

Discourse-pragmatic variation in context: Eight hundred years of LIKE. By ALEXANDRA D'ARCY. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017. Pp. xx, 235. ISBN 9789027259523. \$143 (Hb).

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A lot of linguists work now on popular issues, questions about language that will appeal to the general public. In that sense, this slim volume treats a distinctly UNpopular topic, *like* as it is used for discourse-pragmatic purposes, something constantly decried by nonlinguists and only incompletely understood by linguists, certainly until now. That said, Alexandra D'Arcy's *Discourse-pragmatic variation in context: Eight hundred years of LIKE* is a weighty and consequential work for a wide range of audiences. I first give an overview of the book's contents and then move on to some more evaluative remarks.

The 'Introduction' (Ch. 1, pp. 1–33) surveys the many uses of LIKE. Just the 'unremarkable' uses are rich: verb ('to like something'), adjective ('of like minds'), noun (*likes* and *dislikes*), preposition ('like a dog'), on to conjunction, comparative complementizer, and suffix. To this, D adds five more uses, listed here with her labels and characterizations plus one of her examples:

- Approximative adverb *like*, 'remarked upon but unremarkable': 'I'm like half a block behind.' (9–12)
- Sentence adverb *like*, 'remarked upon but restricted': 'You'd hit the mud on the bottom like.' (12–13)
- Discourse marker *like*, 'remarked upon but not new': 'Och, they done all types of work. Like they ploughed and harrowed.' (13)
- Discourse particle *like*, 'remarked upon and innovating': 'They're like really quiet.' (13–16)
- Quotative *be like*, 'remarked upon, but remarkable for unsuspected reasons': 'It was like, "So, what have you been doing?" ' (16–23)

Even this list leaves aside some rarer patterns, like infixation, as in *un-like-sympathetic*. One major aim of the book is to dismantle claims 'that LIKE, in any of its uses, is random and meaningless' (31). The richness of *like* already becomes clear from this introduction but is steadily developed from here onward.

Those last uses in the bulleted list are where the action is, at least for much of the general public, and this chapter introduces readers to some of the rants: LIKE is meaningless, a tic, grating, incorrect, and, of course, associated with young women. I wonder if there might be some movement on some of these fronts. The discussion of the wikiHow page 'How to stop saying the word "like": 10 steps' is reported to include images only of women, but a visit to the current version (now simplified: '3 ways to stop saying the word "like" '; <https://www.wikihow.com/Stop-Saying-the-Word-%22Like%22>) shows that it includes images of a couple of males (and people of color, which may play against the popular association with whiteness; see below).

One of the first surprises to those not familiar with this complicated set of forms is how old most of them are, going back to Old English in many cases. To understand that long and variegated history, D uses corpus data and quantitative sociolinguistic methods. These are clearly laid out and situated in the embedding problem in particular (Weinreich et al. 1968:185–86), and D holds throughout to the Labovian principle of accountability: that we must deal with all occurrences of a variable and its competing forms (e.g. p. 155). While this focus is underscored by the word 'variation' in the book's title, the book is equally or even more about change and stability.

Ch. 2, 'Empirical context' (pp. 35–45), simply and concisely sketches the ten diachronically oriented and ten synchronically oriented corpora from which D draws her data. They vary tremendously—by size, region, time or time span, types of material included, and so forth—but she notes that the corpora tend on the whole to reflect relatively vernacular language.

In Ch. 3, 'Historical context' (pp. 47–66), D lays out a remarkable example of the recency illusion: of the many uses, only the quotative *be like* and complementizer use in epistemic parenthetical clauses ('I feel like', 'it seems like') are from the second half of the twentieth century. Detailed analysis of historical examples illustrates the others and shows that the forms were

widely used in the UK and North America from long ago. This chapter provides the most fine-grained picture I have seen of the development of key uses of *LIKE*. This history and much of D's later discussion is framed around the use of *LIKE* as particle vs. marker (57). Markers are clause-initial and 'serve pragmatically to evaluate the relation of the current utterance to prior discourse', while particles can appear in various positions within an utterance and 'draw speaker and hearer together in shaping an online discourse' (57).

These two meanings are traditionally seen as emerging from the conjunction *like*, but D argues at length that the marker arose from the sentence adverb, serving to elaborate or clarify discourse intent, with its scope broadening from proposition to discourse (62) by the mid-nineteenth century. The particle develops further in the late nineteenth century, with semantic bleaching and even broader scope. The distinction between marker and particle is sometimes ambiguous in earlier attestations. This amounts to an argument for a single, coherent development: sentence adverb > marker > particle.

With Ch. 4, 'Developmental context' (pp. 67–116), we have a shift from real-time to apparent-time data, including something some readers may not expect: considerable formal syntactic argumentation about how discourse-pragmatic *like* moves from outside to inside the clause. For both marker and particle, domains vary from clausal to nominal, adjectival, and verbal, and we see a clear trajectory for the marker from matrix CP to subordinate CP to TP over about 200 years, and twice as fast for the particle, which starts in DP, *v*P and eventually generalizes down to *n*P. This kind of integration of meaty syntactic analysis is not yet common enough in work on variation and change, and it is a welcome piece of this project, especially as integrated into the full picture the book offers.

The word-order possibilities with *like* are striking and constantly on display here, where the discourse particle can appear within a prepositional phrase—'they can take the joints to *like* the limits'—or within a determiner phrase—'all these *like* CDs and DVDs'—to take examples 201 and 202 from the appendix (p. 225). D has a whole section called 'But *LIKE* cannot go anywhere' (73–80). There she reviews data showing that some contexts rarely contain *like*, such as responses to direct questions. It is unattested in other contexts, like nonrestricted relative clauses ('A lot started in Denmark, [which ___ is probably ten years ago]'; p. 77), and rare in restricted relatives as well. (Working through these data reminds me that I am clearly not a particularly developed *like* speaker, nor a person with the capacity for these kinds of judgments.)

The book's shortest chapter, 'Social context' (Ch. 5, pp. 117–23), notes some of the many social associations attributed to *LIKE*, including mid-twentieth-century American counterculture, used, for instance, in Jack Kerouac's 1957 *On the road*: 'How to even begin to get it all down and without restraints and all hung-up on *like* literary inhibitions and grammatical fears ...' (p. 139). Today, it is associated with whiteness and suburban speech. D focuses particularly on gender, where the marker and particle show distinct patterns: for those born after 1980, women increasingly lead in using the marker, while men have long been leading in the diffusion of particle use. She reads these data as suggesting 'that the social divisions observed for *like* may, at least in part, fall out from stylistic differences relating to gendered practice' (123).

Ch. 6, 'Ideological context' (pp. 125–47), dives deep into popular complaints about *LIKE* and evidence for how those match actual usage, which is to say generally not very well. For the recent *be like* construction, notably, the quotative does seem to have North American roots and is only attested since 1979 (141). Contrary to popular perceptions, though, this form is not simply used by girls, teenagers, or Americans. In contrast to D's nuanced discussions of the many *likes*, these are often conflated into a single word, use, or function by nonlinguists.

In Ch. 7, 'Contextual interfaces' (pp. 149–75), we have a broad and deep effort to put together a coherent picture of what the preceding analyses mean. This begins with a section on what we do and do not know about the acquisition of *like* by young children. To the former, children seem to use the particle early and on a syntactically local level. Children also seem sensitive to sociolinguistic aspects of *like*, including its association with female speech. D puts *like* into the context of linguistic theory and language change, which I turn to in a moment. This section is followed by

'Counting matters, and matters of counting' (163–74), an outstanding statement on how to think about how to quantify evidence for language change. (I will be sending students to read this for a long time to come.) Brief concluding remarks stress the interconnectedness of the strands of evidence and argument presented in the volume.

The appendix (pp. 201–31) is an important piece of the book, giving over 800 corpus examples of *like*. D gives data only for selected uses, namely sentence adverb, discourse marker, and discourse particle. These are first categorized by function and, within that, by date.

Turning to evaluation, I have concentrated my remarks above on language variation and change, but it should be evident that the book can be read with a similarly clear focus on corpus linguistics, pragmatics and syntax, historical sociolinguistics, or sociolinguistics broadly. This is matched by the empirical breadth, built on data from twenty corpora for real- and apparent-time quantitative analyses supplemented by close reading. In terms of theory and method, then, as well as in terms of empirical foundations, this book adopts the approach Mark Lauersdorf advocates regularly (if not yet in print) for historical sociolinguistics generally: 'use all the data'.

This expansive and inclusive perspective, in fact, is ultimately what is most impressive about the book: all of the available data has been used, and it has been examined from an equally wide range of theoretical and other perspectives. The syntactic analysis draws on everything from minimalism to fundamentally functionalist work. And that syntactic analysis is tightly tied to pragmatics, areas of grammar often connected in language change, of course. This allows us to see in great detail the stability but also the 'regular step-wise development' (175) of *LIKE* in the grammar over time, the latter also a familiar characteristic of syntactic change generally (e.g. Westergaard 2009).

These days, one expects a topic like this to be situated at least in part in terms of grammaticalization, and discourse-pragmatic *like* shows the expected hallmarks, such as increasingly grammatical function and semantic bleaching. But D tells a far more complex and interesting story than your textbook case of grammaticalization. The historical trajectory of *like*, for example, violates the prediction of scope reduction (160). While classic formal accounts of grammaticalization involve upward movements as elements occur higher in the syntax (van Gelderen 2004), *like* has moved downward in some ways, for example, from matrix to subordinate clauses and, in the change from marker to particle, from CP to DP or ν P, so from higher to lower projections (161ff.). Previous work has paid little attention to this kind of discourse-level phenomenon, and D suspects that the differences in behavior between typical grammaticalization patterns and these discourse patterns may derive from the different modules involved.

There is profound irony in the mismatch involved in comparing the popular portrayal of *LIKE* as meaningless and random with the remarkable patterns of stability in the history of *LIKE*, as well as with how constrained the diachronic developments have been. This important book tells that story in a clear, compelling way and with broad implications for our understanding of discourse and pragmatic change.

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