

Abstract:

The discourse-pragmatic (D-P) uses of the word *like* represent a functionally versatile phenomenon typical of informal, spoken language. A marked increase in the use of this word and the resulting omnipresence in spoken discourse gave rise to many studies of various facets of its use in the past thirty years. Nevertheless, the research potential has not been exhausted, especially with the emergence of new, contemporary corpus data. Therefore, combining a quantitative approach typical of corpus linguistics with a qualitative approach inherent in pragmatics, the present “short-term diachronic comparable corpus linguistic [research]” (Leech et al., 2009: 28–29) aims to describe the changes that have occurred in the usage and of the D-P *like* between the early 1990s and the 2010s. The present study is based on a twofold analysis of 1000 random tokens of the D-P *like*; one half drawn out from the demographically sampled component of the original Spoken BNC1994, and the second half extracted from its successor, the Spoken BNC2014. Firstly, the quantitative analysis of the data was performed, revealing that the pronounced increase in the frequency of the word *like* in the BNC2014 is caused by the D-P uses, whose relative frequency per million words is estimated to have increased approximately nine times. Secondly, the qualitative analysis of all the extracted tokens of *like* resulted in a detailed account of the contexts in which the D-P *like* occurs and the many functions it fulfils in spoken discourse. Although the functions are incredibly varied due to their high-context dependency, they can all be subsumed under the encompassing label of an interpretive cue. The qualitative analysis did not reveal any innovative functions of the D-P *like* when the two corpora were compared, suggesting relative stability over the examined period. Therefore, the significant changes observed in the data relate mainly to the increasing volume of its use, not its increasing versatility.

Keywords: *like*, discourse-pragmatic, corpus linguistics, pragmatics, spoken discourse, Spoken BNC1994DS, Spoken BNC2014, discourse marker, pragmatic marker, quotative marker, interpretive cue