

Irish *like* as an invariant tag: evidence from ICE-Ireland

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Overview

- *like* as a discourse particle
- *like* in Irish English (Hiberno-English) as an utterance-final **invariant tag (InT)**
- Functions and frequency of *like* in ICE-Ireland

Background on *like*

- “As both a marker and a particle, *like* meets the semantic emptiness criterion, imbued instead with pragmatic meaning(s)”

(D’Arcy, 2006, p. 340)

- So what does discourse marker /particle *like* usually ‘mean’?

Background on *like*

■ Quotative *like*:

“And then I’m like, ‘Sort of.’”

(Tagliamonte & D’Arcy, 2004, p.499; see also D’Arcy 2006)

■ Evincive *like*:

- Inexactness -- “the utterance contains a loose interpretation of the speaker’s thought.”

(Andersen, 2001, p. 260)

“Y’know like say right now he...” (Schourup, 1983, p. 53)

“When he unbuttoned his pants they like fell to the ground” (p. 50)

Background on *like*

- Evincive *like* (cont):
 - Hesitation/pause filler
 - ‘roughly’ (esp. for numerical statements)
 - ‘for example’

“*What we do is **like** - we did a uh*” (Schourup, 1983, p. 54)

“*..right now we’ve written **like** uh quite a few songs y’know*” (p. 41)

“*...a lotta people **like** in business or other - uh things like that,...*” (p. 49)

Irish *like* as a tag

- Kallen: element-final *like* as a ‘robust’ focus marker, highlighting the previous or following content, sometimes with hedging effect
 - Historically common in older English dialects
- Note Schourup (1983, p.47) found 3 examples of tag *like* in his AmE data, which he stated were ‘soliciting clarification’
 - this can’t be extended to all tag uses of *like* in IrE

Background in InTs

■ Invariant Tags

tag questions that do not change form

e.g., *He hates math, eh?*

They hate math, eh?

c.f., canonical question tags

He hates math, doesn't he?

They don't hate math, do they?

Background in InTs

- Previous studies on InT functions and frequencies, such as *eh, yeah, na, no*, in British, New Zealand, Indian, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Canadian Englishes
- Set of functions found to be considerably applicable to tags across the varieties

(Columbus 2009, in press a, b)

Previous InT functions

Meaning	NZE	eh	CanE	eh
Affirmation: emphatic		7		0
Affirmation prev statement		47		13
Check q		21		8
Comment prev statement		53		1
Confirmation check		75		17
Empathetic		11		1
Emphatic		103		29
Exclamation/Emphatic		2		0
Narrative		81		17
New topic		4		3
Pardon		22		3
Post opinion		116		26
TUE		9		1
Really? Check		0		2
Sarcasm/Humour		14		14
Softener		15		0
Suggestion		15		3
Unclear		0		5
Total		595		143

Research goals

- Can the function categories determined in the previous InT ICE studies be applied to IrE *like*?

and if so

- What are the functions of IrE *like* as an utterance-final tag?

Methodology

- Subcorpus of ICE-Ireland:
 - private spoken conversation
(S1A-001-100; 200,000 words)
 - Text only;
 - SPICE-Ireland not yet available

Methodology

- Manual analysis and classification
 - Removed all non-final, adverbial, verb and quotative concordances
- Much reading of context, often full text-file (2000 words) for assigning function

Results – frequency

- 169 occurrences in the private spoken subcorpus (200,000 words)
 - + 23 unclear uses
- Comparable numbers to e.g., Canadian ICE occurrences of *eh* (n = 143)
- c.f. Kallen found 406 tag *like* occurrences in **all** of SPICE (600,000 words)

Results – functions

<i>like</i> function	Total occurrences
aff. prev. comment	24
check question	2
comment on prev. statement	8
conf. check	6
empathetic	1
emphasis	35
emphasis: Q.	4
Exclamation/emph.	4
emphasis: humour	9
narrative	26
post opinion/fact	37
sarcasm/humour	7
suggestion	6
unclear	23
softener	9
Total functions	201
Total tags	192

Results – functions

affirmation of previous comment

Ah no I 'm not saying that I don't know anything
about acting *like* (S1A-032)

check question

Oh well it 's not under control *like* (S1A-027)

comment on previous statement

Och you need you need a house *like* <#> You
need the oul homely house (S1A-014)

Results – functions

confirmation check

And I was on the phone to my mother and she
said do you believe him *like* (S1A-062)

empathetic

you 're under stress all you can think of is
getting stuff done *like* (S1A-094)

emphasis

I mean I had to go to work later and everything
like <#> It 's f* @king not on (S1A-044)

Results – functions

emphasis: question

A: Did ye get anywhere else *like* <#> Did ye travel around after or

B: We didn't (S1A-065)

exclamation/emphasis

you were saying there earlier on people think they can eat raw prawns *like* <#> That 's it they have nae a clue (S1A-045)

emphasis: humour

why would they be lying in your alley *like* (laughter) They 'd go home (S1A-038)

Results – functions

narrative

and he was sitting there *like* And I just went up
to say hello *like* <#> It was grand (S1A-068)

post opinion/fact

So yeah it 's you know though it 's interesting
like <#> But you get a bit of hassle (S1A-057)

sarcasm/humour

A: Was he good Oh very good yeah yeah A Da
Vinci *like*

B: Huh A Da Vinci laughter (S1A-089)

Results – functions

suggestion

Maybe they just crushed it into three videos *like*
(S1A-041)

softener (here: suggestion + softener)

hm aye ask when you're in the wherever you
are ask somewhere how you do it *like* (S1A-093)

unclear

I did that with a class It 's cool *like* <#> I
covered it in all wrapping paper (S1A-088)

Results – functions

- Most frequent function: Post opinion/fact
- Least frequent function: Empathetic
- New categories for functions:

Emphasis: Question

- Seems to reflect Schourup's question focus *like*

Emphasis: Humour

- Not for humour **or** emphasis alone

Discussion

- IrE has *like* as an InT which functions similarly to other InTs (e.g., *eh*)
- Previously determined InT functions are largely transferable to IrE *like* uses
- This *like* is not to be confused with discourse particle *like*
- Some InT *like* are similar to base discourse particle functions (e.g., question use, hedging)

Conclusion

- InT *like* in IrE is clearly a focus marker, as Kallen notes

but

- InT *like* can also be subcategorised into functions as with other InTs
- IrE tag *like* can be added to the group of invariant tags across English varieties

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