



**ALEXANDRA D'ARCY,**  
**DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC VARIATION IN CONTEXT –**  
**EIGHT HUNDRED YEARS OF LIKE**

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Alexandra D'Arcy's monograph is a culmination of more than a decade-long research on the word *like*. Her aim is to show that the distribution and behavior of the pragmatic uses of *like* are deeply rooted in English and its diachronic and synchronic development is nothing but systematic. The book is divided into seven standalone yet interconnected chapters, which are summarized below.

In the first introductory chapter, the author offers an overview of the various functions of the word *like*, including a brief historical and sociolinguistic background, starting with the ordinary ones: verb, adjective, noun, preposition, conjunction, complementizer, and suffix, which are followed by the “unremarkable” approximative adverb, and concluding with the “remarkable” ones: sentence final adverb, discourse marker, discourse particle, and the quotative *be like*. The primary focus of her research in this book is the discourse marker, which is defined by clause-initial appearance and is used to “encode textual relations by relating the current utterance to prior discourse” (p. 14) and the discourse particle, which “targets clause-internal positions [and] signals subjective information” (p. 15). D'Arcy chose to approach the analysis of the selected functions of *like* from the variationist sociolinguistic perspective, through which she aims to shed light on “the trajectories of variation and change” (p. 25).

The second chapter describes the corpora which were used as resources for examples of *like* in D'Arcy's study, which all represent vernacular language as closely as possible. To investigate the history of the word, D'Arcy turns to diachronic corpora of personal letters (e.g. Corpus of Irish English Correspondence), oral histories (e.g. Diachronic Corpus of Victoria English), or interviews (e.g. Origins of New Zealand English Archive), while the synchronic analysis relies mostly on sociolinguistic interviews from the Toronto English Archive (TEA). The careful selection of resources regarding varieties of English and the considerable time span of the data allows D'Arcy to confidently draw the developmental paths of each function in question as well as to describe the synchronic status of the word based on apparent time analysis.

In the third chapter D'Arcy explores the historical context of *like* and provides evidence that most of the functions of *like* are “longstanding components of the spoken grammar of English (p. 47)”. With special focus on the discourse marker and the discourse particle, the author provides persuasive evidence from various diachronic corpora, showing examples of *like* performing the functions that are nowadays considered to be innovative since “at least 18th century” for the discourse marker and “from the start of the 20th century” for the discourse particle (p. 52). D'Arcy also addresses the question of the origin of the two functions, disputing the previously sketched path of development proposed by Romaine and Lange (1991), especially the later developmental stage (conjunction → discourse marker/particle). In addition,

D'Arcy argues that a sentence adverb like constitutes an “important precursor” for the two functions in focus (i.e. preposition → conjunction → adverb → discourse marker → discourse particle) (p. 60).

In the following fourth chapter, D'Arcy examines contemporary data in apparent time to show the synchronic development of the marker and the particle. This chapter aims to describe the syntactic constraints and rules that govern the use of like, proving that the word cannot occupy any random position in a sentence. The analysis is based primarily on data from the Toronto English Archive (TEA), a corpus of spoken English from Toronto recorded between 2002 and 2006 (p. 68). She does not take into account only those who are assumed to use like most frequently (e.g. teenagers) but rather the whole speech community (p. 68). D'Arcy not only examines the contexts where like appears but also considers the contexts where it does not, following the principle of accountability (Labov 1972: 72). This is done by extracting the same amount of data (e.g. verb phrases) from each speaker in the study (see p. 69) and analyzing the possible insertion slots whether like is present or not. Relying on generative grammar, D'Arcy suggests that the discourse marker advanced from the matrix complementizer phrase (CP) to subordinate CP to a tense phrase (TP) (p. 112). Moving inside of the clause the discourse particle underwent a development of its own, beginning from the slot before a determiner phrase (DP) and a verb phrase (vP) to a degree phrase (DegP) and an adjective phrase (AP) and more recently to a noun phrase (nP). Entering into previously constrained environments is suggested to be a process of generalization which is subsequently taken as evidence of ongoing grammaticalization, however, as has been indicated, like cannot be inserted anywhere. The emergence of like in new contexts is thus systematical and is governed by various constraints that render the insertion of like unlikely at this time (e.g. discourse marker following a direct question, discourse particle with perfectives) (see p. 80 for an overview).

The fifth chapter offers insight into who actually uses the discourse marker and the discourse particle like. D'Arcy examines the age and more importantly the gender of speakers who employ this feature in their speech. This analysis was necessary due to the “inconclusive and at times even contradictory (p. 199)” results offered in previous studies. The author analyzes the marker and the particle separately and reveals a significant difference in who is the leading force in its use in each case. For the discourse marker, it is important to acknowledge its ongoing change (generalizing across functional categories and clause types p. 119). D'Arcy suggests that the marker grammaticalized from the sentence-final adverb, which is associated with male speakers (p. 120). With the shift of the pragmatic function, scope and the rate of the marker D'Arcy is able to show, with relation to the age of the speakers, that the proportional frequency of discourse marker like starts to grow higher among women (born in 1980 and onwards) in comparison to men, making women the leaders in this case. Turning to the discourse particle, D'Arcy offers an analysis of three syntactical contexts (DP, vP, and AP) in which the differences in gender initially do not matter, however, as the frequency of the particle increases, the differentiation begins to emerge and is steady across the age groups within a speech community. In the case of the discourse particle, D'Arcy's data shows that the leaders are men this time around.





D'Arcy explains this by "the tendency of women to lag behind for changes that are stigmatized (Eckert 1989)." (p. 123)

D'Arcy dedicated the sixth chapter to all the myths and misconceptions that surround like and systematically refutes their validity on the background of evidence presented in the previous chapters as well as previous studies by other researchers. These claims include that: i) like is a "single entity" behaving in a uniform way within a discourse, ii) the use of like is indicative of careless and meaningful speech and the users of like would be inevitably perceived as uneducated and lazy by others, iii) female speakers use like more frequently, iv) it is a feature typical only of teenage speakers, v) all the functions originated and spread from the US into other varieties of English, and vi) like is a haphazard word that can appear anywhere in a sentence.

The final, seventh chapter provides a discussion of the issues examined throughout this book, applying the findings to an account of like acquisition by children, and addressing the benefits of combining approaches in order to better understand the ongoing variation and change.

The section dedicated to the acquisition of the discourse functions of like by children is based on recent studies of other authors. D'Arcy notes that the functions are not adopted simultaneously, which means that children tend to use the discourse particle first before gaining enough sociolinguistic competence to employ the discourse marker (p. 153). Younger children also work with fewer adjunction sites for like, which spreads into new contexts as the speakers grow older, following the trajectory of the diachronic development of both the marker and particle (p. 152). Furthermore, D'Arcy remarks that young children use like less frequently than adolescents, who represent the peak group for like (p. 150-151). D'Arcy continues with an account of the grammaticalization process with regards to like, which exhibits all the features typical of the process (e.g. reanalysis, semantic weakening, pragmatic strengthening, generalization, etc.), with the exception of its syntactic development, by showing downward movement in structure instead of the expected upward motion (p. 161). D'Arcy also suggests that a combination of outlooks and research methodology (variationist perspective versus corpus linguistics) is beneficial for better understanding variation and change. Even though the outputs may be interpreted differently (p. 164), D'Arcy suggests that each method ultimately only offers a different angle and together help construct a more comprehensive picture of what is going on.

Alexandra D'Arcy's volume represents a unique insight into the diachronic and synchronic development of the word like, showing very clearly its roots and its systematic behavior, which altogether undermines the usual misconceptions surrounding like, the way it is used and the status of its users. Her findings invite further research, as like may be expected to continue developing and her methodology and suggestions to combine or compare approaches inspire to assess like from various angles. Anyone who reads this book, no matter their initial stance on the word, will have to agree that like has been around for a substantial amount of time and is probably here to stay, and that it is very far from being just a meaningless and random feature of everyday speech.

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