External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Veronika Raušová

Discourse-pragmatic functions of like in spoken discourse

Submitted in 2023

at the Department of English Language and ELT Methodology

I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The aim of the thesis is to describe recent changes in the use of the discourse-pragmatic item *like* over a period of about 25 years – from the early 1990s to 2010s. Applying a mixed methodology combining corpus-linguistics and qualitative analysis, the study explores changes in frequency and functions of the discourse-pragmatic *like* on the basis of a comparison of samples extracted from two corpora – the Spoken BNC1994 and the Spoken BNC2014. The author concludes that the development of discourse-pragmatic *like* shows primarily frequency changes, while its varied functional scope is relatively stable over the target period. A typology is proposed of the main functions of discourse-pragmatic *like*, which are regarded as highly context-dependent and therefore interpreted as performing an umbrella function of interpretative cue.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

Veronika Raušová's thesis as a very solid piece of research showing an interest in detail combined with a systematic description of the linguistic phenomenon at hand. The study is grounded in numerous extensively used and acknowledged sources, which are very well organised in the literature review, and employed to build a strong argument to make an original contribution to the field (corpus-linguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics).

One of the merits of the work is that it analyses a relatively new spoken corpus (Spoken BNC2014) to carry out a focused diachronic study – an unexplored area in the otherwise extensively researched functions and uses of discourse-pragmatic *like*. I feel that the sample under analysis is not particularly large and the sampling method, though very systematic, has left some issues unresolved; all of this is amply acknowledged by the author as limitations of her research.

The aims of the thesis are extensively explained and clearly formulated in four research questions, which are answered in the discussion section at the end of the thesis. The academic structure of the thesis is excellent and I am impressed by the quality of the language (with only a few typos). The author's arguments are very clear, but there is some repetitiveness, clearly for the sake of clarity and precision, which I believe could have been avoided.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

The thesis is logically structured into seven chapters including the 'Introduction' and the 'Conclusion' chapters. In the brief Introductory chapter Raušová clearly formulates the aims of her thesis and the new aspect that she brings to the study of discourse-pragmatic *like*.

The second 'Theoretical background' chapter presents a detailed overview of the propositional and discourse-pragmatics functions of *like* based on relevant previous studies (e.g. Andersen 2001, Beeching, 2016, Biber et al. 2021, D'Arcy 2017, Diskin 2017, Romaine & Lange 1991, Schweinberger 2014. Underhill 1988) addressing this topic. Then the author considers how the conversional and rather informal status of *like* has affected the views on its use and approaches the diachronic development of this item the from the lens of grammaticalization theory. The author adopts a critical stance towards some views expressed in previous research and thus I invite her (Q2) to expand on that in the panel discussion.

The following description of the data and methodology is very detailed and clearly organised. I feel, however, that the decision to select a sample of 1,000 items (500 from each of the two corpora of Spoken British English) is not sufficiently discussed and motivated in terms of representativeness (my concern is mainly the representativeness of the sample for the SpokenBNC20104 corpus). This is why Q1 invites the author to address this in the panel discussion. Otherwise, the sampling methodology is explained very (probably too) extensively, the taxonomy of functions used in the qualitative analysis is illustrated by convenient examples, and the statistical tools used in the quantitative analysis are presented in detail and explained.

The quantitative analysis presented in Chapter Four addresses the first two research question to show that the discourse-pragmatic like "has skyrocketed among speakers of British English" (p. 95). The increase is the most significant in the case of the quotative marker and the least important in the case of the clause-final pragmatic marker.

I think that the qualitative analysis (Chapter Five) is the most successful part of the thesis. It offers very interesting insights into the sub-functions of the four main discourse-pragmatic roles that *like* performs in Spoken British English, while addressing the third and fourth research questions. The marked contextual dependency of the interpretations is conveniently highlighted by the author. It is very useful that the Appendix to the thesis offers the analysis of all occurrences of *like* included in samples, which makes it a valuably source for further studies.

The Discussion Chapter and the brief Conclusion explicitly address the four research questions that the thesis has undertaken to respond, summarise the findings and engage with the limitations, validity and replicability of the research; they also trace directions for further studies, thus attesting the academic maturity of the author.

IV. Questions for the author

1) Could you explain why you have decided to work with 1,000 relevant occurrences – 500 per dataset? In the case of Spoken BNC1994 this seems to represent about half of all occurrences of the discourse-pragmatic *like*, which is very solid and representative. However, for Spoken BNC2014 this constitutes less than 1 per cent of the occurrences of this item, which (if my calculations are correct) is really very few and is likely to skew the relative frequencies you report. In that context, does the Log Ratio test you have used compare reliably the differences between the two corpora?

2) I very much liked your discussion of the different views on the developmental path of *like* (D'Arcy 2005, 2017, Romaine & Lange 1991, Traugott 1995) which suggests that you tend to strongly disagree with D'Arcy's view. Although this is clearly not the aim of your thesis, could you share your thoughts on this issue and suggest a possible research strategy to clarify the diachronic development of *like*?

3) When discussing the discourse-pragmatic functions of *like* you relate the Discourse Marker and Quotative Marker functions to cohesion and coherence. Is it possible to claim that the Clause-Medial and the Clause-Final Pragmatic Markers may also contribute to discourse coherence?

4) In most cases you compare the two datasets at the level of the four 'macro' functions of *like*. However, there are some interesting changes at the sub-levels, for instance the requiring loosening and enrichment sub-functions in the case of the Clause-medial pragmatic marker *like* or the changes in the sub-functions of the speaker- and hearer-oriented Clause-final pragmatic marker *like*. Can you think of any rather general tendency in the development of British English that they may suggest?

V. Conclusion

I believe that the submitted thesis fulfils all requirements for a work of this kind and clearly shows that Veronika Raušová is a promising young researcher. Therefore, I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as **passed**.

Brno, 11 August 2023   Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova
Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Education
Masaryk University