Gender and Style: The Discourse Particle *like* in the Corpus of Spoken Professional American English

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Abstract

The present paper discusses the discourse particle *like*, as in: *right so I’m just like below the allotments just now*. Apparently, the use of this discourse item is conditioned by stylistic and sociolinguistic factors. We have investigated the Corpus of Spoken Professional American English and found that the discourse particle *like* is attested in the exploratory talk of the national meetings of mathematics tests and reading tests, both held in the 1990s, to a noticeable extent. By contrast, the expository talk of White House press conferences and faculty meetings of the University of North Carolina provides far fewer examples of the discourse particle *like*. As for gender differences, the same item is more frequently employed by male speakers. This result does not necessarily support the generally accepted view, which argues that it is a characteristic feature of young female speech. Finally, we investigated the relationship between the discourse particle *like* and other hedges, and reached the conclusion that the existence of other hedging items does not seem to hinder the occurrence of *like*. 