatening talk) more directly occasion *like*'s usage. An in-depth consideration of specific participants also reveals that persona construction and interactional styles affect how frequently a speaker uses *like*. I will explore below how the aforementioned factors contribute to Lola's surprisingly low rate of *like* usage in medial position and Rebecca's remarkably frequent use of medial *like*.

Lola from conversation B and Rebecca from conversation D are demographically very similar; they are both highly educated women in their mid-twenties who grew up in middle-class families from the Northeastern United States. However, in terms of personality and interactional styles, they are quite different. Lola is unapologetically bold and confident; she is open with her opinions and does not shy away from making contentious remarks. In the words of her friends, "she tells it like it is." She also tends to dominate conversations and has a Speaker Involvement Index of 48, which is the highest of conversation B. Rebecca, on the other hand, tends to be shy,

agreeable, and non-confrontational. In group settings, she would rather hold her opinions back than risk the tension or embarrassment of offending someone. She is also reserved when talking in a group and has a Speaker Involvement Index of 15, which is the lowest in conversation D. Both Rebecca and Lola are sociable and well-liked among their large friend groups, but their personalities and approaches to interactions among friends are very different. I argue that their dissimilar interactional styles contribute to their differing rates of medial *like* usage.

Lola and Rebecca use *like* in initial position at nearly identical rates; initial *like* occurs in 5.69% and 5.67% of their IUs, respectively. These rates are also equivalent to the average frequency (5.73%) of initial *like* usage across all participants in the study. However, their uses of IU-medial *like* diverge significantly from each other and the study's average of 11.17%. Medial *like* occurs in only 6.89% of Lola's IUs, while Rebecca uses it almost three times as often at a rate of 18.04%. These comparisons are presented below in Table 20:

Position	Lola's <i>like</i> rate	Rebecca's <i>like</i> rate	Average <i>like</i> rate
IU-initial	5.69%	5.67%	5.73%
IU-medial	6.89%	18.04%	11.17%

Table 20: Comparison of Lola's and Rebecca's rates of *like* usage

The disparity between Lola's and Rebecca's medial *like* usage is striking for two reasons: (1) they use *like* at similar rates in initial position, and (2) higher speaker involvement significantly predicts greater *like* usage; Lola's SII of 48 is more than three times greater than Rebecca's 15, but Rebecca's rate of medial *like* usage is nearly three times that of Lola's. Nevertheless, a discourse-informed examination of the conversations reveals that these patterns are a consequence of each speaker's interactional styles and the types of discourse strategies they use in conversation.

The primary reason that Lola's rate of medial *like* usage is so low is that she seldom uses mitigation or hedging in her talk at all and, therefore, almost never uses *like* for these purposes.

The instances of medial *like* that do occur in her speech mostly serve the function of signaling semantic inexactness, such as marking talk as approximate or an example out of a larger set. Moreover, her lack of mitigation is not due to lack of opportunity. She makes several bold threats to other participant's positive face but does not seem to use any politeness strategies to minimize them. Examples of an unmarked boast, critical disagreement, and criticism are presented and discussed below.

At the time of the recording, Lola had just gotten a new haircut, which received mixed reviews from her friends. Stan insisted that she looked better with long hair, while Katherine and Charlotte reassured her that the new look was cute and suited her well. Lola closed the discussion and dismissed the controversy by saying that regardless of anyone else's opinions, she knew that she was cute "no matter what":

Lola:	Whatever. But the point is is that I'm cute, No matter what.
--------------	--

Excerpt 15: Lola's unmitigated boast from conversation B

Not only does Lola not mitigate the boast of calling herself cute, but she even intensifies it by adding "no matter what."

Later in conversation B, Sophie questions Lola's criteria for judging the value of a man by conventional standards of attractiveness. She remarks that she likes the actor Jack Black, even though most people might not consider him attractive. Lola disagrees with Sophie so strongly that she even doubts they are talking about the same person and requests clarification. Once Stan confirms that Sophie is referring to the "fat ugly comedian," Lola responds, "exactly. Fat ugly comedian. Are you serious:"

Sophie:	See this is the other thing, Like what defines an eight point five, I have a gigantic crush on Jack Black.
Lola:	.. Jack Black who?
Sophie:	Jack Black. Like the actor.
Mark:	Jack Black.
Stan:	Fat ugly comedian.
Lola:	Exactly. Fat ugly comedian. Are you serious?

Excerpt 16: Lola’s unmitigated critical disagreement from conversation B

Again, Lola not only baldly disagrees with Sophie’s opinion, but she also criticizes her taste in men, and neither of these FTAs is minimized.

In the final example, Lola provides a critical evaluation of another participant’s narrative. In conversation B, Lola persuades Maggie to tell the group about seeing Fifty Cent, a popular musical artist, while on a road trip with her family, and she assures the group that it will be a great story. However, as soon as Maggie finishes, she demonstrates her disappointment with Maggie’s retelling and comments that “it’s a great story when she ends it better:”

Lola:	Well it’s a great story when she ends it better.
--------------	--

Excerpt 17: Lola’s unmitigated criticism from conversation B

Each of the above excerpts exemplifies Lola’s tendency to make unmitigated face-threats to other participants. They also illustrate that her relatively low rate of medial *like* usage has little to do with gender or *like* itself. Instead, Lola uses *like* the same way she uses other epistemic markers – to signal her stance towards information but not to minimize potentially face-threatening talk. How she uses *like* reflects her personality, interactional style, and broader trends in the discourse strategies she typically employs. Her overall lack of mitigation and hedging contributes to her persona construction as someone who is unapologetically bold and confident.

Rebecca's personality and use of medial *like* contrast markedly with Lola's. Rebecca uses medial *like* in 18.04% of her IUs, almost three times as often as Lola and tends to be much more reserved and agreeable. Most of her contributions to the conversation are short back-channeling responses or agreements, such as *oh, yeah, definitely, or that makes sense*. When she does take more substantial turns, she frequently marks them with *like*, especially when presenting opinions or potentially face-threatening talk. In particular, her rate of medial *like* usage increases during a section of conversation D where she describes her sister's weight gain.

While Rebecca is generally shy in groups and contributes the turns and topic introductions in conversation D, she does hold the floor for an extended period of time when asked to update the group about her family. In Excerpt 18 below, she tells the other participants about her sister's poor lifestyle choices and recent dramatic weight gain. She explains that her sister's poor diet and inactivity have caused her to gain a significant amount of weight, and that it is even more pronounced because of her short stature:

Rebecca:	Yeah, And then I feel like her metabolism just like slowed way down, And she's like really .. fat,
Katherine:	It's shocking.
Rebecca:	@@ It's really bad. And she's really short,
Laura:	Yeah,
Rebecca:	So like--
Katherine:	Yeah,
Rebecca:	Like her gaining weight .. shows like a lot more than--
Brandon:	I can't picture this, Because I can only picture her as being like really really thin.
Rebecca:	Like if I gained the same amount of weight? Because I'm taller, I feel like it would distribute more?
Katherine:	Yeah,
Rebecca:	And not- but she's just like got a gut,

Excerpt 18: Rebecca's criticism of her sister's weight gain from conversation D

In this excerpt, Rebecca marks the most critical or insulting talk with *like*, such as that her sister's metabolism has "like slowed way down," that "she's like really fat," and that "she's just like got a gut." Even though this talk is not directly face-threatening to any of the participants present, it has the potential to threaten Rebecca's own positive face, because these criticisms could make her seem shallow and unkind. Marking this type of talk with *like* allows Rebecca to present the negative assessments as if they were not the final truth and distance herself from the negative metamessage that may result from giving a harsh critique of someone else's appearance. This sort of mitigation and hedging is important to Rebecca's persona construction as someone who is agreeable and reserved.

The comparison between Lola and Rebecca suggests that variable rates of medial *like* usage among young adults may have less to do with choosing *like* over possible covariants and more to do with interactional styles, personas, and discourse contexts. For example, potentially face-threatening talk typically calls for mitigation, and the quantitative results of this study have shown that participants used *like* in these contexts 23.09% of the time. The above analysis of Lola's face-threats, though, reveals that an absence of *like* from FTAs may not be caused by the speaker opting for an alternate mitigation strategy. Rather, it may be due to a complete lack of mitigation. Thus, the choice to use medial *like* in non-approximative contexts may more directly reflect the speaker's tendency to hedge or not hedge than their tendency to use *like*. The results of this study align with past observations that hedging is typically associated with women; however, the tendency to hedge is more directly linked to a speaker's persona and interactional styles than the speaker's gender.

6. CONCLUSION

By combining variationist and discourse analytic theories and methodologies, this study addressed the following questions about the distribution and function of non-standard *like* in conversation:

How is *like* distributed within and across interactions, and how does this distribution reflect its core meaning and functions?

The results of this study show that the distribution of *like* is most significantly affected by interactionally defined factors and to some extent by gender. *Like* in all positions was influenced by the speaker's epistemic rights to a topic, the face-threatening potential of the talk, turn length, and the speaker's overall control of the floor, as measured by the Speaker Involvement Index. In other words, speakers use *like* more often in both initial and medial positions when they have exclusive knowledge of a topic, commit a face-threatening act, take longer individual turns, and hold the floor more throughout the entire conversation. In initial position, *like* occurs more frequently during narratives, and women generally use *like* in medial position more than men. These patterns are largely affected by the ways that *like* functions in discourse. Medially, *like* acts as an epistemic and pragmatic hedge, signaling a reduced commitment to the information, idea, or act that a specific phrase communicates. *Like* can also mitigate acts in initial position; however, it mostly marks the sequencing of ideas and turns. IU-initial *like* signals that upcoming talk is a clarification, elaboration or objection to previous ideas and turns. I argue that all of these functions are united by and rooted in a core meaning of inexactness.

The narrow range of participants in the study could present limitations. First, there was no data of exclusively male interaction. Second, there was little diversity among the participants in terms of ethnicity, educational background, and geographic origin. Of the 17 participants, 14 are European-American, 2 are African-American, and 1 is Asian-American. All of the

participants have completed college, and most have either earned or are working towards graduate degrees. 13 of the participants are originally from the Eastern U.S., 4 are from California, and 1 is from the Midwest. Third, I was present in every conversation and exhibit particularly high rates of *like* usage. Past research on linguistic accommodation theory has shown that speakers adjust their speaking styles to mirror or differentiate from their interlocutors. It is possible that my patterns of *like* usage had an effect on the other participants.

Despite these limitations, the present study addresses gaps in the literature on the distribution and functions of *like* in conversation and proposes a possible explanation for the apparent contradiction between *like*'s well-understood approximative function with its frequent occurrence in semantically precise contexts. It also offers innovative approaches to the study of discourse and variation. In particular, it demonstrates the value of operationalizing discourse features for use in a multivariate analysis. For discourse analysts, this approach allows for a statistically grounded analysis of discourse functions that teases apart overlapping factors and compares their relative effects. For instance, I discussed above in section 4.5 that narrative, in terms of raw percentages, seems to have the greatest effect on *like* usage in all positions. However, using a multivariate analysis, as opposed to relying on raw figures, illuminates that narrative actually has a weak effect on initial *like* and none at all on medial *like*. The observed correlation between narrative and *like* usage is caused by other factors that typically co-occur with it, namely epistemic exclusivity, extended turns, and high speaker involvement. Operationalizing discourse features presents similar benefits to the study of sociolinguistic variation. This study demonstrates that interactionally defined factors had a significantly greater effect on the distribution of *like* than gender. Just as phonological variation studies include internal linguistic constraints as independent variables, I argue that it is essential to identify and

incorporate relevant interactional or discourse constraints when conducting discourse variation studies.

REFERENCES

- Andersen, Gisle. 1997. "They like wanna see like how we talk and all that: the use of like as a discourse marker in London teenage speech." In: Ljung, M. (Ed.), *Corpus-based Studies in English: Papers from the 17th International Conference on English Language Research on Computerized Corpora*. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 37-48.
- . 1998. "The pragmatic marker like from a relevance-theoretic perspective." In: Jucker, Andreas, and Yael Zi (Eds.), *Discourse Markers: Descriptions and Theory*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- . 2000. "The role of pragmatic marker like in utterance interpretation." In Andersen, Gisle and Thorstein Fretheim (Eds.), *Pragmatic Markers and Propositional Attitude*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub.
- Belebeau, Arthur. "You're a Bright Woman! So What Did You Just Say?" *Glamour*, April 2011.
- Biber, Douglass and Edward Finegan. 1988. "Adverbial Stance Types in English." *Discourse Processes* 11(1): 1-34.
- Blyth, Carl, Sigrid Recktenwald and Jenny Wang. 1990. "I'm like, 'Say What?!': A new quotative in American oral narrative." *American Speech* 65(3): 215-227.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press.
- Bucholtz, Mary and Kira Hall. 2005. "Identity and Interaction: A sociolinguistic approach." *Discourse Studies* 7: 585-614.
- Buchstaller, Isabelle. 2001. "An Alternative View of like: Its Grammaticalisation in Conversational American English and Beyond." *Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics* 11: 21-41.
- Chafe, Wallace L. 1994. *Discourse, consciousness, and time: the flow and displacement of conscious experience in speaking and writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Coupland, Nikolas. 2007. *Style: Language Variation, Identity and Social Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dailey-O'Cain, Jennifer. 2000. "The sociolinguistic distribution of and attitudes toward focuser like and quotative like." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4/1: 60-80.
- D'Arcy, Alexandra. 2006. "Lexical replacement and the likes." *American Speech* 81(4): 339-357.

———. 2007. “*Like* and Language Ideology: Disentangling fact from fiction.” *American Speech*, 82(4): 386-419.

Dictionary.com. The truth behind one of the most disliked phrases in English.” February 17, 2011. <http://hotword.dictionary.com/like/?c>

Du Bois, John W., Stephan Schuetze-Coburn, Danae Paolino, and Susanna Cumming. 1992. “Outline of discourse transcription” in S. Thompson (Ed.) *Discourse and Grammar* (Santa Barbara Papers in Linguistics, vol. 2). Santa Barbara: University of California, Department of Linguistics.

Edelsky, Carole. 1993. “Who’s got the floor?” In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Gender and Conversational Interaction*, 189-227. New York: Oxford.

Ferrara, Kathleen and Barbara Bell. 1995. “Sociolinguistic Variation and Discourse Function of Constructed Dialogue Introducers: The Case of *be + like*.” *American Speech* 70: 265–90.

Fox, Barbara and Jessica Robles. 2010. “It’s like mmm: Enactments with it’s like.” *Discourse Studies* 20: 715-738.

Fox Tree, Jean. 2006. “Placing *like* in telling stories.” *Discourse Studies* 8: 723-743.

———. 2007. “Folk notions of um and uh, like, and you know.” *Text & Talk* 27(3): 297-314.

Fuller, Janet. 2003. “The influence of speaker roles on discourse marker use.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 35: 23-45.

Jucker, Andreas and Sara Smith. 1998. “*And people just you know like ‘wow’*: Discourse Markers as Negotiation Strategies.” In: Jucker, Andreas, and Yael Zi (Eds.), *Discourse markers: descriptions and theory*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.

Kärkkäinen, Elise. 2003. *Epistemic stance in English conversation: a description of its interactional functions, with a focus on I think*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.

Kiesling, Scott F. 2004. “Dude.” *American Speech* 79(3): 281-305.

Labov, William. 1972. “The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax.” *Language in the Inner City*, 354-96. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lamerichs, Joyce and Hedwig Te Molder. 2009. “And then I’m really like...: preliminary self-quotations in adolescent talk.” *Discourse Studies* 11: 401-419.

Meehan, Teresa. 1991. “It’s Like, ‘What’s Happening in the Evolution of *like*?’: A Theory of Grammaticalization.” *Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics* 16: 37–51.

- Mendoza-Denton, Norma. 2002. "Language and Identity." In J.K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill, and Natalie Schilling-Estes, Eds. *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 475-499.
- Miller, Jim. 2009. "Like and other discourse markers." In Pam Peters, Peter Collins, and Adam Michael Smith, Eds. *Comparative studies in Australian and New Zealand English grammar and beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. 317-338
- Miller, Jim and Regina Weinert. 1995. "Function of LIKE in Dialogue." *Journal of Pragmatics*, 23: 365-393.
- Moore, Emma and Robert J. Podesva. 2009. "Style, indexicality, and the social meaning of tag questions." *Language in Society* 38: 447-485.
- Mushin, Ilana. 2001. *Evidentiality and epistemological stance: narrative retelling*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.
- Ochs, Elinor. 1992. "Indexing gender." In Alessandro Duranti & Charles Goodwin (eds.), *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 335-358.
- Pichler, Heike. 2010. "Methods in discourse variation analysis: Reflections on the way forward." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14(5): 581-608.
- Romaine, Suzanne and Deborah Lange. 1991. "The use of like as a Marker of Reported Speech and Thought: A Case of Grammaticalization in Progress." *American Speech* 66(3): 227-279.
- Schiffrin, Deborah. 1987. *Discourse markers*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press.
- Schilling-Estes, Natalie. 2002. "Investigating Stylistic Variation." In J.K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill, and Natalie Schilling-Estes, Eds. *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 375-401.
- . 2004. "Constructing Ethnicity in Interaction." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8(2): 163-195.
- Schourup, Lawrence. 1983. *Common Discourse Particles in English Conversation*. Ohio State Working Papers in Linguistics 28. Columbus: Dept. of Linguistics, Ohio State Univ.
- Singler, John. 2001. "Why you Can't do a VARBRUL study of quotatives and what such a study can show us." *U. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics*, vol. 7.3: 259-278.
- Tagliamonte, Sali. 2005. "So who? Like how? Just what? Discourse markers in the conversations of Young Canadians." *Journal of Pragmatics* 37: 1896-1915.
- Ten Have, Paul. 1999. *Doing Conversation Analysis*. Sage Publications.

Tsui, Amy B. M. 1991. "The Pragmatic Functions of I Don't Know." *Text* 11(4): 607-622.

Underhill, Robert. 1988. "Like is, like, focus." *American Speech* 63(3): 234-246.