# A Two-Tiered Change in Canadian English: The Emergence of a Streamlined Evidential System

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## 1 Introduction

*Like* is well-known as an incoming form across a variety of syntactic/pragmatic functions in present-day English (D'Arcy 2005, 2007, 2012; Dinkin 2016). A recurrent finding is that *like* is involved with morphosyntactic change as well as lexical replacement (see e.g. D'Arcy 2005:209 on discourse *like* and D'Arcy 2012 on the *be like* quotative). This article reports on further evidence that *like* is not easily contained, grammatically speaking. What at first seems to be a case of lexical change with *like* as its incoming form ends up being connected to a more-recent change on a broader syntactic level. The syntactic change tidily conforms to variationist findings and principles (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968; Labov 2001), but also brings with it ramifications for the expression of evidentiality in Canadian English.

The case in question is the use of *like* as a complementizer introducing a finite subordinate clause after the verbs *seem*, *appear*, *look*, *sound*, and *feel*. This context can be described as a single syntactic template – (subject) + (verb) + (complementizer) + (finite subordinate clause) – that semantically lends a degree of apparentness or ostensibility to the subordinate proposition. However, the set of verbs and the set of complementizers are each heterogeneous in terms of their etymological roots and the syntactic/semantic restrictions that affect them (see e.g. Huddleston and Pullum 2002:962; Gisborne 2010:276; López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2012a, 2012b, 2014:39; Brook 2014:1-2). This means that the number of complementizers that are grammatical depends on the verb and the type of subject. The maximal number in North American English is five:

(1) It seems (as if/as though/like/that/Ø) the problem has resolved itself.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Complementizer *Like*

The newest of these complementizers is *like*, which is not attested in this context in any variety of English before 1864 (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2012b:316). However, by the beginning of the 21st century, *like* had become the overwhelmingly predominant variant in spoken Canadian English (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2012a:185) as represented by the Toronto English Archive (TEA; Tagliamonte 2003-2006, 2006). An apparent-time view of the TEA (Brook 2014) suggests that *as if* and *as though* have long since been superseded by *like*, and shows that in more recent decades, *that* and Ø have been declining as well. I have argued (Brook 2014) that *like* is more semantically versatile than its covariants: it does not show a preference either for hypothetical/metaphorical clauses (*as if*, *as though*) or for the opposite (*that*, Ø) in present-day Canadian English (Brook 2014). As with other uses of the word *like* in present-day English, the complementizer has a certain amount of semantic flexibility built into it.[1]

### 2.2 Copy-Raising

With *as if* and *as though* out of the picture, at least on the vernacular level, *like* has another major advantage: unlike the remaining covariants *that* and Ø, *like* supports an optional syntactic opera-

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[1]Dinkin (2016) refers to this property of the word *like* as "vague literality."

tion known as *copy-raising* (Rogers 1974; Heycock 1994; Matushansky 2002; Asudeh and Toivonen 2007; Gisborne 2010; Asudeh 2012; etc.) This is a syntactic alternation whereby a noun phrase from the lower clause[2] is 'copied' into the matrix subject position, leaving behind a coreferential pronoun, as in (2):

(2) a. It seems (as if/as though/like) [the kids]$_i$ want to stay at the beach a bit longer.
b. [The kids]$_i$ seem (as if/as though/like) [they]$_i$ want to stay at the beach a bit longer.

The earliest perspectives on copy-raising (Rogers, 1974:72) interpreted it as a case of genuine syntactic movement, and the literature is divided on whether it truly is (e.g. Horn, 1981:355; Asudeh 2012) or is not (e.g. Heycock 1994; Potsdam and Runner 2001; Gisborne 2010). Either way, what is important here is that whatever copy-raising is, it is blocked by the complementizers *that* and Ø (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:962, Gisborne 2010:276, López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2014:39). With these two complementizers, the only matrix subjects allowed are expletives:

(3) a. It seems (that/Ø) [the kids]$_i$ want to stay at the beach a bit longer.
b. * [The kids]$_i$ seem (that/Ø) [they]$_i$ want to stay at the beach a bit longer.

*As if*, *as though*, and *like* all allow copy raising, but only *that* and Ø – which do not – are left as active covariants to *like* in spoken Toronto English (Brook 2014:3-4). This means that *like* is the sole remaining complementizer on the vernacular level that supports copy-raising – the only one that allows NPs in matrix subject position when the complement is a finite subordinate clause. I will come back to this as an additional advantage that *like* has over *that* and Ø.

### 2.3 A Second Age Effect

A discovery that seemed curious but incidental in my earlier work on the complementizer *like* (Brook 2014:5) was an age effect in terms of the number of tokens produced. It is not just that younger speakers in the corpus are using *like* at much higher rates than their elders; young Torontonians are also the ones using the whole (verb) + (complementizer) + (finite subordinate clause) template the most often (Brook 2014:5). At the time, I considered two accounts of this pattern and then set it aside. Here, I revisit the age effect, extend the analysis to Ontario English more generally using additional corpora (Tagliamonte 2007-2010; 2010-2013), and show that it is key to a full understanding of the variation and its repercussions.

One of my suggestions for interpretation of this age effect (Brook 2014:4) was that it is a genuine case of linguistic change tied to grammaticalization. López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (2014) have argued that the collocations *seems like*, *looks like*, and *sounds like* are grammaticalizing into fossilized epistemic markers. According to this explanation, the increase in raw frequency would be a side-effect of ongoing grammatical change (see Hook 1991:76). The alternative interpretation that I proposed (Brook 2014:5) was age-graded hesitancy. Epistemic markers and hedging show considerable overlap (Denis 2015:206-207; Kärkkäinen 2003:22; López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2014:55). Maybe it is the case that young adults – either in general or in the context of a sociolinguistic interview specifically – are the ones feeling the least secure about their own opinions, and consequently are using *seems like* and other epistemic markers more frequently than their elders.

I have no reason to suspect that either of these explanations is misguided, but neither of them is satisfying in terms of explanatory power. The problem with the grammaticalization account is that very few tokens in the TEA show evidence of functions new enough for grammatical evolution to be driving the lopsided age effect in terms of the number of tokens. Meanwhile, the age-graded hesitancy explanation is at odds with two hints that there might be genuine linguistic change occurring, rather than age-grading. López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (2012b:329) observe that the use of these complementizers "seems to be on the increase in the present day." It is also

[2]This is typically the subject of the lower clause, though not always. Occasionally the 'copied' NP corresponds to a position farther down the tree, or even a to an implicit noun phrase that is semantically related to the lower clause (see e.g. Rogers 1974, Heycock 1994, Potsdam and Runner 2001, Asudeh and Toivonen 2007, Asudeh 2012).

suggestive – though not definitive – that the lopsided age-effect also shows patterning by speaker sex: of the ten speakers who use the structures the most frequently, nine are female. While a sex effect alone is not a reliable indication of linguistic change, it means that the possibility of a linguistic change led by young women (Labov 2001:275, 292-293) cannot be ruled out offhand.

If the imbalance in terms of the numbers of tokens in apparent time[3] is a product of a change in progress, then the entire syntactic template is varying with at least one other unit. This possibility necessitates stepping outside the original variable context in the manner of Aaron (2010). What could a competing structure be? One possibility is suggested by Hopper and Traugott (2003:175), who anticipate that as time passes, "*([i]t) seems that he is right* [will be replaced by] *He seems to be right*." This follows from their prediction that as grammaticalization proceeds, "separate clauses may become totally interlaced such that the boundaries between [them] may become obscured" (2003:175). If so, the covariant of finite subordination after verbs such as seem in a syntactic-level change would be infinitival subordination, also known as *Subject-to-Subject raising* (see e.g. Rosenbaum 1967; Davies and Dubinsky 2004). This possibility – of competition between finite and infinitival subordinate clauses after verbs such as *seem* – must be evaluated in Ontario English.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Variable Context

Needing consideration is the matter of where finite and infinitival subordination are both productive among *seem*-class verbs. *Seem* and *appear* each support both types of subordinate clause, but *appear* with a finite subordinate clause is very rare in vernacular Canadian English (Brook 2014:9). *Look* and *sound* can take infinitival complements in some dialects of English but not in others (Algeo 1988:23; Mack 2010:179; see also Matushansky 2002:228), and *feel* resists infinitival subordination in general (Mack 2010:179).

Using AntConc (Anthony 2014), I performed an exploratory search of the TEA and found no tokens of infinitival subordination after *look* or *sound*. There were three tokens with *appear* and even one with *feel* (in the past tense); apart from those, all of the tokens of infinitival subordination after *seem*-class verbs were with *seem* itself (N = 248). Although the goal is to explain an age effect among the finite tokens that includes all five verbs, out of necessity, I restrict this analysis to finite and infinitival complements of *seem* in Ontario English.

### 3.2 Data

The data are drawn from various corpora of spoken English in Ontario, Canada: the aforementioned Toronto English Archive (Tagliamonte 2003-2006), plus three communities from the southeast of the province (Tagliamonte 2007-2010), and several from the north (Tagliamonte 2010-2013). See Tagliamonte (1998, 2006, 2014) and Tagliamonte and Denis (2014) for further discussion of the corpora used in this paper. The corpora are made up of sociolinguistic interviews (Labov 1984) of about one hour each, and are balanced in terms of age and sex.

### 3.3 Extraction

Using AntConc (Anthony 2014), I searched for tokens of *seem** across the corpora. The next step was to sort the list by subsequent word and then pare it down manually to the tokens that included *seem** either immediately followed by any complementizer and then a subordinate clause (i.e. the finite tokens), or immediately followed by the infinitival marker *to* and then a verb phrase (the infinitival ones). Among the finite tokens, I made exclusions along the lines of those in my earlier protocol (Brook 2014:3). The only difference was that for the purposes of this analysis, I retained negative and interrogative contexts since they did not seem to be acting any differently from the

[3]These numbers are not normalized: that is, they rest on the assumption that every speaker in the corpus produced the same number of words. This is not perfectly accurate, but given that every interview in the corpora was about an hour in length, I assume that the normalized numbers would not be different enough to threaten the findings.

declarative ones that made up most of the data.

### 3.4 Testing Two Divisions of the Finite Tokens

This methodology defines two syntactic templates as variants, but the finite tokens show much less internal uniformity than the infinitival ones do. The finite ones encompass two types of subject (expletive and NP) and five different complementizers. There is no assurance that they act as a single variant. At the same time, it is not clear from the outset how best to divide them. I treat this issue as an empirical question, coding separately for two different approaches and then comparing the results (cf. Tagliamonte and Poplack 1993).

The first kind of division, in Table 3, is based on the type of subject: expletives (*it* or a zero) versus referential subjects (nouns or pronouns). This way of splitting the finite tokens I refer to as the *envelope-of-variation division*, since it dictates which complementizers are available. If there is an NP in matrix subject position, it has gotten there through copy-raising, meaning that the complementizer is necessarily one of the three that allow this (*as if*, *as though*, and *like*). If, on the other hand, there is an expletive as the matrix subject, the complementizer might be any of the five – it might mean that copy-raising is disallowed (with *that* or Ø), or that copy-raising is possible but not actually realized (*as if*, *as though*, or *like*).

| [expletive + seem* + finite]<br>(expletive subjects) | [NP + seem* + finite]<br>(referential subjects) | [infinitival subordination] |
|---|---|---|

Table 1: The three variants as per the envelope-of-variation division.

The second approach to dividing the finite tokens, shown in Table 4, is based on whether copy-raising is permitted. This is tantamount to a *type-of-complementizer division*:

| [blocked copy-raising]<br>(*that* and Ø) | [permitted copy-raising]<br>(*as if*, *as though*, *like*) | [infinitival subordination] |
|---|---|---|

Table 2: The three variants according to the type-of-complementizer division.

*That* and Ø do not allow copy-raising (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:962, Gisborne 2010:275); with *as if*, *as though*, and *like*, copy-raising is permitted but not mandatory. As a result, under the type-of-complementizer division, *it seem* like* and *NP seem* like* are contained within the same variant since in both cases, copy raising is allowed. Unlike in the envelope-of-variation division (by type of subject), it does not matter that copy-raising has occurred in one but not the other.

## 4 Results and Interpretation

### 4.1 Overall: Finite Versus Infinitival Variation

Table 3 shows the overall numbers and rates of finite and infinitival subordination tokens in Ontario English. The infinitival ones are the more prevalent by far: there are almost four times as many of them as of the finite ones.

| | Finite | Infinitival | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| N | 158 | 577 | 735 |
| **%** | 21.5% | 78.5% | |

Table 3: Tokens and proportions of finite and infinitival subordination after *seem* in Ontario.

Figure 1 shows the same overall division in apparent time, showing a trade-off between finite and infinitival subordination in Canadian English, though the direction of the change is the opposite of what Hopper and Traugott (2003:175) expect. Infinitival subordination, originally found at

stable high rates, begins to decline among speakers under the age of 30, with finite subordination increasing accordingly. In other words, it is not just the case that younger people in Toronto are using structures such as (4a) instead of the options in (4b) and/or (4c) with other complementizers. Younger Torontonians are also increasingly relying on (4a) instead of (4d) – infinitival subordination. This provides a third explanation for the overarching age effect left over from my earlier study[4] (Brook 2014:5). On top of a lexical replacement, syntactic change is occurring.

(4) a. It/he seems like he's feeling better.
b. It/he seems as if/as though he's feeling better.
c. It seems that/Ø he's feeling better.
d. He seems to be feeling better.

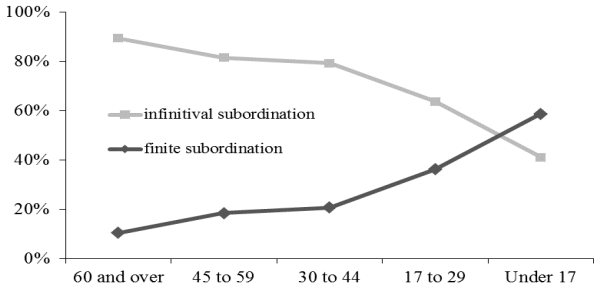


Figure 1: Rates of finite and infinitival subordination after *seem* in Ontario: apparent time.

### 4.2 Testing the Finite Divisions

The next step is to compare the two ways of splitting the finite tokens opposite the infinitival ones. These are displayed in Figure 2. The envelope-of-variation division, categorizing the finite tokens according to their matrix subject types, is on the left. On the right is the type-of-complementizer division, which depends on whether copy-raising is allowed.

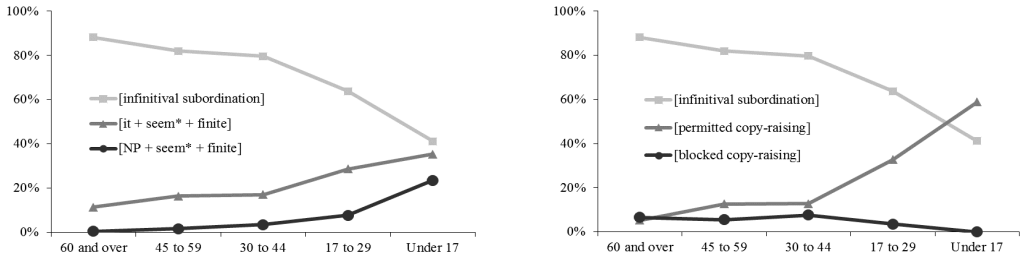


Figure 2: Comparison of two ways of splitting the finite tokens opposite the infinitival ones.

The more informative result is the type-of-complementizer division, on the right, which specifically captures the innovation replacing infinitival subordination after *seem*. The incoming form is [permitted copy-raising], regardless of whether copy-raising actually occurs.

On first glance, this pattern could be said to be completely unsurprising. Since *that* and Ø are declining in Ontario English (Brook 2014:4), it makes sense that [blocked copy-raising] (which is coterminous with this set) would be dropping to zero on the right side of Figure 2. Likewise, given that *as if* and *as though* are very rare in Ontario English (Brook 2014:4), the [permitted copy-raising] variant consists almost exclusively of *like*, which is the only incoming complementizer.

[4]At least for the verb *seem*, that is. Whether the other verbs (especially *look*, *sound*, and *feel*) are also becoming more frequent despite not having productive infinitival subordinate options to overtake is a question left for future research.

However, crucially, the right side of Figure 2 cannot be accurately described as a mere replication of my earlier findings. A lexical replacement does not guarantee grammatical change. There was absolutely no guarantee that the tokens of *like* would still prove to be increasing opposite infinitival subordination. Figure 3 illustrates this by means of a comparison of the two incoming forms. The left side *is* a replication of my earlier findings, extended across all the corpora used here; it shows the *like* complementizer catching on opposite the remaining competitors[5] in spoken Ontario English. On the right is the higher-level syntactic change whereby the innovative [permitted copy-raising] structure is detracting from [infinitival subordination] after *seem*.

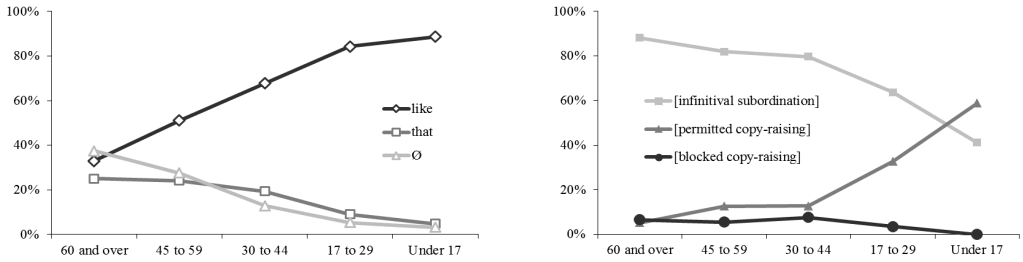


Figure 3: Comparison of two incoming forms: *like* and [permitted copy-raising].

An increase in *like* among the complementizer variants on the left does not automatically yield a rise in [permitted copy-raising] on the right. For instance, *like* increases in apparent time across the speakers in the three oldest age-cohorts, but at the same points in apparent time there is stability between [infinitival subordination] and [permitted copy-raising]. The graph on the right is not a depiction of *like* catching on among the complementizers. The second change is distinct from the first: it is a subsequent development outside the original variable context.

It is even possible to run a multivariate analysis on the variation between the incoming [permitted copy-raising] and the outgoing [infinitival subordination], as in Table 4:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected mean | | | 0.11 |
| Total N | | | 694 |
| | Factor weight | % | Total N |
| **Age (p = 4.49e 11)** | | | |
| 10 to 29 | 0.80 | 36.3% | 182 |
| 46 to 59 | 0.58 | 13.5% | 282 |
| 60 and over | 0.22 | 0.06% | 230 |
| *Range* | *58* | | |
| **Sex (p < 0.01)** | | | |
| Female | 0.62 | 24.4% | 323 |
| Male | 0.38 | 11.1% | 371 |
| *Range* | *24* | | |

Table 4: Factors selected as significant to the probability of the [permitted copy raising] structure (versus [infinitival subordination] for the verb *seem* in Ontario English, with individual included as a random effect.

This model is quite rudimentary and does not include any linguistic factors; however, it shows that the syntactic-level change exhibits the expected age effect and the sort of female lead that is typically found for changes in progress in the Western world (Labov 2001:275, 292-293). This speaks to the existence of orderly heterogeneity (Weinrich et al. 1968) on multiple levels of the grammar, provided that the variant structures are carefully defined to capture the change occurring.

[5]This graph on the left encompasses *seem*, *look*, *sound*, and *feel*; however, the pattern does not change substantially if restricted to *seem*. See Brook (2016:79) for these results split by verb.

There is one additional upside to accepting the type-of-complementizer model of the broader-level change: it resolves a question left unanswered in my earlier work on *like* complementizers. If [permitted copy-raising] is one syntactic variant and [blocked copy-raising] is a more distant one, the complementizer *like* can be expected to overtake *as if* and *as though* earlier than the complementizers that block copy-raising. This is precisely what I have found (Brook 2014:4).

### 4.3 Evaluating Causation

The results have shown that *like* increases to become the dominant complementizer after the verb *seem* and similar verbs in Ontario English; some time later, the entire [permitted copy-raising] structure starts increasing opposite [infinitival subordination]. Is the second change caused by the first reaching a certain level?

Here I look to British English in an attempt to answer this question. López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (2012a:185) find that the change toward *like* among the complementizers is very recent in the United Kingdom: this use of *like* is not attested in their spoken British data from the 1960s, but by the 1990s it "becomes quite popular." The British linguistics literature also continues to capture resistance to the *like* complementizer. To Quirk et al. (1985:1175), it is "often regarded as nonstandard." Mair and Leech (2006:318) call it "strongly stigmatized," and Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1158) acknowledge a "strong tradition of prescriptive opposition" to it. If the shift toward *like* in the UK is indeed far behind where it is in Canada, and if the onset of the broader syntactic change depends on *like* having reached a threshold among the complementizers first, there should be no sign of such a change in British English. Following the methodology laid out above, I use the York English Archive (Tagliamonte 1996-1998) to probe these hypotheses.

Figure 4 displays the results for both levels of the grammar in York English in apparent time. As in the findings of López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (2012a:185), the complementizer *like* is rare until recent decades, when it suddenly gains considerable ground. This is a new enough development to predict, assuming the threshold interpretation of the Ontario results, that *like* is not yet embedded enough in the York community grammar to instigate the syntactic-level change. The results in Figure 4 are ultimately inconclusive but do match the prediction: clausal complements of *seem* in York English are dominated by infinitival subordination and are stable in apparent time. The complementizer *like* has arrived in York, but there is no syntactic change occurring here.

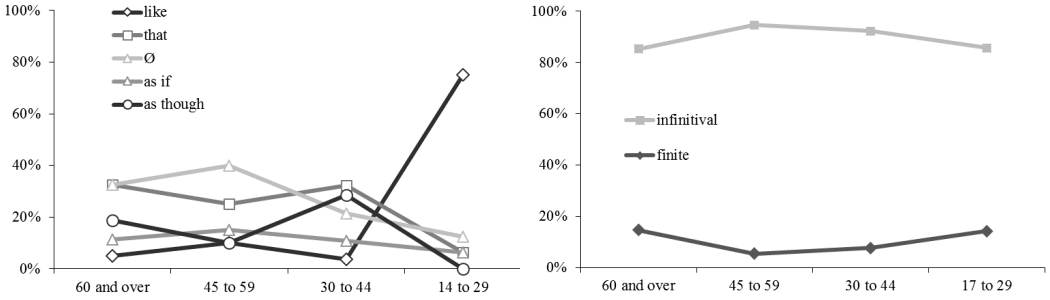


Figure 4: Comparison of two levels of the grammar in apparent time in York: finite complementizers after *seem*, *look*, *sound*, and *feel* (N = 143) and clausal complements of *seem* (N = 200).

If the complementizer *like* has indeed set off a second, more-abstract change in Ontario English, what has enabled it to do so when *as if* and *as though* – which also support copy-raising – never did any such thing? I suggest, in accordance with the threshold argument, that it is attributable to *as if* and *as though* presumably never having achieved a large enough proportion of the complementizers in any English-speaking community. The first variant to have done either in present-day English, as far as I know, is *like*.

Such a two-tiered change would not be completely unprecedented. A close parallel is the Hungarian finite subordinator *hogy*, 'that', which over time "was extended in its functions and came to be preferred over infinitival structures" (Bácskai Atkári and Dekány 2014:187).

### 4.4 Consequences for Evidential Expressions in Canadian English

With the finite paradigm after *seem*-class verbs becoming unified by *like* in Ontario English, there are always two options for the subject, as in (5a): an expletive and an NP, depending on whether copy-raising has taken place. This is not true of [infinitival subordination], which involves obligatory Subject-to-Subject raising, as in (5b).

(5) a. (It/she) seems like she wants to go next.
b. She seems to want to go next.

What conditions the variation in (5a)? The data do not make it obvious, but an answer comes from acquisitional literature on American English. Rett, Hyams and Winans (2013) and Rett and Hyams (2014) conduct a judgment task and a child-language corpus study, and conclude that the difference between the expletive and the NP options lies in their divergent evidential values. The expletive is unmarked for reliability and/or source of the proposition in the subordinate clause, and thus is non-committal.[6] A copy-raised NP, on the other hand, is used to convey direct observation of the subject. There were no cases of a copy-raised NP used for anything other than direct evidentiality in the speech of children (Rett and Hyams 2014:189) or adults (Rett and Hyams 2014:191).

If an inventory of clausal complements after *seem* is someday reduced to nothing more than [permitted copy-raising] with *like*, there will necessarily be a choice between an NP for direct evidentiality and an expletive that is not marked for evidential status, as in Table 5.

| Matrix subject | Evidential status (Rett and Hyams 2014) |
|---|---|
| NP | Direct evidentiality |
| Expletive | Unmarked for evidentiality |

Table 5: Evidential values corresponding to types of matrix subject in a system of *seem* subordination restricted to [permitted copy-raising].

Currently, no such one-to-one correspondence exists. An expletive *could* indicate unmarked evidentiality as in Table 7, or it could be there simply because of a *that* or Ø complementizer making copy-raising impossible. Similarly, an NP subject *could* indicate direct evidentiality, or could be there because it is in an example of [infinitival subordination], which has obligatory raising and is "neutral with respect to evidentiality" (Rett and Hyams 2014:192). The result of the processes in Figure 3 might therefore be a more streamlined set of English evidential expressions.

## 5 Conclusion

What at first seemed to be an everyday case of lexical replacement among a set of minor complementizers has turned out to be much more when it comes to clausal complements of *seem* in Ontario English. Sometime after *like* has saturated the associated complementizer system, the whole [permitted copy-raising] structure starts to catch on at the expense of [infinitival subordination]. Even though this is a somewhat abstract change, in terms of its effects of age and sex it behaves the way any classic change in progress would, attesting to orderly heterogeneity in action (Weinreich et al. 1968) even deep inside the community grammar. This syntactic change also has ramifications for evidential expressions in Canadian English: if it goes to completion and [permitted copy-raising] is the single active clausal complement of *seem*, then the type of matrix subject (NP or expletive) will always correspond to evidential status (direct or unmarked, respectively).

If the two levels of change are cause and effect, rather than only a correlation, the second change should only be able to begin once *like* has reached a certain threshold as a proportion of the finite complementizers. Evidence from York, England is consistent with this idea: the lexical replacement whereby *like* comes to dominate the complementizer system after *feel* remains well

[6]This can be tied to the notion of the expletive collocations *seems like*, *looks like*, and *sounds like* becoming epistemic markers (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2014).

behind the stage it has reached in Canada, and there is no broader syntactic change occurring.

As in the case of the Peninsular Spanish future expressions studied by Aaron (2010), a considerable amount of explanatory power has been found lurking slightly outside the conventional envelope of variation. While I do not see such findings as a threat to the validity of the variable context as a construct, my results are an additional testament to the conclusion that for morphosyntactic phenomena, "sensitivity to quantitative patterns outside the variable context may be the key to understanding otherwise inexplicable changes in distribution" (Aaron 2010:30). Even disregarding chain shifts on the phonetic/phonological level, it is not unheard of for one change to set off another (Martins and Nunes 2009). Nor does it seem unusual for there to be interference between two or more ongoing changes on the basis of shared variant forms (see e.g. Aaron 2010, D'Arcy 2015; Dinkin 2016). The present results suggest that it is prudent to double-check that token numbers are stable in apparent/real time; if they are not, this may well be a sign of change occurring on a higher syntactic level, in which case examining the behavior of neighboring (similar/overlapping) variables and structures is advisable. Ultimately, findings along these lines should not come as a surprise. They are a reminder that within the vast interconnected system that is any language, there is no morphosyntactic phenomenon that exists in isolation.

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