

The Social Meanings of Discourse Markers in Valspeak: *Like and Totally**

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Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. What are Discourse Markers?
- III. Findings
 - 3.1 Discourse marker *like* in Valspeak
 - 3.2 Discourse marker *totally* in Valspeak
- IV. Concluding remarks

Q: *Which school is better, University of California at Santa Barbara or Harvard?*

A: *What, are you a zod? UCSB has the beach right there and way more parties. Isn't Harvard in Philadelphia or something? Someplace where it's cold, anyway.*

(Valley girl Q and A in *Valley Girls' Guide to life*, Pond 1982)

I. Introduction

The current study aims to explore the functions of the discourse markers which are commonly found in Valspeak¹⁾ from a sociolinguistic

* This work was supported by the research grant from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies of 2011. I am grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

perspective, a now partially American sociolect, originally of Southern Californians, in particular valley girls. This stereotype originated in the 1970s, was at its peak in the 1980s and then lost popularity from the late 1990s onwards. However, elements of Valspeak have seeped into everyday English virtually wherever the language is spoken, with their presence particularly strong among young native English speakers.

The following illustrates the kinds of discourse markers found in the 1995 film *Clueless*, where Valspeak is heavily used. Discourse markers such as *like*, *(so) totally*, *whatever*, *you know* and *as if* are pervasive in Valspeak:

- (1) DIONNE: Tell me about it. This weekend he called me up and he's all "Where were you today?" and I'm *like* "I'm at my Grandmother's house"...
- (2) CHER: So I was *like, totally* buggin'.
- (3) ROBBER: And I will *totally* shoot you in the head. Get down!
- (4) CHER: Was that you going through my laundry?
 AMBER: *As if. Like* I would really wear something from Judy's

1) The term *Valley Girl* and the Valley manner of speech were given a wider circulation in 1981 with the release of a hit single by Frank Zappa entitled "Valley Girl," on which Moon Zappa, Frank's fourteen-year-old daughter, delivered a monologue of meaningless phrases in "valspeak" behind the music. Here, Valley Girl (or Val) is a term referred to affluent upper-middle class young girls living in the neighborhoods of San Fernando Valley. A Valley Girl can be described as materialistic, self-conscious, dodgy, self-centered, hedonistic, and physically attractive with a SPOILED behaviour that showed more interest in shopping, personal appearance and social status than in intellectual development or personal accomplishment.

(<http://language-dossier.webs.com/americanslangvalspeak.htm>)

- (5) ELTON: *You know*, you're one of my best friends and I do not have friends that are girls.
- (6) SUMMER: Hey, Cher! Is it true some gang members, *like* tried to shoot Tai in the mall?
CHER: No.
SUMMER: That is what everyone is saying.
CHER: *Whatever*.
- (7) MEL: It looks like underwear. Go upstairs and put something over it.
CHER: *Duh*. I was just going to. (Cher runs off)
- (8) LAWYER: Just forget it, OK? Just go back to the mall *or something*.
(Cher runs out of the room)

The preliminary examination of the discourse markers suggests that only some, but not all, markers appear to exhibit the characteristics of Valspeak. Firstly, looking at those that do not appear to do so, the function of *like* in (1) as a quotative particle and the function of *like* in (2) as a hedge are observed in other dialects as well. The same is true of the marker *you know* in (5), where it is used to solicit the common ground and establish addressee–speaker solidarity. *Whatever* in (6) means "I don't believe you," "I don't care," etc., and a stand-alone *whatever* is used to dismiss a topic, often during situations where the person delivering the phrase understands that the argument is lost or pointless (Suh 2008). Special emphasis is placed on "EVER" in *whatever* as in "You're, *like*, so *totally* out of nail polish? *What-EVER!*". It is often used as a weak comeback in response to others' insults. Of special interest is *wev*, a phonologically reduced form of a stand-alone *whatever*, which is often found in a SMS (short message service). The marker with vague reference

such as *or something* in (8) signals that the information may be inaccurate in the first place. As such, *or something* may be face-saving (c.f. Brown and Levinson 1987) or downplay the importance of what has been said. It can be used as a face-saving device if an action is perceived as face-threatening or as a device to be used to establish solidarity and group-feeling.

In contrast, discourse markers such as *totally* in (2) and (3), *as if* in (4) and *duh* in (7) seem to be unique to Valspeak. The adverb *totally* as an intensifier is found to be used anywhere in the sentence, even in syntactically awkward positions (e.g. before a noun) as in "It's *totally* you". Moreover, *totally* tends to be used quite heavily in Valspeak. The stand-alone *as if* is used to contradict the previous sentence or demonstrate skepticism, meaning "You're wrong." or "It's not going to happen." The marker *duh* as a response is usually said with heavy emphasis, conveying the sense that "Everybody knows that" or "Obviously".

These observations give rise to several relevant questions worthy of in-depth research.

The first question I would like to address is which discourse markers are frequently used in Valspeak and what would be their social meanings with respect to the language of young Native English speakers, given that different kinds of discourse markers have different functions in the participant framework plane of discourse (cf. Andersen 1997).

Secondly, it would also be interesting to examine whether a particular use of markers is characteristic of Valspeak and whether the adolescent speakers use those markers for the same purposes as the speakers in the mainstream group, i.e., whether or how these distinctive functions are related to adolescent speech styles with respect to societal norms and politeness principles. It is assumed that differences in social norms

between the adolescent and the mainstream group are likely to have linguistic effects and the different social requirements of peer groups as opposed to mainstream society are likely to affect conversational cooperation and politeness.

As is noted above, sociolinguistic factors may well play a key role in explaining how discourse markers are used and what functions they have. According to Andersen (2000), it is not the case that adolescents use discourse markers more than adults as a whole, but rather, they use different items for different purposes, suggesting that adolescence and adulthood could be differentiated from each other with respect to societal norms, and interactional/politeness principles. The underlying assumption of this study, thus, is that adolescents play a prominent role in the use and development of forms that serve pragmatic, especially attitudinal, functions.

Thirdly, another research question that I hope to pursue is to examine whether there is any correlation between a greater use of this clustering of discourse markers and the speech style of the adolescence group. Among the characteristic properties of discourse markers which have not received enough attention in the literature is their 'clustering' (collocation with other particles). For example, Vicher & Sankoff (1989) found that 65% of some 3700 utterances in classroom discussions and ordinary conversation contained up to five different particles in turn-openings. A cursory glance at the data reveals that discourse markers tend to cluster together in stacks in the adolescence speech as in "*So OK, I was totally like, you know, 'I have no idea or something!'*"

In order to better understand the social meanings of these discourse markers, it is essential to take into account the topic as well as the audience of the use of these markers. While teen-age, high school girls from southern California were the first users of this lingo, we do see

young female professionals in their twenties or thirties using it as well, albeit in very specific, audience- and topic-dependent settings.²⁾

These discourse-markers can often be understood in relation to the practice of code-switching. Valley-girl talk occurs mainly within, and for, a very specific audience, which in turn makes it more likely that topics pertinent to valley-girl talk will be discussed.

In this respect, the hypothesis which will be investigated in this study is as follows:

- (a) The adolescent using discourse markers in Valspeak use the different items for different functions from the mainstream English speakers, which reflects the different societal norms and interactional principles.
- (b) The discourse markers using the valley-girl language reflect shared interests within the context of specific audience, and certainly do reflect qualities that, while not central, certainly are peripheral to modern feminine identity (such as being 'hip,' assertive, and being up-to-date with latest fads or celebrity gossip).

My research will shed some light on these aspects of stance display and identity negotiation from a constructivist perspective in relation to the practice of code-switching and its import for audience accommodation.

The main data source for the present study will come from films such as *Clueless* (1995) and *Valley Girl* (1983), TV series *Square Pegs* (1982) and *Gossip Girl (Valley girls)* (2007) and a booklet *Valley Girls Guide to Life* (Pond, 1982).

2) The film *Legally Blond* (2001) is such a case where young professional Elle Woods often uses Valspeak.

II. What are Discourse Markers?

Discourse marker is perhaps the most common name suggested for its seemingly empty meaning and for its discourse–organizational roles, such as *actually*, *oh*, *well*, *like*, *I mean*, *whatever*, and *you know* (Schiffrin 1987, Jucker & Ziv 1998). Traditionally, some of the elements considered as discourse markers were treated as fillers or expletives, that is, elements that do not have their own meaning or function. Accordingly, sentence–based formal grammar has little to say about the meaning and function of discourse markers. Fruitful approaches to discourse markers are instead to be found in Discourse Analysis (Schiffrin 1987), Ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis (Hakulinen 1998), Speech Act Theory, Relevance Theory or Rhetorical Structure Theory (Mann & Thompson 1986).

Following Schiffrin (1987: 328) and Brinton (1996: 32–35), an expression (or words or set of words) will be considered a discourse marker if it had all of the following properties:

- (a) The expression has a range of prosodic contours, i.e. tonic stress followed by a pause and phonological reduction.
- (b) The propositional content of the proposition remains the same when the expression is omitted.
- (c) The expression occurs either outside the syntactic structure or is loosely attached to it; hence, it has no clear grammatical function.
- (d) The expression may be multifunctional, operating on the local (i.e. morphophonemic, syntactic, and semantic) and global (i.e. pragmatic) levels simultaneously, as well as on different planes (textual and interpersonal) within the pragmatic components.

In terms of types, discourse markers are comprised of discourse

connectors, turn-takers, confirmation-seekers, intimacy signals, topic-switchers, hesitation markers, boundary markers, fillers, prompters, repair markers, attitude markers, and hedging devices (Jucker & Ziv 1998: 1). As such, discourse markers are considered multifunctional, since they can be functional both within the textual and interpersonal domains; some markers serve primarily textual functions, signaling the relationship between clauses. Other markers serve primarily interpersonal functions, such as hedging or turn-taking uses (Jucker & Ziv 1998). The interpersonal and textual domains are not mutually exclusive; discourse markers are, at the same time, signposts in the communication and expressions of the speaker's attitude and emotions. Discourse markers are like cues or road signs which guide our processes of text comprehension and interpretation:

(9) That gets on my nerve, too. *Anyway*, tell me about your new job.

(10) (Schourup, 2001: 63).

((A and B are attempting to fill a job opening))

A: I'd like to know your impression of Kim.

B: *Well*, she is a very enthusiastic worker and finishes every assignment on time.

(11) (*Valley Girls Guide to Life*)

You're, *like*, so *totally* out of nail-polish? *What-EVER!*

Anyway in (9) serves a textual function, indicating a topic change. *Well*, *like*, *totally* and *whatever* in (10) and (11) primarily serve interpersonal functions, indexing the speaker's epistemic/affective stance toward the proposition or the interlocutor. In (10), we can see a note of reservation in B's utterance; B might not be entirely happy with Kim's work. Here,

well encodes divergence from the hearer's expectation, prefacing mild disagreement. Discourse markers often occur in a cluster as in (11), where *like*, *totally* and *whatever* are said to be characteristic of Valspeak.

The interest in spoken language and discourse in the last two decades has led to an increase in articles and monographs on discourse markers. A number of studies have provided useful analyses of discourse markers in different languages (Schourup 1985, 1999, 2001, Schiffrin 1987, Fraser 1990, 1996, Jucker & Ziv 1998, Lenk 1998, Andersen 2000). Moreover, diachronic studies of discourse markers building on the analysis of their grammatical and semantic changes have added to our knowledge of the functions of discourse markers (Brinton 1996, Traugott 1995). Some studies analyze discourse markers from a sociolinguistic perspective with regards to the sociological factors such as age, gender, social class, ethnicity (Dines 1980, Dubois 1993). Bernstein (1971: 98) found, for instance, that the 'ego-centric' sequence *I think* are preferred by middle class groups while 'sociocentric' sequences (*you know, isn't it*) are used more frequently by working-class speakers. Discourse markers have also been studied from a gender perspective. Homes (1988: 116f)³ found, for example, that women tend to emphasize the interpersonal use of particles such as *sort of*, while men put more emphasis on their use as modal signals .

Of particular interest are the recent studies which have shown that teenagers are at the forefront of developments in which lexical items take on new discourse and pragmatic functions at the expense of their lexical imports (i.e. use of discourse markers). This observation applies, for instance, to the use of *like* as a marker of reported speech (Romaine & Lange 1991), *just* as an emphazier (Erman 1997), and *well* as an intensifier (Stenstrom 2000).

3) Women tend to use *sort of* for softening their claims while men tend to use it for expressing uncertainty.

Given that discourse markers are seldom sociolinguistically neutral, various sociolinguistic variables deserve a closer examination. These variables, which often have not been taken into account in previous studies, include regional preferences, gender, social class, age, profession or the type of interaction, e.g. formality/intimacy and the role of interlocutors (Bazzanella 1990).

Given that there has been no research, to date, examining the social meanings of the discourse markers found in Valspeak, this study can function as pioneering work, which should serve as an incentive to further investigate many other related issues.

III. Findings

In this section, I aim to provide an account of the discourse markers in Valspeak in terms of its syntactic–semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic properties. A preliminary examination of data reveals that tokens of *like* and *totally* as discourse markers are massively recurrent in Valley Girl speech.

3.1 Discourse marker *like* in Valspeak

Like as a discourse marker has been reported to serve a variety of functions, being notorious for its distributional versatility and functional complexity (Andersen 2000: 210).

Granting that discourse markers occur either outside the syntactic structure or are loosely attached to it and hence has no clear grammatical function (Brinton 1996: 32–35), the kinds of discourse markers typical of Valspeak are VERY loose in terms of their position.

Like as a discourse marker is reported to be positioned before a noun phrase, adjective/adjective phrase, an adverb/adverb phrase or prepositional phrase, a verb phrase and subordinate clause and before the entire sentence. The most frequently observed position of *like* in Valley Girl talk, however, is at the turn initial or utterance initial positions.

As is shown below, *like* introduces the whole proposition at a turn/utterance initial position.

(12) (Valley Girl)

Randy: That's cool.

Julie Richman: *Like*, it's not cool at all! *Like*, it's all this stuff that tastes like nothing and it's supposed to be so good for you. Why couldn't they, like, open a Pizza Hut or something?

(13) (Square Pegs)

Muffy: Give me my money.

Jennifer: *Like* I don't remember where I put it.

(14) (Clueless)

Cher: Was that you going through my laundry?

Amber: As if. *Like* I would really wear something from Judy's

(15) (Valley girl)

Fred Bailey: [warily surveying party food] What you got running here, a bait shop?

Suzi Brent: *Like*, it's sushi, don't you know?
[points at each platter as she identifies them.]

Suzi Brent: *Like*, this here is tuna, that's flying fish egg, and that's sea urchin.

Of particular interest is the use of *like* in example (15), where the scope of *like* compasses the subsequent three utterances.

The predominant use of *like* at the utterance initial position suggests that the speakers of Valley Girl talk tend to show their hedging stance not on the specific constituent of the sentence but on the whole utterance(s). This translates to the observation that the speakers of Valley Girl talk demonstrate their lack of lexical as well as psychological commitment towards what they're saying.⁴⁾

The distributional versatility of *like* in Valspeak is also manifested in the following example, where it occurs between the main verb and the negation *not*. On top of that, the speaker, even after displaying her firm stance with the adverb *certainly*, uses the hedging *like*, to avoid sounding too assertive.

(16) (Square Pegs)

Jeniffer: I certainly hope *like* not.

According to Jucker & Smith (1998: 183), the discourse marker *like* serves as an approximator, marker of exemplification, hesitatorial device and quotative marker as illustrated by the following (non-exhaustive) list:

(17) So it was that was *like* three hundred dollars [approximator]

(18) I think I might get... kind of sidetracked you know, ahm, *like* around the hallways [exemplifier]

(19) Hockey is kind of *like* interesting too, ice-hockey. [hedge]

(20) I was *like* it's okay [quotation]

Andersen (2000: 244-245) also points out the metalinguistic function of *like*, marking reduced "lexical commitment" towards the following expressions; there is non-identical resemblance between the expression the speaker chooses and a potential alternative expression fully

4) The discourse marker *like* appears at the end of the utterance, serving as a tag: "Hey, maybe there's, like, a sorority. you could, like, join instead, *like*?" (the 2001 film *Legally Blond*)

internalized in the speaker's vocabulary.

Distributionally, *like* can occur between clause constituents, within phrases and between propositions. In all of the above examples, by using *like*, the speaker does not commit herself to the literal truth of the utterance.

A shared property of the various uses of the marker *like* seems to be 'non-equivalence', 'looseness' or 'approximation' (Schourup 1985, Andersen 1997, 2000, Jucker & Smith 1998). For instance, *like* is defined as a marker of non-equivalence between a statement and what the speaker has in mind (Schourup 1985). In a similar vein, the discourse marker *like* is reported to signal looseness or enrichment, signalling "non-literal resemblance between an utterance and the underlying thought" (Andersen 2000: 210). Therefore, the following utterance, where a speaker wants to make manifest a single precise proposition (i.e. her own name), is not likely to contain the marker *like* (Andersen 1997: 166). Here, when Mary is asked to provide a single piece of information, a highly familiar concept such as her own name, she is expected to state this proposition as directly as she can. Therefore, the use of *like* as a marker of loose talk is unlikely.

- (21) Peter: What's your name?
 Mary: *My name is *like* Mary.

However, in Valspeak, even in uttering her own name, the speaker employs the marker *like*, where its scope is her own name (i.e., Jeniffer DiNuccio).

- (22) (Square Pegs)
principal: name?
Jennifer: *Like* Jeniffer DiNuccio

In Valspeak, such use of *like* signals that the speaker DOES NOT want to make even her own name manifest, which in turn indexes the speaker's "psychological non-incorporation" of, and psychological distance, towards the following linguistic expressions, especially the subjective/attitudinal function (cf. Andersen 2000: 219). In other words, the use of *like* in Valspeak seems to signal the general tendency of non-committal stance of the young adolescent; they "avoid sounding too confident in their use of language, undue assertiveness, or warning the hearer about a potential stylistic inadequacy" (Andersen 2000: 248). As such, the discourse marker *like* reflects the teenagers' wish to express their ideas without sounding too assertive. Such case is also found below, where the speaker uses *like* even in front of "I'm so sure", where she supposedly claims her strong certainty toward the proposition.

(23) (*Valley's girls guide to life*)

| | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Salesperson: | Oh, God, that is totally you. |
| your friend: | It is? |
| you: | <i>Like</i> I AM SO SURE |

The use of *like* as a discourse marker is characteristic of adolescent conversation, as opposed to that of the adults in terms of its overall frequency and its social and functional distribution (Andersen 2000).

Tannen (1986) and Blyth et al. (1990) also report that the use of *like* as a discourse marker is a middle class phenomenon, common in what is called Valley Girl talk; suggesting that it reflects an aspiration of sorts to climb up the social ladder (Andersen 1997). *Like* as a discourse marker is reported to be used primarily by white female speakers in late adolescence (Andersen 2000). Especially BE *like* as 'quotative complimentizer' (see examples (1) and (20) above) is particularly common in the speech of adolescent girls, who are supposedly the initiators spreading this linguistic

feature (Romaine & Lange 1991). The pervasive use of *like* in teen age talk is considered to be repetitive and imprecise (Dailey–O’Cain 2000); speakers are found to have negative attitudes towards the heavy use of *like*, according to a newspaper article (Knowlton 1999). Nowadays, *like* appears to be gaining ground in a fairly wide range of speaker groups (even though the speakers from the highest social class use this marker more frequently than the other groups) and across registers, and it is used by speakers who otherwise speak a standard variety of English (Andersen 2000).

Even though adult speakers use *like* as a hedging device, youngsters’ use of *like*, observed in Valley Girl talk, seems to reflect their cognitive, social and psychological realities.

The frequent use of *like* in Valspeak is indicative of the cognitive developmental characteristics of teenage group who are still in the process of accumulating the vocabulary.⁵⁾ Especially the lack of internalization of many lexemes in the adolescent age group may account for the use of pragmatic markers (Andersen 2000); the speaker indicates that she/he is not entirely confident with the use of certain lexeme, or she/he may also indicate that there is something inadequate, stylistically or sociolinguistically, about the chosen expression.

The frequent use of *like* in adolescent talk serves as an overt manifestation of adolescents’ need and desire to avoid full commitment to the expressions they choose. This, in turn, reflects either a genuine conceptual discrepancy between what was said and what was meant, or points out to a less-than-full lexical commitment to the appropriateness of an expression (Andersen 2000: 295). Such reduced lexical commitment translates into lack of psychological commitment, which displays

5) As for vocabulary, the main body of lexicon is acquired along with grammatical rules, but adolescents generally have not reached the adult level of minimum 50,000 (up to 250,000) words (Andersen 2000: 5).

psychological distance towards the chosen expressions,

By using *like*, the speaker signals that there is something about the chosen expression that she is not comfortable for her to utter cognitively, stylistically or sociolinguistically

Besides this cognitive and developmental reason, the frequent use of *like* along with other typical features of Valspeak seems to signal the expression of social identity and peer group membership/ingroupness among adolescents.

3.2 Discourse marker *totally* in Valspeak

The adverb *totally* along with its synonyms such as *absolutely*, *completely*, *perfectly*, *entirely*, and *utterly* belongs to degree adverbs or more specifically maximizers. Maximizers are generally considered to express degrees of increasing intensification upwards from an assumed norm (Kennedy 2002: 469) or to denote the upper extreme of a semantic scale (Bolinger 1972: 17, Quirk et al. 1985: 590). According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 589–590), maximizers along with boosters are the subtype of amplifiers, which are again the subtype of intensifiers. Maximizers, which comprise amplifiers such as *completely*, *entirely*, *totally*, *absolutely* and *utterly*, denote an absolute degree of intensity and therefore occupy the extreme upper end of the scale. In contrast, boosters which include *very*, *awfully*, *terribly*, *bloody*, *tremendously* etc., denote a high degree but without reaching the extreme end of the scale (Altenberg 1991: 128).

The traditional dictionaries give the definition of *totally* as a synonym with *completely* as in "We have such *totally* different background"; *totally* in its freestanding form is listed to be used for saying you really agree with something someone said as in "Mark is such an idiot!" "Totally".

Urban dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com) provides more colloquial

usages; *totally* is characteristic of Valley Girl talk, meaning "Of course"; *totally* is also a word used by ditzy girls that means "Definitely" or "For sure" and used to emphasize or reassure as in "OMG! Like, you must have been, like, *totally* shocked!" "Totally". It also adds that *totally* is an overused word that was first used by Valley Girls as in "Like, oh my God. I'm *totally* in love with Justin Timberlake!!!". The Valley Girl Dictionary section (in *Valley Girls's Guide to life*, 1982: 62) provides the definition of *totally* as "to the max". To sum up, *totally* as a maximizer is used for (emotional) emphasis, and for strong agreement in its freestanding form.

The discourse marker *totally* (pronounced /t^hetəli/) in Valspeak is observed to occur anyplace in the sentence, even in syntactically awkward position as in "That is *totally* you", where *totally* is located before a noun. The following is another case in point:

(24) (Gossip girl)

I'm *totally* the star, a music video equals national exposure.

In addition, *totally* is frequently found to be repeated at the end of the sentence in the same turn or across the turns, which helps to increase the degree of intensity as shown in the following examples.

(25) (Square Pegs)

Johnny: *Totally* out of control, *totally*
Totally different, *totally*,

(26) (Square Pegs)

(Patty and Lauren talk about Johnny's band to persuade Muffy to invite Johnny's band to fill in Devo.)

Patty: he is original

Lauren: and he is *totally* available, *totally*.

(27) (Square Pegs)

Marshall: I'm *totally* tired, *totally*.

(28) (Valley Girl)

Suzi: I am not too small. I look *totally* hot in this, *totally*.

In (25), Johnny repeats *totally* after each utterance. The same observation is made in Lauren's utterance in (26) as well. It seems that *totally* repeated at the end of the turn serves to wrap up the speaker's assessment with increasing strength and emphasis.

As such, the function of *totally* is similar to that of *completely* or *absolutely*. Frequency-wise, *totally* is predominantly used in Valspeak; for example, in the movie *Clueless*, the tokens of *totally* amount to 11, while *completely* and *absolutely* are used just once.

As for their collocation patterns and semantic preferences, it was noted that *totally* only occurs with the adjectives *different* and *wrong* in the material in close competition with *completely* (Altenberg 1991: 138). The examination of Valley Girl talk in my data, however, shows a more diverse distribution: *totally* is observed to have the positive collocates (such as *hot*, *awesome*, *important* and *special*) and the negative collocates (such as *grody*, *gross*, *gnarly*, *rigid* and *out of touch with civilization*) as well, let alone the neutral collocate (such as *different*).⁶⁾

In contrast, *absolutely* tend to collocate with superlative adjectives, especially those having emotive forces (e.g., *super* and *crucial*) (Partington 1993, Tao 2007). As argued by Tao (2007), the accumulative effect of both being positive and affirmative of *absolutely* are aspects which could be carried over in the freestanding form, which differentiate *absolutely* from other adverbs (i.e., *totally*, *completely*, *perfectly*, *entirely*, and

6) *Totally* is reported to prefer the negative collocate three times more than the positive collocate in BNC and Brown corpus (Cho 2011).

utterly) for being a responsive token. However, *totally*, which does not have such a semantic preference co-occurring with an affirmative token, is still frequently used as an affirmative response token in Valley Girl talk as follows⁷⁾:

(29) (Square Pegs)

Marshall: We're *totally* different bands

Johnny: *Totally.*

The following is another case, where *totally* is used to express strong agreement to the interlocutor:

(30) (House)

Cameron: So, wait, *Like*, I can, *like*, lie to House but, *like*, not to a patient?

Cuddy: *Totally.*

The repetition/use of *totally* as a response to the assessment turn conveys that the listener immediately provides agreement with a strong intensity. The following shows that even a grandmother at a party responds with *totally* to the teenager Johnny's assessment.

(31) (Square Pegs) ((at party))

Johnny: *totally* different band

Granny: *totally*

7) The freestanding *totally* as an agreement token is rarely found in adult talks whereas the freestanding *absolutely* is frequently found as in the following example (Cho 2011, Lee 2011):

A: Looks totally different, doesn't it?

B: Absolutely

(32) (Clueless) ((at the robbery))

Cher: It's like a *totally* important designer.

Robber: And I will *totally* shoot you in the head. Get down.

(33)(Valley Girl)

Julie: I'm so sure. Brad's *totally* hot.

Loryn: I think he is *totally* hot.

As is shown in the above examples, we can also find the pervasiveness of repetition in Valley girl talk. For example, we can observe the frequent use of self- and allo-repetition of *totally*. Examples (25)–(28) are cases of self-repetition, repetition by the same speaker in the same turn whereas examples (29)–(33) are cases of allo-repetition, repetition by the different speaker across the turns.

According to Tannen (1987), repetition in conversation helps to create coherence across utterances, which in turn contributes to build on and create interpersonal involvement. She also notes that the conversation of adolescents is particularly rich in repetition.

Given that repetition serves not only to tie part of discourse to other parts, but to tie participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation (Tannen 1987: 584), the repeated use of the typical Valley Girl token *totally* across turns contributes to rarifying/accepting the previous speaker's talk and emphasizing the speaker's own or another's conversational contributions, which in turn helps to create and display agreement and solidarity among interlocutors.

In addition to the repetitive use of certain discourse markers, I find a greater use of the clustering of discourse markers in Valley Girl talk as is illustrated below:

(34) (Clueless)

Cher:so I was *like, totally* buggin'.....

(35) (Valley Girls)

Julie: I can't see you anymore, okay?

Randy: Okay. I know what it is. I know what this is.

It's your fucking friends, right? Shit, Julie, what is this?

It's between you and me... not between the rest of the fucking world.

So fuck off! It's your friends. Fuck you!

Well fuck you, *for sure, like totally!*

In (35) Julie, who is a sweet-natured, if shallow, Valley girl, just dumps Randy because her friends do not approve of Randy. It is in this context where Randy utters "*for sure, like, totally*", which displays a parody of the talk typically used by Valley girls, showing his antipathy towards Julie and her friends. Such use of discourse markers in clusters shows another characteristics of the typical Valley Girl talk.

The clustering (the co-occurrence of discourse particles with other elements) is reported to serve as a linguistic clue to the interpretation of their functions; the five most frequent combinations with *well* in topic shifts, for instance, were *well you know, well now, well I think, oh well* and *we you see* according to Kalland (2001). However, the co-occurrence patterns observed in Valley Girl talk do not serve as such clues; as is shown in the examples above, the functionally not-so-coherent elements co-occur as in *for sure, like, totally*. This suggests that adolescents use of discourse markers do not conform to that of adult speaker.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The examination of the data suggests that the discourse markers carrying textual functions are rarely used in Valspeak. Instead, most of the discourse markers carry interpersonal functions; they are used subjectively to express a response or a reaction to the preceding discourse or attitude towards the preceding or following discourse, expressing agreement/disagreement, for instance, and interpersonally to effect cooperation, sharing, or intimacy between speaker and hearer.

The typical functions found in the use of some discourse markers in Valspeak are hedges or boosters on illocutionary force; *like*, for instance, is also used as a hedge. The loose talk and non-committal stance encoded by the frequent use of *like* reflect the "one-size-fits-all" mentality of the adolescent. The heavy use of *like* in Valspeak demonstrates that the adolescent uses hedging to avoid sounding too assertive. It is the tendency to avoid a definite, forthright statement and the "less-telling, more-supposing tendency" of the adolescent. As is claimed by Andersen (2000: 304), "marking of reduced commitment, whether lexical or epistemic, is the current young generation's conversational contribution that reflects its more general non-committal stance."

Some markers such as *totally*, *so totally*, *duh* function as boosters: they are uttered with heavy emphasis on exaggerating/highlighting the speaker's affective stance. The use of *totally* in its dependent and independent use suggests that teenagers have the tendency to exaggerate when they agree with their conversational partner(s), which is manifested in the repetition of *totally* across the turns, often with the fronting of backvowel as /t^hetəli/.⁸⁾ It is in line with the so-called 'high-involvement style' observed in

8) Beside heavy emphasis given to the pronunciation of certain discourse markers, fronting/unrounding of backvowels as in *totally* /t^hetəli/ was observed in young

adolescent conversation, in which referential meaning is superseded by the more expressive/interactional aspects of language; their conversation typically involves vivid storytelling and the frequent use of reported speech, onomatopoeia and voice quality modulation (Nordberg 1986, Tannen 1984).

The common usages of such markers in Valspeak seem to be the expression of social identity and ingroupness, and reflect adolescents' increasing need to express autonomy from the parent group and to express their drive toward peer group conformity. The heavy and repetitive use of such markers across turns serves to enhance inter-speaker solidarity. It also reflects their feelings of inadequacy in general (Andersen 2000). As such, the use of Valspeak suggests another way of allaying adolescent insecurities; the adolescent exploits the use of hedges such as *like* and boosters such as *totally* in their speech.

The outcome of this study will have significant implications for the field of applied linguistics/language education as well as sociolinguistics and discourse analysis.

First, the phonological realization and sociological characteristics evident in the use of these discourse markers seem to accord with the descriptive properties observed by Brinton (1996), with respect to the phonological reduction and the sociological parameter. Moreover, this study will add another descriptive property to the list of features observed by Brinton (1996: 33–35). Findings from this study, as well as other studies conducted in sociolinguistic perspective, will shed further light on the different kinds of discourse markers having different functions in different

Californian (Hinton et al. 2008) as the California speech style. On the one hand, it is perceived to be the speech of a privileged group of young people – Anglo, urban, and financially secure. On the other hand, this speech style often appears in the parodies and is associated with a vapid, irresponsible, hedonic approach to life, which suggests that fronting of backvowels may be stigmatized.

dialects/registers.

Secondly, by deepening our understanding of how American speakers of Valspeak organize their talk, this study will help us better understand the relationship between the register and structure of talk. This can be done by illuminating the macro social phenomenon of Valspeak from the examination of the micro details in face-to-face interactions. As such, the outcome of this study will prove that age/group-specific variation will be approached from the point of view of pragmatic features, including the communication of speaker attitude, conversational politeness, the organization of discourse so on.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, recognition of age differences in language use should be an incentive to pose a number of questions concerning the nature and extent of age-specific linguistic feature: Does adolescent language differ from the mainstream variety to an extent that justifies the conceptualization of adolescent speech as a separate variety of a language? Why is teenage language different? What sort of social, psychological and cognitive realities are reflected in linguistic variation that crucially depends on the age parameter?

Thirdly, from the perspective of applied linguistics and language education, the findings of this study will further deepen our understanding of how Valspeak, an interesting variety of 'authentic English', is actually used *in situ*, and will serve as an important input in various English language teaching and materials development projects. Furthermore, it will enhance our understanding of the communicative style of the American adolescent, which will in turn facilitate the intercultural communication between the Korean and the English speakers.

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Abstract

The Social Meanings of Discourse Markers in Valspeak: *Like* and *Totally*

Kyung-Hee Suh

The study aims to examine the functions of discourse markers which are commonly found in Valspeak from a sociolinguistic perspective with special reference to the societal norms and interactional principles of the adolescent group. The examination of data suggests that most of the discourse markers carry interpersonal functions rather than textual functions; they are used subjectively to express a response or a reaction to the preceding discourse or attitude towards the preceding or following discourse, expressing agreement/disagreement, for instance, and interpersonally to effect cooperation, sharing, or intimacy between speaker and hearer.

The typical functions found in the use of some discourse markers in Valspeak are hedges or boosters on illocutionary force; *like*, for instance, is also used as a hedge. The loose talk and non-committal stance encoded by the frequent use of *like* reflect the "one-size-fits-all" mentality of the adolescent. The heavy use of *like* in Valspeak demonstrates that the adolescent uses hedging to avoid sounding too assertive. Some markers such as *totally* function as boosters; they are uttered with heavy emphasis on exaggerating/highlighting the speaker's affective stance. The use of *totally* in its dependent and independent use suggests that teenagers have the tendency to exaggerate when they agree with their conversational partner(s), which is manifested in the repetition of *totally* across the turn.

The common usages of such markers in Valspeak seem to be the expression of social identity and ingroupness, and reflect adolescents' increasing need to express autonomy from the parent group and to express their drive toward peer group conformity. The heavy and repetitive use of such markers across turns serves to enhance inter-speaker solidarity. At the same time, its heavy use reflects their feelings of inadequacy in general (Andersen 2000). As such, the use of Valspeak suggests another way of allaying adolescent insecurities.

By deepening our understanding of how American speakers of Valspeak organize their talk, this study will help us better understand the relationship between the register and structure of talk. The finding will illuminate the macro social phenomenon of Valspeak from the examination of the micro details in face-to-face interactions.

Key words: discourse marker, textual functions, interpersonal functions, Valspeak/Valley Girl talk, social meaning, maximizer
담화표지, 텍스트구성기능, 대인적 기능, 발리걸 토크, 사회적 의미, 극대사

논문접수일: 2011. 10. 02

심사완료일: 2011. 12. 05

게재확정일: 2011. 12. 20

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