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Some structural consequences of diffusion

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the diffusion and structural adaptation of quotative *be like* into a rural African American speech community. The data come from a longitudinal corpus of recordings (1988–2010) with rural African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers born between 1894–2002. Previous research suggests other innovative AAVE features have diffused into this community from neighboring urban areas (Cukor-Avila 1995, 2001; Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b, 1996) approximately a generation after they appear in urban varieties. The present analysis supports Cukor-Avila (2002) that *be like* has followed a similar path of diffusion, and adds new recordings of young speakers to provide necessary data to explore the transmission of *be like* in the community, its continued diffusion, and how these processes reinforce each other as *be like* becomes the primary means of expressing quoted speech. In addition, the present study explores how quotative *be like* has been structurally adapted into the AAVE copula system. (AAVE, transmission, diffusion, adaptation, quotative *be like*)*

INTRODUCTION

This article reports on the diffusion and structural adaptation of a global "discourse-pragmatic innovation" (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2009)—quotative *be like*—into a rural African American speech community with evolving sociolinguistic norms. *Be like* is a particularly interesting feature through which to investigate diffusion and adaptation because of its explosive expansion across ethnic and global speech communities and because the linguistic and social constraints on this feature have been well-documented for several varieties of English.

The processes of diffusion and transmission have received new emphasis in recent years both because of the rapid spread of *be like* and because of the work of Labov (2001, 2007, 2010). In this work Labov clarifies the relationship between diffusion and transmission by looking at these processes across a number of phonological features. In his discussion of transmission Labov notes that when children acquire their first language they often do not preserve the

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exact linguistic structures of the generation before them—in a sense their vernacular is "reorganized" (Labov 2001:415). Change occurs as second-generation speakers incorporate the restructured forms into their grammar and as they increase the frequency and/or scope of these forms, what Labov (2001, 2007) calls "incrementation." This cycle repeats as subsequent generations transmit restructured forms and as each generation incrementally advances the reorganized forms. A recent analysis of the incrementation model using morphosyntactic data, including data on change in progress in the quotative system of Canadian youth (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2009), supports the incrementation model proposed by Labov for phonological features. Data from the present study of quotative *be like* in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) also lend support to this model.

Change through diffusion has been shown to occur across communities when speakers of different languages or language varieties come in contact with each other. Labov argues that unlike transmission, diffusion rarely leads to structural change since these contact situations typically involve adults, who "do not learn and reproduce linguistic forms, rules, and constraints with the accuracy and speed that children display" (Labov 2007:349).[1] In reaching these conclusions, Labov examines a broad array of data from a number of urban settings that have "well-defined limits, a common structural base, and a unified set of sociolinguistic norms" (Labov 2007:347). It is not clear to what extent these conclusions apply to communities with less clearly defined limits and evolving sociolinguistic norms. In what follows I explore some of those conclusions with data from such a community. These data are a part of a larger corpus of longitudinal recordings with rural AAVE speakers born between 1894–2002. The quotative *be like* data for the present study come from speakers born between 1978–2002, the only residents of the community who use *be like* consistently and whose quotative systems include this form.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON QUOTATIVE *BE LIKE*

The use of *be like* to introduce recreated speech or constructed dialogue (Tannen 1986), as in (1a), inner thoughts as in (1b), or nonlexicalized sounds or gestures as in (1c) has garnered the attention of sociolinguists for almost four decades.

(1) a. An' I was at the mall an' I saw this guy that I useta go to school with **an' he was like**, "Why you didn't come to the reunion?" **I was like**, "What reunion?" You know **he was like**, "We had, you know the past two class reunions." **An' I was like**, "I didn't know anything about it." **I was like**, "I didn't know anything about it, you know." (B/82/2009)[2]

b. When Keisha drink soda she don' wanna stop drinkin' it. **I'm like**, "Girl I know that's burning your throat!" (B/82/1999)

c. An' he was goin', I think he was goin' fast, an' like the trailer thing jus' tipped over. **An' I was like**, "[breathes in]." (K/82/2009)

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Numerous studies on the distribution of *be like* and the other "new" quotatives, *go* and *be all*, from both sociolinguistic fieldwork and online corpora, document widespread use of one or more of these forms for speakers of American English (Blyth, Becktenwald, & Wang 1990; Romaine & Lange 1991; Ferrara & Bell 1995; Dailey-O'Cain 2000; Barbieri 2007, 2009; Rickford, Buchstaller, Wasow, & Zwicky 2007), Canadian English (D'Arcy 2004; Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004, 2007), British English (Buchstaller 2011; Durham, Haddican, Zweig, Baker, Cockerham, Danks, & Tyler 2012), Scottish English (Macaulay 2001), Australian English (Winter 2002), and New Zealand English (Baird 2001; D'Arcy 2010, 2012). In addition, cross-variety comparisons (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999; Buchstaller 2006, 2008; Buchstaller & D'Arcy 2009) suggest pathways of diffusion for the new quotatives as they develop in World Englishes and other languages (cf. Eriksson 1995 for Swedish, Golato 2000 for German, and Maschler 2002 for Hebrew).

The two most studied linguistic constraints for quotative *be like*—CONTENT OF THE QUOTE, in which *be like* is favored before thoughts ((1b) above) and GRAMMATICAL PERSON, where *be like* occurs more often with first person subjects ((1a–c) above)—have remained stable as this form has diffused across varieties and continues to expand in the speech of younger generations. A third characteristic of *be like*, attested mainly in American English, is that *be like* occurs most often in the present tense (cf. Blyth et al. 1990; Romaine & Lange 1991; Singler 2001).[3] However, as Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007:203–4) note, surface morphology with *be like* does not always correspond to its actual temporal reference, since *be like* frequently occurs in narrative discourse, and as such would have past temporal reference. In these cases then, *be like* would actually be HISTORICAL PRESENT (HP) (Wolfson 1978, 1979; Schiffrin 1981)—non-past morphology with past temporal reference. Indeed, VARBRUL results for morphology/temporal reference in their Toronto data reveal a "split in the population." For the 20–39-year-olds *be like* predominantly occurs with nonpast morphology, both with present and past temporal reference (although for speakers aged 20–29 HP is the favored form), yet for speakers under age nineteen *be like* occurs most often in the HISTORICAL PRESENT (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2007:206–8). The MORPHOLOGY/TEMPORAL REFERENCE constraint has also been shown to operate in other varieties of English (cf. Buchstaller & D'Arcy 2009; D'Arcy 2010); however, as these researchers suggest, "the effect is subject to local re-organization as *be like* finds its niche in the respective quotative systems outside the North American context" (Buchstaller & D'Arcy 2009:309).

Research on the diffusion of *be like* across ethnic varieties of American English is more limited, and all but Cukor-Avila (2002) report on data from urban settings (cf. Sánchez & Charity 1999, Singler 2001, and Kohn & Franz 2009 for urban AAVE speakers; Fought 2003, Bayley & Santa Ana 2004, Hansen-Thomas 2008, Kohn 2008, and Kohn & Franz 2009 for urban Chicano[4] speakers). The data from each of these studies show that *be like* not only has become the preferred verb of quotation for young AAVE and Chicano English speakers, but also that the two main constraints on *be like* illustrated above in (1 a–c) hold in these varieties as well.

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The rural AAVE quotative *be like* data discussed in Cukor-Avila (2002) are of particular interest to the present study of the relationship between transmission, diffusion, and structural adaptation since previous research on this same variety has suggested that innovative AAVE features, such as present habitual *be* and preterite *had* + past, have diffused into the community from neighboring urban areas (Cukor-Avila 1995, 2001; Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b, 1996) a generation or so after they appear in urban varieties. The present analysis, based on an expanded data set from additional recordings with the same speakers, confirms the suggestion in Cukor-Avila (2002) that *be like* has followed a similar path of diffusion as it becomes the primary means of expressing quoted speech for speakers born after 1970. New recordings of speakers born in the 1990s and early 2000s provide the data necessary to explore the transmission of *be like* in the community. In addition, the present study explores how quotative *be like* has been structurally adapted into the AAVE copula system.

RESEARCH SITE

The data for this study come from conversational recordings made with residents living in and around Springville, Texas.[5] This rural community has maintained a stable population of 150 to 170 over the last sixty years—approximately 70% of the residents are African American, with the remainder of the population equally divided among Mexican Americans and Anglos. Guy Bailey conducted exploratory fieldwork at the Springville School in 1986 and 1987, and following that in the summer of 1988, I began extensive fieldwork in the community. Since the Springville project was designed as a longitudinal study to explore the mechanisms of language change in addition to compiling a database of primary evidence on rural AAVE, we have done follow-up fieldwork nearly every year between 1988 and 2002, with the most recent recordings made in the spring of 2010. The follow-up fieldwork includes re-interviews with almost two-thirds of the African American informants recorded during the initial fieldwork, which has enabled us to construct a panel survey that provides real-time evidence crucial for understanding how transmission, diffusion, and adaptation have contributed to language change for AAVE speakers in this rural setting. In addition, over the past twenty-two years we have also recorded new informants, both children who were born during this time period and former residents who moved back to the community. At present, the roughly 1.8-million-word Springville corpus includes approximately 165 hours of recordings with 103 informants: sixty-seven African Americans, twenty-four Anglos, and twelve Mexican Americans.

For over half a century the center of the village was the Springville general store and post office, which provided a gathering place for residents of all ages and races and was the primary site of public linguistic interaction in the community (cf. Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995a). However, in December 2004, some two years after the death of the owner, the store closed and now only the post office

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remains open. One other notable change that has occurred in Springville over the last decade has been the explosive growth of the Springville School and the Springville Independent School District (ISD). When the project began in 1988 Springville School served fifty-eight students in pre-K through 8th grade and was in danger of being closed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) due to low enrollment. For the next three years the enrollment remained low, then starting with the 1992–93 school year student enrollment began to climb, and by the beginning of the 1994–95 academic year the student population had more than doubled (see Figure 1). This dramatic rise was not the result of an increase in the population of Springville, something which has changed little since World War II, but rather to an influx of transfer students, primarily from nearby urban communities who began attending the Springville School because it was considered to be safer and was ranked higher by TEA than the schools in their districts. Over the years enrollment continued to rise, and in 1997 a new school was built on the property adjacent to the original school, and in 2001 a third building opened. The new buildings provided the necessary space to add one grade per year, so that by the end of the 2002–03 school year Springville had its first class of graduating high school seniors.[6] Currently, Springville ISD is a thriving school district with over 500 students, virtually all of whom are from outside the community. The district has been rated by TEA as "Exemplary": in 2008–09 it won a TEA Title 1 Distinguished Performance Award, and it was recognized as a Higher Performing School and District by the National Center for Educational Achievement. In 2008 Springville Elementary School was selected as a Blue Ribbon school, and that same year US News and World Report named Springville High School as one of America's Best High Schools with a

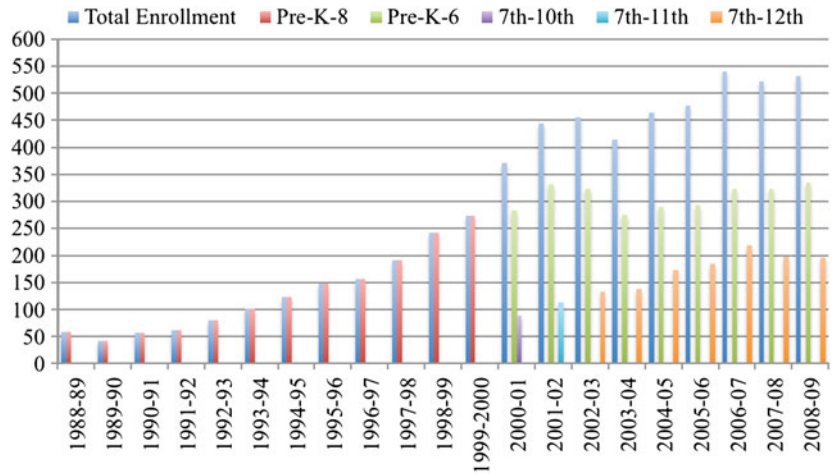


FIGURE 1. Student enrollment in Springville ISD 1988–2009 (source: Texas Education Agency District AEIS History Report).[7]

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bronze category recognition. Thus, in just under two decades, Springville ISD has redefined itself simply by allowing students to cross district lines to increase enrollment in an effort to "save" the school and the district and perhaps the community as well.

Another outcome of the growth of Springville ISD is a shift in the demographic makeup of the district. As Figure 2 shows, between the 1988–89 and the 2000–01 academic years the percentage of white students significantly increased as the percentages of both African American and Hispanic students was in decline. The following eight-year period, which coincides with the opening of Springville High School, marks a leveling off in the percentage of African American students, while the percentage of Hispanic students continued to grow and the percentage of white students slowly decreased.[8] Figures 3 and 4, which present these data by grade level, reveal that it is precisely in grades 7–12, when peer networks and the "construction of a peer-based social order" (Eckert 2008:31) has been reported to play an important role in adolescents' linguistic choices (Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b, 1996; Cukor-Avila 2002; Eckert 2008), that there are four times as many Hispanic and white students than there are African Americans. The linguistic implications of the demographic make-up of Springville ISD, which is not mirrored in the community, clearly deserve further attention.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON *BE LIKE* IN SPRINGVILLE

The following brief summary of the 2002 analysis provides an overview of quotative use by Springville speakers across four major time periods that earlier studies

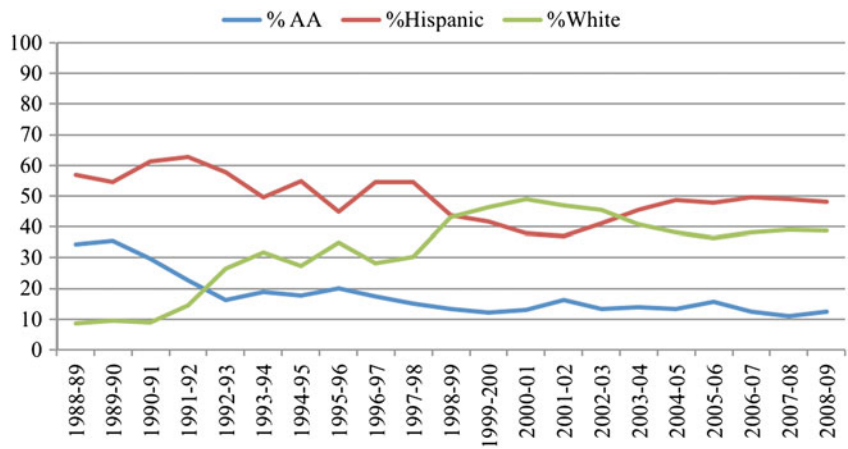


FIGURE 2. Demographic makeup of Springville ISD 1988–2009 (source: Texas Education Agency District AEIS History Report).

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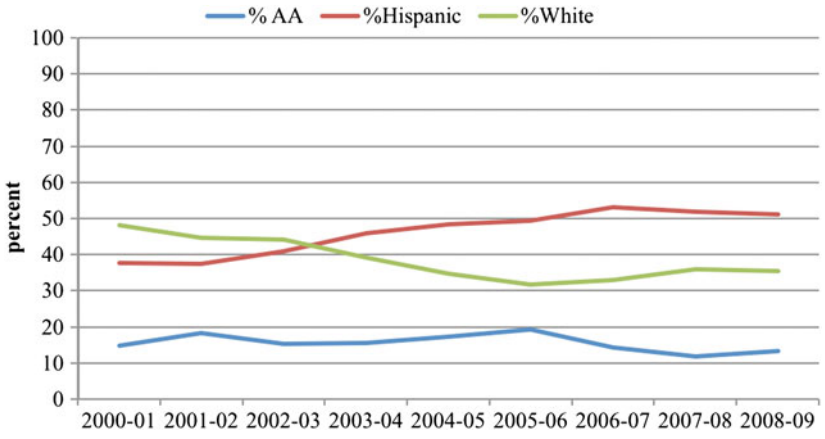


FIGURE 3. Demographic makeup of Springville Elementary 2000–2009 (source: Texas Education Agency District AEIS History Report).

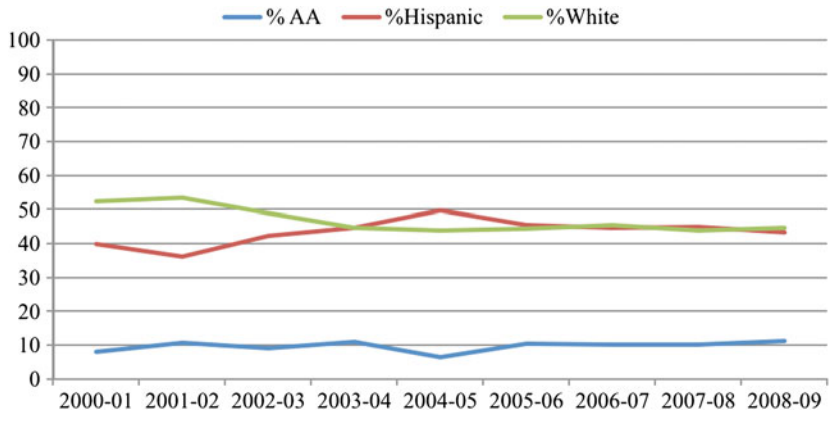


FIGURE 4. Demographic makeup of Springville High School 2000–2009 (source: Texas Education Agency District AEIS History Report).

have suggested are significant for the diffusion of urban vernacular forms in the community (cf. Cukor-Avila 1995, 1999; Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b, 1996, 2007). This analysis includes 3,202 quotative tokens extracted from conversational recordings with fourteen Springville African Americans born between 1907–1982, thirteen of whom had been recorded multiple times in a variety of interview contexts between 1988–1999.[9] Figure 5 (adapted from the data in table 2 in Cukor-Avila 2002:12) shows that by far the most commonly used quotative form for each of the speakers is *say*, and that *be like* only begins to emerge as an alternative

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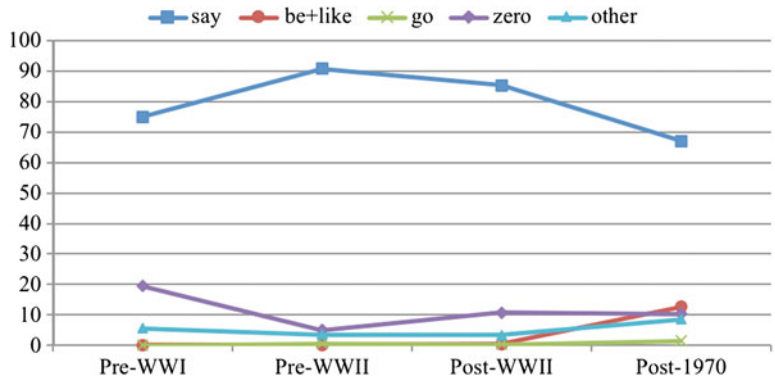


FIGURE 5. Overall distribution of dialogue introducers for Springville AAVE speakers born 1907–1982 (adapted from Cukor-Avila 2002:12, table 2).

form for speakers born after 1970. This is approximately one generation behind the diffusion of this form in non-AAVE speech communities in the US (cf. Blyth et al. 1990; Ferrara & Bell 1995; Dailey-O'Cain 2000). Moreover, the overall percentage of quotative *be like* use for the post-1970 generation is significantly lower than what Sánchez & Charity (1999) report for the youngest speakers in their urban AAVE data from Philadelphia (67%) and what Ferrara & Bell (1995:277) report for urban African American speakers from Texas (eight out of thirteen subjects use *be like*). This difference is not surprising if, as Ferrara & Bell (1995) hypothesize, *be like* is diffusing hierarchically from urban to rural areas in Texas. In fact, data from three Springville adolescents over three time periods between 1988–1999 suggest that quotative *be like* most likely diffused into Springville from neighboring urban communities. Figure 6 illustrates that their use of *be like* increases as these girls progress through their teens and their social networks begin to extend outside of Springville. Their increased use of *be like* is not surprising in light of previous analyses of the use of AAVE features, such as habitual invariant *be*, copula absence, verbal *-s* absence, and preterite *had* + past in the speech of these three girls, which show a strong correlation between the development of peer networks outside of Springville and the acquisition of these vernacular forms (Cukor-Avila 1995, 1999, 2001, 2003; Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b, 1996). For Brandy this occurs during her first and second years of high school in 1996–97 and 1997–98; for Samantha this occurs when she temporarily moves to urban Attmore in 1997 and subsequently drops out of high school; and for Sheila this occurs when she drops out of school in 1993 and moves fifteen miles away to the urban town of Wilson.

The 2002 analysis also suggests that the person/number and discourse constraints on the use of *be like* by Springville adolescents are similar to what had been documented in the 1990s for urban middle-class whites in the US, Canada,

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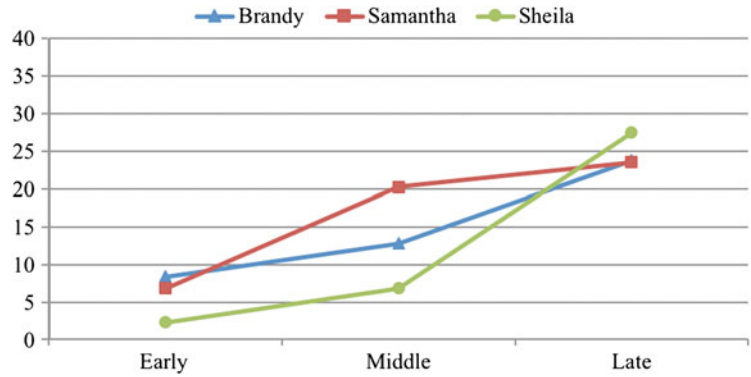


FIGURE 6. Diffusion of *be like* in the speech of three Springville adolescents (adapted from Cukor-Avila 2002:14, table 3).

and England (Romaine & Lange 1991; Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999; Dailey-O'Cain 2000): *be like* is more frequent in first person singular contexts[10] and it is favored before internal dialogue and nonlexicalized sounds. In fact, the longitudinal data show that as *be like* is incorporated into the speech of the post-1970 generation its frequency increases over time in all quotative contexts while the grammatical and discourse constraints on its use remain constant (cf. Kroch 1989). Because this earlier analysis focused only on constraints that had been identified in previous quotative research, however, it did not highlight some distinctive characteristics of *be like* and its distribution in Springville speech that may be unique to AAVE in general. The present analysis discusses these distinctive characteristics in light of the more general linguistic process of diffusion. In doing so, it explores specifically how structures from one variety adapt into the pre-existing grammatical system of another variety as these forms diffuse in the speech community.

CURRENT STUDY

Since the 2002 study a new cohort of speakers has been added to the Springville corpus. This cohort includes children born in the mid 1990s who are now teenagers, and Brandy's two children who were born in the early 2000s. In addition, follow-up group and individual recordings made in 2006, 2009, and 2010 with speakers recorded regularly over the past twenty years have been added to widen the scope of the real-time corpus. Thus, the present study includes data from thirty-five Springville residents born between 1907–2002 divided into six cohorts, as shown in Table 1.[11] This subset of the total number of African Americans in the Springville corpus (sixty-seven) represents only those informants who use direct speech or thought introduced by a verb of quotation in their recorded conversations.

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TABLE 1. Total number of quotatives in six cohorts of Springville speakers.

	Number of speakers	Total VQ tokens	Total *be like* tokens	% *be like*
Cohort 1: 1901–1920	5	1,050	0	0
Cohort 2: 1921–1940	5	190	0	0
Cohort 3: 1941–1960	3	544	3	.6
Cohort 4: 1961–1977	9	846	4	.5
Cohort 5: 1978–1990	9	1931	488	25.3
Cohort 6: 1991–2002	4	112	63	56.3
TOTAL	35	4,673	558	

Twenty-five of the thirty-five informants included in this study have been recorded multiple times in various interview contexts.

Following the methods of the 2002 study, all quotatives that introduce direct speech, inner thought, and nonlexicalized sounds or gestures were extracted from the transcribed recordings and coded by form into five types—*say*, *be like*, *go*, zero, and other—for a total of 4,673 quotative forms. The distribution of these quotatives across each cohort is shown in Figure 7 and examples of each are shown in (2a–e) below.

(2) a. I tripped him when he called me. **He said**, "Mama what'd they say?" **I say**, "They wrote me out a check for fifty thousan'." (V/61/2010)

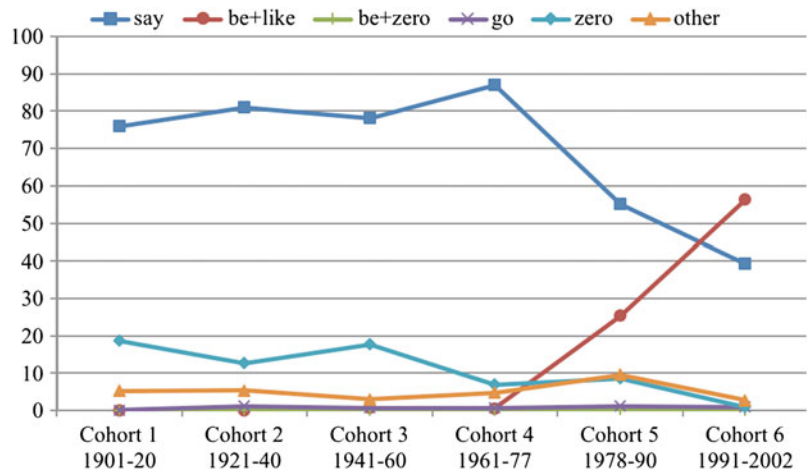


FIGURE 7. Distribution of quotatives over six cohorts of Springville speakers (totals include *say*, *be like*, *go*, zero, and other).

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b. An' then **he was like uh, he was like**, "I'm surprised you called," or whatever. **I was like**, "Why you say that?" **He was like**, "I don't know. I'm jus' surprised you called," or whatever. (B/82/2002)
c. 'Cause you know sometimes when my mama is, like tired or somethin' or she don't feel like bein' bothered she'll call an' **she'll go**, "What you cookin'?" (B/82/2002)
d. Tina be trippin'. She's **0**, "Nuh uh don't get in my bed! Bed outside." (S/79/2000)
e. They really, really love him an' then **they gon tell me uh, talkin' about** uh, "We ain't foolin' with that one." **Talkin' about**, "This our baby right here." (B/82/2002)

Figure 7 is remarkably similar to figure 2 in Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007:205), revealing that the explosive increase in the use of *be like* coupled with the steady decline in the use of *say* is occurring in Springville AAVE just like it has occurred in Canadian English and in other varieties of English. The main difference, however, is that Springville AAVE speakers are approximately a decade behind the Canadian English speakers in the wholesale adoption of *be like* as their primary quotative form. Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007) suggest that *be like* replaced *say* in Canadian English around the early 1980s, when the thirty-year-olds in their study (roughly the same age cohort as Cohort 4 in Springville) were teenagers. As Fig. 7 shows, the cross-over, where *be like* begins to replace *say*, does not occur in Springville until the Cohort 5 speakers are in their teens, around the mid 1990s.

On the surface, then, the diffusion of quotative *be like* in Springville appears to mimic its diffusion in other varieties of English: *be like* is rapidly replacing *say* as the number one quotative for young Springville AAVE speakers, and data from 2002 confirm that the person/number and discourse constraints are similar to what has been found in other varieties of English.[12] What has not been previously analyzed, however, and is not apparent from a frequency count or constraint analysis of *be like*, is the form of *be* in *be like* as this quotative has diffused in Springville AAVE. If *be* in these constructions adapts to the semantic and structural norms of AAVE then we would expect to find examples of both invariant *be* and zero in *be like* quotatives.

The present tense *be* paradigm is one of the most studied features of AAVE, in particular the use of invariant *be* + V-*ing* in contemporary AAVE to refer to present habitual actions, as in (3a), and the person/number and grammatical context of zero copula, as in (3b) and (3c) (cf. Labov 1972; Bailey & Maynor 1987, 1989; Wolfram & Thomas 2002).

(3) a. Sometime **I be hearin'** that bus during 8th period. I know **I be hearin'** that bus during 8th period on Mondays an' Tuesdays. (K/96/2010)
b. ∅ You full Tina? Tina ∅ full, look. Watch. Look Keisha. See she ∅ quiet now. Quiet. She ∅ ready to talk now. She done got full. (V/61/1997)

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c. Well you ain't too pretty. You ∅ annoyin' me. I hate to see what your baby ∅ gonna look like. (S/79/2000)

Research on invariant *be* in Springville shows that the frequency of this form began to increase in the speech of residents born in the 1930s (see Figure 8), and that the increase in frequency was accompanied by both semantic and syntactic restrictions on its occurrence. As invariant *be* has grammaticalized in Springville it has become primarily a marker of habituality before V-*ing* for speakers born after 1945, just as it has in other varieties of AAVE (Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b; Cukor-Avila 2001). The use of zero copula in Springville also parallels what has been found in other AAVE-speaking communities (Labov 1972; Rickford, Ball, Blake, Jackson, & Martin 1991; Wolfram & Thomas 2002): zero typically occurs with plural and 2nd and 3rd singular pronoun subjects, is favored before verb-like predicates, and is disfavored before noun-like predicates, with locatives and adjectives somewhere in-between (Cukor-Avila 1999).

In order to investigate the structural adaptation of *be* in *be like* quotatives, all examples of *be like* (N = 558) were separated from the database of 4,673 quotatives and subsequently coded for form of *be* (*am*, *is*, *are*, zero, *be*), and for aspect (habitual/nonhabitual). Additionally, all *be like* tokens were also coded for tense, temporal reference, and discourse context (narrative/nonnarrative). The results for each of these analyses are discussed in the following section.

RESULTS

One of the most striking differences between the data from Springville and the data reported in previous studies is in the tense of *be like* tokens. As noted above, previous studies on quotative use in American English have suggested that *be like*

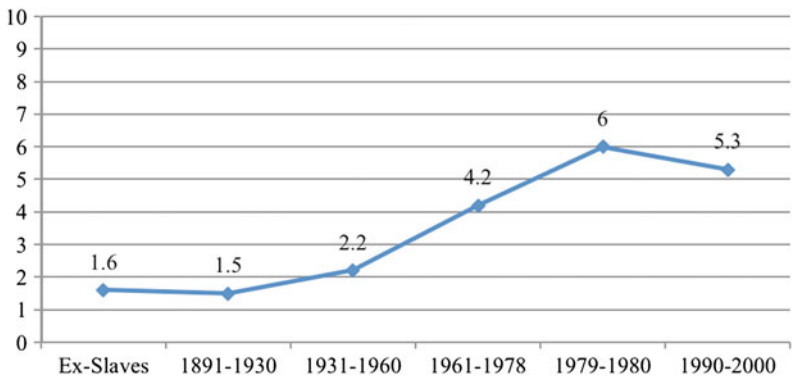


FIGURE 8. The expansion of invariant *be* in Springville (invariant *be* as a percentage of all forms of the present tense of *be*).

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typically occurs with nonpast surface morphology, either with present temporal reference, as in (4a), or with past temporal reference as a historical present, as in (4b).

(4) a. An' like, you can get fired for that. Because **they're like, you know**, "This is a professional workplace." (B/82/2009)
b. Boy it was some big ol' pretty hamburgers. I started bitin' in about that far – an' they had put 'em on the grill. **I'm like**, "Give me some of 'em." (L/81/1997)
c. An' I was like, 'cause he seen it on his paper an' **he was like**, "Who spelled my name like this?" An' I said, "I did." He say, "Look it how you spelled my name." An' then he wrote it down for me an' **I was like, I was like**, "Well with that kin'a name you don't know which way to spell it." (S/79/1998)

These studies also suggest that the use of past tense *be like*, as in (4c), is much less frequent; in fact, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007:206, table 2) show that *be like* used with past temporal reference is disfavored for all age groups in their study of Canadian English speakers.

The situation in Springville, however, is quite different. As Figure 9 shows, for speakers in Cohorts 5 and 6 *be like* occurs primarily as a past tense form, morphologically and temporally marked for past approximately two-thirds of the time in both generations.[13] More importantly, its use in the past has remained stable from the time when *be like* first emerged in the speech of young teenagers in the early 1990s.

The passages below illustrate how Springville teens and young adults most often recreate dialogue and inner thought in their narratives.

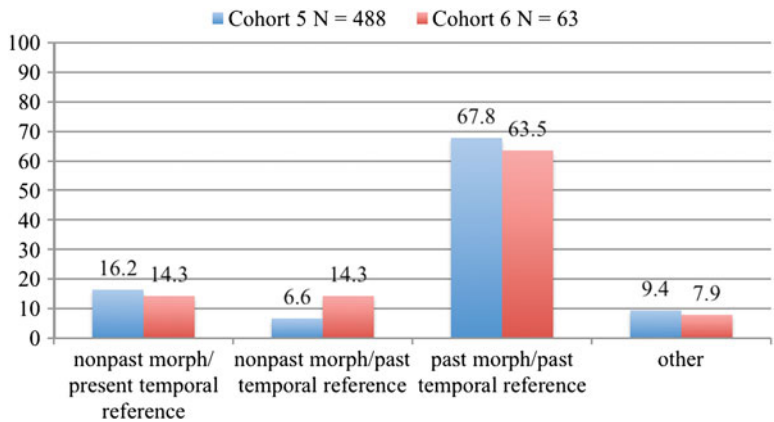


FIGURE 9. Morphology and temporal reference of *be like* in Cohorts 5 and 6 ("other" includes future and ambiguous forms).

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(5) We made some hamburgers [laughs] an' we just a-playin' aroun'. We was makin' some hamburgers. **She was like**, "What do yall wanna eat?" **Tina was like**, "I don't know." **An' Tina was like**, "Wanna make some HAMBURGERS." An' like we was, you know, messin' with the um, meat an' puttin' it together an' Tina's patty came apart. **An' Sheryl was like**, "That's your patty!" Our patty was jus' so perfect. We made some little bitty ones. But we had fun, we had a lotta fun. (K/96/2009)

(6) Uh, it is – hmmm, I went – me an' Misty went. She was goin' to get a purse that she had seen it on sale. An' when she, when we got there the purse was gone. She was very upset. **She was like**, "I came all the way out here to get this purse an' it's not here." **I was like**, "Well they got a lotta purses on sale. You don't see another one you might want?" **She was like**, "No I wanted that one!" **I was like**, "Oh God!" (B/82/2010)

(7) Yeah but they didn't admit me. **They was jus' like**, "He really pushed her button didn't he?" **I was like**, "Yeah." [laughs] **I was like**, "Yeah I tried to kill him." An' they say, **he was like**, "You don't remember?" **I was like**, "No." **He was like**, "You blacked out." **I was like**, "Yeah that's what they say. (S/79/2009)

The data in Fig. 9 seem to suggest that the use of simple present has declined between Cohorts 5 and 6 and that the use of HP (nonpast morphology with past temporal reference) has increased. While this appears to parallel the findings in Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007), the relatively small number of present tense *be like* tokens for the youngest cohort makes it difficult to reach definitive conclusions: the 14.3% nonpast morphology/past temporal reference among Cohort 6 in Fig. 9 above represents only nine total tokens. When *be like* quotatives do occur in the historical present they typically co-occur with either past tense *be like* or other past tense quotatives (cf. Tagliamonte & Poplack 1988), as in the short narrative examples in (8) and (9) below. In fact, since HP is a relatively rare construction in narrative discourse in Springville AAVE (Labov, Cohen, Robbins, & Lewis 1968:138; Cukor-Avila 1990; Myhill 1995), its infrequency with quotatives simply mirrors its infrequency elsewhere.

(8) So I was over there, you know. We was um, I think we were either, I think we were about to get ready to go to class. An' she outside beggin' me for money while her husban' in the house beggin' my niece for money. **She was like**, "Oh I need some weed." **I'm like**, "Ehhh? If that's one of your habits you need to support your own habit." **So she was like**, "You don't have any money?" **I said**, "Samantha I got five dollars an' that is for my gas money." **So she was like um**, "I got a ten dollars Macy card. I'll give it to you for street value four dollars." **I said**, "Do Macy's have a gas pump? Didn't I jus' tell you that my five dollars was for gas? Ima need for you not to as' me for my little five dollars 'cause I'm broke jus' like you broke, you know." (B/82/2009)

(9) An' like it was scary 'cause this one girl, her friend name Cheyenne, an' she, she was like about ten when we were like friends with her. She was like eleven or

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twelve. An' then **we were like**, "We gotta drive." An' she can't drive. So we were like on this big ol' ramp an' she's all swervin'. **I'm like**, "Oh my God she's about to kill us." An' we were like swervin' everywhere. An' **I was like**, "OK we should go back down now." (T/95/2010)

Almost as remarkable as the tense differences between the Springville data and other corpora are the present tense forms of *be* that occur in *be like* quotatives. The data show that Springville speakers have adapted *be like* into their pre-existing AAVE grammatical system, and as a result, they use the full range of AAVE copula forms (*am*, *is*, *are*, zero, *be*) for this feature. The distribution of *be* forms across the paradigm reflects what has been reported in earlier studies of present tense *be* in the community in many ways (cf. Cukor-Avila 1995, 1999). However, as Figure 10 shows, zero, as in (10), occurs less often in quotative than in nonquotative constructions, and invariant *be*, as in (11), occurs much more frequently. Nevertheless, together these forms account for 60% of present tense forms in *be like* quotatives.

(10) You know Samantha got a little boy friend. **She like**, "I don' want you talkin' to the boy." (S/79/1996)

(11) You know why they do Keisha like that? 'Cause when they come to the house, she don't let 'em go no more. She, she bosses him aroun', **she be like**, "Don't go in my room." Or, "Get outta my mama room!" (B/82/2002)

The relatively small number of zero and of present tense tokens in general (N = 100) is a reflection of the fact that, as outlined in the previous section, *be like* is predominantly used in the past tense in Springville (see Fig. 9 above), and the relatively small number of *is*, *are*, and zero tokens (N = 25) is a reflection of the fact that

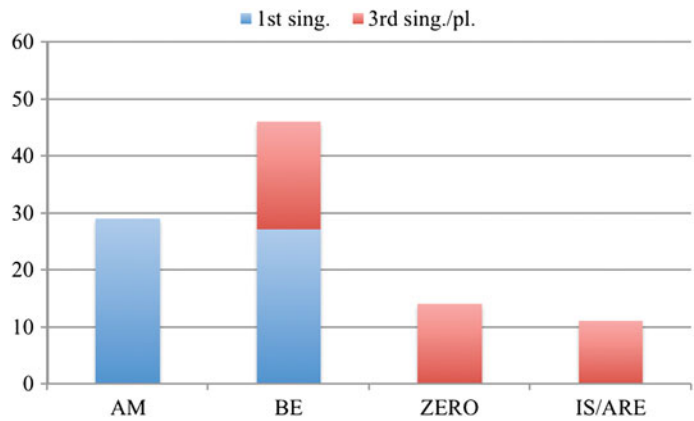


FIGURE 10. Distribution of forms of present tense *be* in *be like* quotatives for Cohorts 5 and 6 (N = 100).

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present tense *be like* quotatives occur most often in 1st person contexts (cf. Cukor-Avila 2002). Of the eleven occurrences of *is* and *are*, six are *it's*, a strongly disfavoring environment for zero (cf. Blake 1997), and although the number of zero tokens is small, Fig. 10 illustrates that zero comprises more than half of the noninvariant *be* tokens in plural and 3rd singular.

Somewhat surprisingly, Fig. 10 shows that invariant *be* comprises almost 50% of the present tense *be like* quotatives. The explanation for this lies with the fact that 60% of the present tense *be like* quotatives occur in habitual contexts, the favoring context for invariant *be* in AAVE. When *be like* first diffused into Springville, young AAVE speakers adapted it into the AAVE tense/aspect system by (among other things) encoding invariant *be* as the predominant form to mark present habitual *be like* quotatives, as in examples (12a) and (12b).

(12) a. He's O.K. You be tryin' to talk an' he interrupt you. **0** "I'm talkin' right now." An' **I be like**, "I wanna talk." (R/78/1997)

b. 'Cause when things go to, goin' wrong you know, Rolanda she, she call me an' talk to me. Like we talk more than me an' Sheila talk about more personal stuff. So she'll call me every time when somein' goin' wrong. **She jus' be like**, "Look out." **She be like**, "Man I cannot deal with Red too much longer" you know. (B/82/2010)

c. They motto, they motto is "if you wanna come to church an' you ain't got no good clothes girl come as you are, come. If you got some ratty clothes on baby, got some little short shorts, come in." Because when you tell them kids that they gotta wear some specific things you jus' pushin' 'em away from the church. Exactly what you're doin'. Because man Sunday mornin' be borin' an' then I go at New Birth, **I'm like**, "Hey!" Like yeah. It be jammin'. (L/81/1997)

d. An' this one—they be lookin' so much alike to me. I get 'em confused all the time. **I be like**, "Thomas an' Nathan." **He like**, "I ain' no Thomas." (B/82/1999)

While forms of *am*, *is*, *are*, and zero do occur in habitual *be like* quotatives, as in (12c) and (12d), they only comprise less than 20% of the total habitual *be like* forms, as Figure 11 shows.

At the time that quotative *be like* first appeared in the mid 1990s, it comprised approximately 25% of the quotatives for speakers in Cohort 5. *Say* was still by far the predominant quotative form for them as well as for speakers born earlier. And although there was variable marking for tense, as in (13a), *say* was virtually never marked for aspect, even in habitual contexts, as in (13b).

(13) a. Girl but at firs' he tickled me with that cash register. He thought he was gonna punch somethin' an' mess it up. **I said**, "Mr. Stan, you ain' gotta worry about this." **I say**, "If it's somethin' you punch an' you ain' suppose to it gonna, it's gonna let you know 'cause it gonna bing at you." **I say**, "Gee, you ain' gotta

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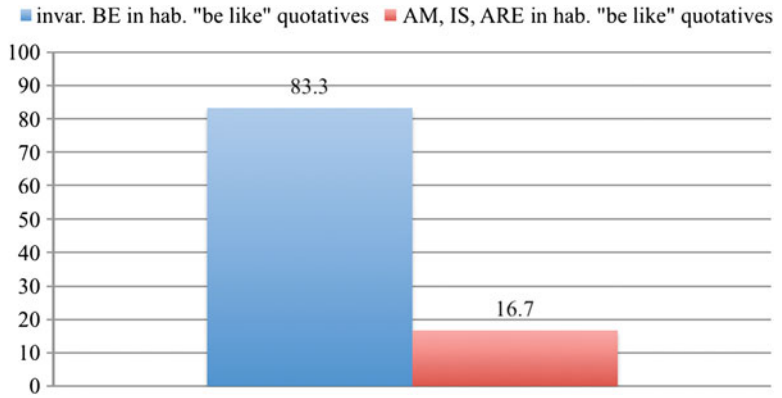


FIGURE 11. Distribution of present tense *be* forms used in habitual *be like* quotatives in the speech of Cohorts 5 and 6.

worry 'bout this." An' then I showed him how to use it. He started usin' it. **He said**, "Oh it tells you how much change!" **I said**, "Yeah." **I said**, "You don' even have to work no more, see!" (V/61/1991)

b. That girl bad. Ohhh she bad. She, she always wanna get the recorder instead of like talkin' but it some parts on that tape [makes noise]. She jus' [unintelligible]. She be tryin' to take the recorder. **I say**, "Misty, get back! You can' get this." She is so bad. (B/82/1996)

After 1995, as *be like* began to increase dramatically, invariant *be* became the primary form of *be* used to express habituality in *be like* quotatives, and it subsequently spread to non-*be like* quotatives except for *say*. Examples (14a) and (14b) illustrate the use of habitual *be* in non-*be like* quotatives.

(14) a. I'm nervous. Every time I be sittin' up there **I jus' be thinkin'**, "Don' be nervous." I look up an' see all those people out there I jus' get nervous. (S/82/1996)

b. **She be tryin' to tell 'em uh**, "Yall get out of my room." Or, "That's my mama's. An' that's my mama room. Get outta there." An' **I be lookin' at her an' tellin' her**, "Who do you think you is? You ain' runnin' enough over here." (B/82/2002)

With *say*, however, habituality is still rarely marked, as shown in Figure 12 below. It seems clear that the use of habitual invariant *be* in *be like* and other quotatives was triggered by the diffusion of *be like* into the community, since examples of each occur simultaneously over a fifteen year period in the data. Moreover, there are no examples of invariant *be* used with non-*be like* quotatives before 1995, a date that coincides with the emergence of *be like* in Springville.

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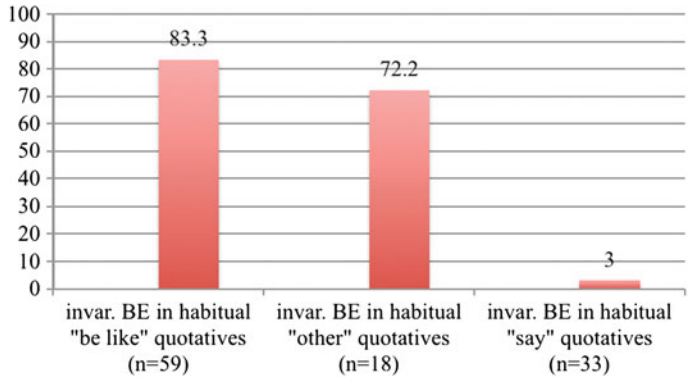


FIGURE 12. Invariant *be* as a percentage of *be* in habitual quotatives.

As *be like* has diffused into Springville it has developed the formal characteristics of the AAVE present tense of *be*, and in doing so, it has helped create a quotative system that is quite different from other varieties described in the literature and from the previous quotative system described for Springville (Cukor-Avila 2002). Thus the use of the full range of AAVE present tense copula forms, the encoding of habituality with invariant *be*, and the predominance of *be like* in the past tense together create a *be like* quotative system that conforms to the more general norms of AAVE rather than to the norms of the vernacular from which *be like* diffused.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The spread of *be like* into Springville represents a clear example of linguistic diffusion, with a well-known feature that developed earlier in the surrounding urban areas, most likely first among adolescent whites, then subsequently spreading into both urban and rural AAVE speech communities. Labov argues that diffusion rarely leads to structural change because adults are slower at learning new structures than children, and when adults are exposed to new structures in language-contact situations they typically "do not faithfully reproduce the structural patterns of the system they are borrowing from" (2007:383). But what if the language contact situation that leads to diffusion is not between adults, but rather between children and adolescents? The diffusion of *be like* in Springville provides us with such a setting.[14]

Social context for diffusion

The tremendous growth of the Springville ISD since 2000 accompanied by demographic shifts in the student population have created language contact situations in

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Springville for young residents that only existed for earlier generations when they left the community either to visit friends or relatives, attend high school, work, or move away to the city (cf. Ash & Myhill 1986). Prior to this time, all of the students who attended Springville School lived in the community, and since there were no organized extracurricular activities like competitive sports, cheerleading, or clubs where they could interact with students from other schools, school did not play an important role in their social lives, and as such, their social networks were limited.

In contrast, Cohort 6 speakers are the first group of Springville residents to have grown up interacting regularly with peers from neighboring urban communities, most of whom are not African American, both during school, when they hang out with each other at lunch, and in extracurricular activities and clubs. They typically participate together in sports and cheerleading, and often see each other outside of school at parties or sleepovers. Thus, the dense multiplex social networks characteristic of Springville residents born prior to the 1990s are becoming a thing of the past. As more and more "outsiders" attend school in Springville ISD, young Springville speakers' social networks will continue to become less dense and more uniplex (Milroy 1987) as their communities of practice develop around school-based relationships with people who neither live nor have family ties in Springville. The following excerpts from a conversation I had in April 2010 with Brandy (b. 1982) about her fifteen-year-old niece Tina (b. 1995) illustrate this point.

(15)
PCA: Are most of her friends, are most of her friends um, I guess she meets 'em in school, huh?
B: Uh huh. Yeah most of 'em she meet 'em at school. [Uh huh] An' then I think they meet some like, you know when they go play basketball at different places.
PCA: Right, right, right.
B: An' stuff like that.
PCA: It's interesting though 'cause I was looking um, up at that Springville School online, looking at like the, how many kids were going there an' everything. An' I – remember when you went there an' there were like eight kids in your grade? [Uh huh] An' now they've got like over, about five hundred an' fifty kids in that whole school. Isn't that, it's amazing how much it's grown.
B: Uh huh. 'Cause it was nothin' like that when we were there. [Uh huh] Even when it was in like pre-K an' kindergarten, firs' grade it was jus' me, Samantha, an' April.
PCA: Yeah same people all the time, right? [Uh huh] Yeah. The Three Musketeers.
B: That was our name. [laughs] So yeah.
PCA: So I guess most of their friends don't live in Springville then, right? If they're – 'cause a lotta those kids are comin' from outside of Springville.
B: Uh huh. Most of 'em are in Attmore an' Wilson.[15] [Uh huh] I think Tanya is really the only one that they hang with in Springville. [Uh huh] Yeah.
…….
PCA: Uh huh. Well are most of her friends um, Hispanic? Are they black or what?
B: I think most of 'em are Hispanic. Most of 'em are. [Uh huh]

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The Springville School, then, provides a relatively comprehensive social environment (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1995:472) where children and adolescents from Springville and the surrounding communities construct their individual and social identities. Research in sociolinguistics suggests that language plays a primary role in this process (cf. Tabouret-Keller 1997). Given this social situation, it is not surprising that Cohort 6 Springville speakers have been caught up in the *be like* tidal wave that has swept across the English-speaking world.

Linguistic context for diffusion

The diffusion of *be like* into Springville in the early to mid 1990s coincided with significant structural changes in the tense and aspect systems of Cohort 5 Springville speakers, as this is the period when innovative AAVE features such as preterite *had* + past and habitual *be* + V-*ing*, that first emerged in urban areas, developed in their speech (Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1996, 2007). As speakers were sorting out form/function relationships in the present tense copula system (cf. Bailey & Maynor 1987; Cukor-Avila 1999) and ambiguities in past tense marking (Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995b), they were exposed to an innovation in the quotative system, crucially one that could easily adapt to their newly reconfigured grammar. Up until this time, the quotative system of Springville speakers of all ages was remarkably similar, with *say* as the primary verb used to introduce both speech and inner thought followed in frequency by zero, which was occasionally used (more often by speakers born before WWII) when quoting constructed dialogue. The adoption of *be like* by speakers in Cohort 5 caused a shift from a "*say* quotative system" to a "*be like* quotative system," similar to what has been documented in other quotative studies. Yet unlike its diffusion in other communities, *be like* did not diffuse structurally intact in Springville—its form changed as it adapted into the existing AAVE copula paradigm. The result is a quotative system in Springville that is more structurally complex and less ambiguous than the earlier system was since *say*, which is typically unmarked for tense and aspect in AAVE, is rapidly being replaced with *be like*, a form that marks tense and aspect as do other AAVE copula forms. As is shown above, not only does *be* in *be like* quotatives have the same range of forms found in the AAVE present tense copula system (*am*, *is are*, zero, and *be*), but also the distribution of these forms parallels their distribution in nonquotative contexts. In addition, as Fig. 12 shows, the use of habitual invariant *be* has spread to non-*be like* quotatives, providing further evidence for the adaptation of *be like* into the existing copula system in Springville.

Diffusion, adaptation, and structural change

The 2002 study proposed that *be like* diffused in Springville sometime in the mid 1990s, approximately a decade after its appearance was documented in other speech communities in North America (cf. Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2007). Since the

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grammatical and discourse constraints on the use of *be like* documented for Springville speakers at that time paralleled the constraints found in other English varieties, the diffusion of *be like* appeared to be an example of "weak transfer or replication" (Meyerhoff 2009:3034). The added data from the present study, however, suggest a revised interpretation. These data show that *be like* did not diffuse intact, but rather as Springville speakers began to replace *say* with *be like* as the primary quotative form, they simultaneously adapted it to the structural norms of AAVE that were already operative in the speech of younger generations in the community. This structural adaptation echoes the findings in D'Arcy (2010: 63) on the diffusion of *be like* in New Zealand English for Maori and Pakeha speakers in that "*be like* does not impose itself on an existent system but rather is integrated into it in ways which cohere with the system's prevailing, and pre-existing, overall configuration." However, there is a crucial distinction between the adaptation of *be like* in the grammar of Springville speakers and its adaptation in New Zealand English. In Maori and Pakeha English it is the frequency and distribution of *be like* that differs,[16] whereas in Springville it is the form of *be like* that changes when it diffuses in the community. As the form is adapted, it has structural consequences for the Springville quotative system, as the data in this study suggest.

Labov has argued that diffusion does not lead to structural change in the grammar of the host language. As discussed above, this argument is based on contact situations between adult speakers with shared sociolinguistic norms. The diffusion of *be like* quotatives in Springville, however, presents an alternative account. The analysis of tense and form of *be* in *be like* for young Springville speakers suggests that when linguistic features diffuse between vernaculars that are structurally different, grammatical constraints in the host variety may trump the existing constraints on those features in the source vernacular. As these data show, the diffusion and structural adaptation of *be like* in Springville AAVE has transformed the existing "*say* quotative system" into one that is more structurally complex and less ambiguous. Thus, diffusion may lead to structural consequences for the grammatical system of a host language as new features adapt into its grammar.

NOTES

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[1]Meyerhoff (2002, 2009) suggests that "transformation under transfer" may account for change over time in language contact situations. According to this principle "patterns from the model to the replica language may be sufficiently cognitively demanding that speakers cannot replicate (or perhaps do not care if they replicate) the linguistic details of the model in the replica language (2009:17).

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[2]All quotative examples come from the Springville corpus. Included in the parentheses are the first initial of the speaker, the year the speaker was born, and the year of the recording.

[3]Other constraints associated with the use of *be like* are speaker sex, mimetic reenactment, and socioeconomic status (see Buchstaller & D'Arcy 2009 for an overview).

[4]The use of the general term "Chicano" for English speakers of Mexican or Latin American heritage is not widely accepted. Other terms include "Latino" and "Hispanic"; the more specific term "Mexican-American" is also commonly used to refer to speakers of English, who may or may not be bilingual, who are born in the US, and are of Mexican heritage. I have chosen to use the term "Chicano" since three of the four articles cited use this term.

[5]All place names and names of subjects are pseudonyms. For a more detailed discussion of the history of Springville see Cukor-Avila & Bailey (1995a).

[6]Prior to the 1999–2000 school year, children from Springville attended all four years of high school in Attmore, a neighboring town of some 5,000 residents, about nine miles away. Data from fieldwork in Attmore suggests that AAVE speakers in this small urban (by Texas census standards) community use innovative features similar to what has been documented for AAVE speakers in other urban centers (cf. Labov 1972; Rickford & Rickford 2002; Wolfram & Thomas 2002).

[7]The Texas Education Agency District AEIS History Report can be found online at: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2009/district.srch.html.

[8]TEA data show that this pattern of increasing of Hispanic enrollment, decreasing white enrollment, and stable or slightly declining African American enrollment parallels what is occurring in the state of Texas as a whole.

[9]The interview contexts are: (i) individual, (ii) adult and adolescent peer group, (iii) site study recordings made at community sites of linguistic interaction where the fieldworker was often not a participant in the conversation (cf. Cukor-Avila & Bailey 1995a), (iv) community fieldworker recordings made by a community member when the fieldworker was not present (cf. Cukor-Avila & Bailey 2001), and (v) diary study recordings made by a teenager who used the recorder like a talking diary.

[10]*Be like* is used more often in first person than in third person; however, this constraint is not significant for Springville speakers.

[11]How speakers are separated into generations or cohorts can certainly influence the interpretation of results. After careful consideration, I decided to reconfigure the Post WWII speakers from what I have done in previous Springville studies. This was done for the following reasons: (i) analyses of AAVE features such as present habitual *be*, verbal *-s* absence, copula absence, and preterite *had* + past suggest that

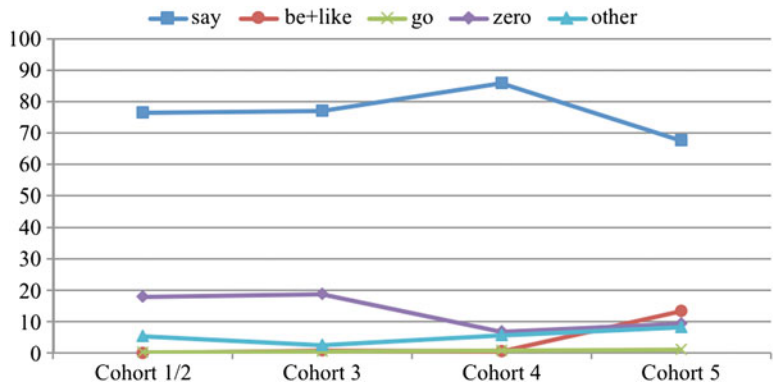


FIGURE 5A. Recoded overall distribution of dialogue introducers for Springville AAVE speakers born 1907–1982.

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speakers born in the 1960s and 1970s represent a transitional generation between rural and urban speech patterns; (ii) to separate mothers from their children—Vanessa (b. 1961) is the mother of Sheila (b. 1979) and Rachel (b. 1961) is the mother of Rolanda (b. 1978); and (iii) speakers in Cohort 6 are the first children to attend all their schooling in Springville. In order to check that the new configuration did not skew the new data I recoded the 2002 data into five cohorts (Cohort 6 includes speakers who either were too young or were not born when the earlier study was done). The recoded data in Figure 5a below show virtually the same distribution of quotative forms as the original data shown in Figure 5.

[12]Whether these constraints are still operative for Springville speakers ten years later is the subject of forthcoming research.

[13]Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007:217, table 7) report approximately 31% of *be like* tokens are simple past tense forms.

[14]Labov (2010) comments that the acquisition of invariant *be* by young Latinos in Philadelphia may be an example of diffusion that is not the result of contact between adults. Furthermore, he suggests that since there is evidence of this feature in the speech of some Latinos with little to no contact with AAVE speakers, that invariant *be* in their speech could be the product of transmission rather than diffusion.

[15]Atttmore and Wilson are both urban communities within nine and fifteen miles respectively from Springville.

[16]For example, in Pakeha English *be like* is more frequent and it is favored in HP contexts; in Maori English *go* is favored in HP contexts (D'Arcy 2010:75).

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