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

Georgie Columbus  
University of Alberta  
9 October – AACL 2009
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

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

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

- Special thanks to Jeffrey Kallen for the focus on Irish *like*, and for access to his unpublished manuscript from his 2006 plenary

- Thanks also to John Newman
Selected references


Columbus (in press b) "Nice day, eh?": Canadian and New Zealand *eh* compared. In *Proceedings of Methods in Dialectology XIII.*


