

Running Head: PLACING LIKE IN TELLING STORIES

This paper was accepted for publication in *Discourse Studies* and the final (edited, revised and typeset) version of this paper was published in *Discourse Studies*, Vol 8(6): 723–743, by Sage Publications Ltd, All right reserved © Sage Publications Ltd, 2006.

Placing Like in Telling Stories

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Keywords: discourse markers, ums and uhs, fillers, spontaneous speech

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Abstract

The discourse marker use of the word *like* (“we hitch a ride out of there with uh this *like* one crazy *like* music major guy”) is considered by many to be superfluously sprinkled into talk, a bad habit best avoided. But a comparison of the use of *like* in successive tellings of stories demonstrates that *like* can be anticipated in advance and planned into stories. In this way, *like* is similar to other words and phrases tellers recycle during story-telling. The anticipation of *like* contrasted with the uses of other discourse markers such as *oh*, *you know*, and *well*, which almost never re-occurred in similar locations across tellings. *Um* and *uh* did sometimes re-occur; these uses are contrasted with *like*. Although discourse markers are generally used on the fly to handle various issues that come up in coordinating talk as it unfolds, *like* can be used as an integral part of the story -- a marked contrast to the prevalent idea that *likes* are speech tics.

## Placing Like in Telling Stories

*Like* is one of many *collateral signals* conversational participants use to coordinate their speech production and comprehension processes (Clark, 1996). For example, speakers can use *oh* when they forgot part of their story and want to indicate that what they are about to say will be disjointed from what they just said (Fox Tree & Schrock, 1999; Heritage, 1984), as in the example “I was running and then *oh*- here’s another- another tidbit the captain of the team really didn’t like me at all” (all examples are from student conversations). They can use *I mean* to indicate upcoming revision (Schiffrin, 1987), as in “this big electric keyboard *I mean* electric organ.” They can use *you know* to invite addressees to fill in off-record information (Jucker & Smith, 1998), as in “it was like the best vibes ever in the room, like everybody was um was, just in in love, *you know*.” They can use *well* to indicate a mismatch between what’s about to be said and what’s expected to be said (Jucker, 1993), or to assure that’s what’s about to be said is relevant (Blakemore, 2002), as in “We were so in love with him, *well* I still am.” They can use *I dunno* as a disclaimer, as in “he thought we’d get bad luck or something *I dunno* superstitious coaches” (Diani, 2004). And they can use *um* and *uh* to indicate the anticipation of upcoming delay in speech (Clark & Fox Tree, 2002; Smith & Clark, 1993), as in “and, *um*, I’m like blanking right now.”

The term *collateral signal* encompasses a broad set of speech phenomena, including not only *discourse markers* such as *I mean*, *you know*, *like*, *oh*, *well*, and *I dunno* and *speech fillers* such as *um* and *uh*, but gestures and prosodic information (Clark, 1996). The work here focuses on discourse markers and fillers, with particular attention to the use of *like*. There are three main uses of *like*: (1) propositional uses, such as “the story kinda goes *like* this” and “she’d *like* to pay ten cents,” (2) enquoting uses, such as “we were *like*, ‘oh, we gotta leave early in the morning’”

and “he’s *like*, ‘yeah, alright,’” and (3) discourse marker uses, such as “my mask *like* started leaking,” “they were *like* setting up the tent,” and “I’m gonna *like* die.” Both propositional and enquoting uses are conventional word uses, although for many the use of enquoting *like* has a marked informality or youthful quality to it (see Blyth, Recktenwald, & Wang, 1990, Cukor-Avila, 2002, or Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999, for discussion of enquoting *like*). In the current corpus, *like* was more common than any other enquoting device, including *said* (Fox Tree & Tomlinson, unpublished). Nonetheless, discourse marker *like* is much more common than enquoting *like*, on the order of six to nine times (Dailey-O’Cain, 2000; Fuller, 2003), and it is this use of *like* which is the focus of the current study.

For all discourse markers, uses can be described as either informing about the talk at hand (the propositional content to be conveyed), a *content* use, or informing about how to process the talk (negotiating meaning between conversational participants), an *interactional* use (see also Erman, 1992, regarding *textual* and *interactional* uses, and Östman, 1981, regarding *coherence* and *politeness levels*, and Jucker & Ziv, 1998, regarding *text-structuring* and *markers of speaker-hearer intentions*, among other terms). Differentiating between content and interactional uses can be difficult (Erman, 1992; Jucker & Ziv, 1998; Östman, 1981). One way to do so is to explore how people use discourse markers upon successive tellings of a story to different addressees. Because interactional uses are tied to the moment of use and the speakers engaged in the conversation, interactional uses should not repeat on successive story tellings. But because successive tellings may include similar words and phrases to describe a concept, content uses may re-occur. Still, discourse markers are defined as not tied to grammatical structure (see Jucker & Ziv, 1998, for overview), and therefore re-occurrences may be too infrequent for useful measurement.

Re-occurrences are especially unlikely given the view that discourse markers are produced on the fly in the negotiation of talk as it unfolds (Fox Tree, 2000). For example, a speaker wouldn't plan an *oh* in advance of a conversation because the speaker wouldn't know while planning a story that a piece of information would be forgotten in telling the story. Of course, speakers can plan *ohs* in advance for rhetorical effect; for example, they can decide in advance to indicate that they are receiving new information when they actually aren't (Fox Tree & Schrock, 1999). But this case works to deceive precisely because listeners generally understand *oh* to be used spontaneously to indicate an actual change of state (such as from not knowing to knowing something). Similarly, *you know* is thought to invite addressees to fill in off-record information; theoretically, at the moment it is used, listeners determine what information is being left off record and why. This use relies on the common ground between the speaker and listener and is finely tuned to the current needs of conversational participants (Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002). Of course, once again, the *you know* could be planned in advance, such as if the story-teller anticipates a risqué allusion, as in the following discussion of contraceptives: "She keeps asking um if they're guaranteed to work and he says that he really can't do that, it's really hard to tell with *you know* these type of things." Generally, however, collateral signals work to serve the momentary needs of conversational participants.

As part of the collateral track, discourse markers are comments on the way the primary content of the conversation, the typical words, should be interpreted (Clark, 1996). This running commentary changes across conversational participants and circumstances. People report feeling more comfortable using *like*, *you know*, and *um* and *uh* with particular people (Fox Tree, unpublished). For example, they may feel more comfortable using *you know* to invite inferences from some addressees over others (see Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002, for review). As another

example, people use more *ums* and *uhs* when they are in situations where they have more delay; for example, when they are about to say something they find difficult to say, or when they are manufacturing a lie (see Fox Tree, 2002, for review). They use fewer when they are not having trouble speaking, when they are concentrating on avoiding saying *um* or *uh*, and when they don't care about indicating delay (see Clark & Fox Tree, 2002, for review).

While a story may contain phrases that are repeated across multiple tellings, perhaps even sentences that are repeated, there has been neither theoretical suggestion nor empirical evidence that people repeat discourse markers in retelling stories. The primary reason for this is that the need for discourse markers changes with each new occasion of speaking. For example, upcoming delay in speech cannot be anticipated precisely, as it depends on many factors. These include the exact words speakers plan to use, the sentence structures speakers plan to use, how much interference speakers experience from other thoughts concurrently running through their minds, and things going on in the environment around the speakers. Speakers may also experience delays in speaking from addressee feedback; if speakers notice addressee facial expressions indicating confusion, they may decide to rephrase what they are saying, adding delay to their talk and increasing their use of *ums* and *uhs*.

Of course, discourse markers could occur in the same location: a speaker could, coincidentally, forget the same piece of information at the same time in the first and second tellings of a story, and produce an *oh* in the same locations in the stories to mark this realization. They could also repeat a story that included a verbatim reporting of what someone said where the verbatim report included a marker, such as “and I was like, ‘*well* that’s dumb.’” Speakers could choose to leave off-record the same information, such as avoiding saying *contraceptive devices* in “it’s really hard to tell with *you know* these type of things.” Speakers could also use discourse

markers in ways that have specific roles with respect to story-telling; in particular, the use of *um* in the expressions *and um*, *but um*, or *so um* (Clark & Fox Tree, 2002). These expressions are typically used at the start of utterances (Bell, Jurafsky, Fosler-Lussier, Girand, Gregory, Gildea, 2003; Fox Tree, 1995), and as such may occur in similar locations in multiple tellings (in the analyses, these expression will be grouped together under the category *andum*, reflecting the fact that *um* is usually cliticized onto the prior word, as in “an.dum” and “so.wum;” see Clark & Fox Tree, 2002). Other expressions likely to re-occur are those used at the start of quotations, such as *well* in “she said, ‘well, what do I feed it?’” or in conventionalized phrases, such as the *oh* in *oh sorry* (Aijmer, 1987). So, although discourse markers are generally used at a particular moment for a particular purpose in a particular conversation to a particular addressee, the reoccurrence of some markers under some circumstances would not be extraordinary.

What would be extraordinary, however, would be the re-use of *like*, given the popular view that *like* is a garbage word strewn throughout speech, as typified by the following example:

- (1) He’s *like* a political rapper I guess. I hadn’t really heard of him before but he’s pretty popular *like* from the crowd cause *like* by then *like* the crowd had *like* really built up. There was *like* a lot of people there.

This interactional approach to the use of *like* comes in three forms: *random-sprinkling*, *purposeful-but-substitutable*, and *particular-purpose-at-a-particular-time* (see Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002, for similar discussion of *you know* and *I mean*).

The random-sprinkling view is the most ubiquitous. It ranges from the positively-slanted view that *like* is a “stylistic marker” of casual speech (Fuller, 2003: 369) or conveyor of social information (Dailey-O’Cain, 2000; Jucker, Smith, & Lüdge, 2003; Valentine, 1991), to neutral approaches that *like* is sprinkled into talk for no useful purpose, to the negatively-slanted view

that *like* is a tic that people should best avoid. Fuller (2003: 369) notes that “*like* has long had the connotation of being a marker of superficiality and lack of intelligence,” but that *like* is pragmatically useful because it “brings the interaction back to a more casual conversational style.” Dailey-O’Cain (2000) found that:

On the positive side, the use of *like* makes the speaker seem more ‘attractive,’ ‘cheerful,’ ‘friendly,’ and ‘successful.’ However, it is also associated with the speaker seeming less ‘educated,’ ‘intelligent,’ and ‘interesting’ (although ‘intelligent’ and ‘interesting’ are not statistically significant), so the use of *like* is perceived as mixed, or as both positive and negative at the same time. (p. 75)

And Valentine (1991: 332) noted that even in Indian English *like* conveys “some of the meaning and sense of superficiality” found in American English. Almost any guide to public speaking will propound the view that *like* is harmful to communication, perhaps best encapsulated by the common label *verbal virus*, as described in the following newspaper column (Rank, 2004):

Yesterday I discovered a plot to overthrow the English language. It turns out that a **verbal virus** has been unleashed on our culture that threatens to destroy nearly 10,000 years of oral communication. This little linguistic black plague has infected nearly everyone in Generation Y, and it’s only four letters long: L-I-K-E.

Recommended cures are typified by the following (Petersen, 2004):

Fed-up teachers are turning their classrooms into “like”-free zones. Even speech pathologists are being called in to help break the habit, at rates of as much as \$100 an hour, for which they teach such techniques as tape recording or videotaping the afflicted as a kind of shock therapy to show them how “like”-infused they really are. (p. 4)

The pervasiveness of this negative message has affected laypeople's attitudes. In one survey, 77% of respondents reported trying to avoid saying *like* at some time or other (Fox Tree, unpublished).

The random-sprinkling view may be especially widespread because people have trouble identifying a purpose for *like*. In a survey of students' intuitive beliefs of the meaning of *like*, 23%, could not come up with a meaning, or described it as meaning nothing; this contrasts with only 7% who could not come up with a meaning for *um*, *uh*, or *you know*, or rated them as meaning nothing (Fox Tree, unpublished). In addition, 34% of respondents gave a version of the contagion hypothesis when asked why people used *likes*: using *like* is a habit caught from others. Only 3% offered this reason in evaluating why people used *um*, *uh*, or *you know* (Fox Tree, unpublished).

The purposeful-but-substitutable view is also widely held. In the same survey of folk notions, 9% of respondents described *like* as meaning the same as another discourse marker, such as *I mean* or *you know*. But an even greater percentage, 23%, described *like*'s meaning as equivalent to one particular group of collateral signals, *um* and *uh*. For contrast, no respondent in the survey of intuitive meanings described *you know*'s meaning as equivalent to *um* or *uh* (or *um*'s and *uh*'s meanings as equivalent to any other marker). Although not many scientists describe *like* as equivalent to *um* or *uh* (Valentine, 1991: 332, calls *like* a "place filler"), the concept is common in the popular imagination, as evidenced by definitions produced on public dictionary websites:

- (2) "In America, since the 1980's the word 'like' has been used in the same way as 'um' or 'uh' as filler words" (Wikipedia, 2006).
- (3) "*Like* can also be used in much the same way as *um*" (Answers.com, 2006)

- (4) “often used as an almost meaningless filler”(WordWeb Online, 2006)
- (5) “An overused filler word said by many young Americans. Actually, it seems to have entered practically everyone’s vocabulary” (Netlingo.com, 2006)
- (6) “A filler word, interchangeable with ‘uh’” (Urban Dictionary, 2006)
- (7) “A word used as filler while thinking; interchangeable with ‘um’” (Urban Dictionary, 2006)

In this view, *like* is not randomly sprinkled, but it is not an independent word either; its use is interchangeable with other expressions.

In contrast to the random-sprinkling and substitutable views, many scientific approaches to *like* highlight *like*’s unique contribution. Although scientists generally agree that *like* is used for particular purposes at particular times, there is debate about what exactly the purpose is; *like* has been described as possessing “extreme flexibility” (Andersen, 1998: 153). Hypotheses include that *like* is used (1) as a hedge (Aijmer, 1986; Jucker et al., 2003, Underhill, 1988), (2) to focus on upcoming talk (Underhill, 1988), (3) as a way “to express involvement with the listener” (Aijmer, 1986: 14) or “invite collaboration” (Jucker et al., 2003: 1750), and (4) to indicate lexical access problems (Siegel, 2002).

Many researchers have converged on the idea that *like* is used to indicate that what’s being said is not exactly what’s on the speaker’s mind, but rather a “loose rendering” (Andersen, 1998: 158; see also Schourup, 1985, and Siegel, 2002). This does not mean that the speaker’s intention is loose, but rather that the words used to express the idea are not fully reflective of the intention (Andersen, 1998). Some argue that *like* marks not just a mismatch, but a minor mismatch (Siegel, 2002). Others argue that *like* may be best viewed as a precise way of indicating imprecision. Much as describing an age as “almost 40” can convey a clearer meaning

than saying “38” (Jucker et al, 2003: 1761), *like* can be used to convey that the most useful information is imprecise rather than precise (Jucker et al, 2003: 1759). For example, saying that a wait lasted “for *like* two hours” highlights what’s meant by a wait of that length, rather than precisely expressing the length of the wait. As Jucker et al. (2003) put it:

We argue that more precise expressions imply to the listener that more individuation and focus is needed, whereas less precise expressions imply that a referent can remain in the background and that processing resources should be directed to other elements of the situation. (p. 1743)

That is, *like* provides information to addressees about how to interpret the upcoming talk.

So, even though *like* may appear before numbers and frequencies, it does not necessarily indicate approximation; indeed, the argument has been made repeatedly that *like* does not mean *approximately* (see Andersen, 1998; Fuller, 2003; Siegel, 2002; Underhill, 1988). By analogy, saying “they were *like* setting up the tent” differs from “they were setting up the tent” because it provides the extra information that there is something unsaid about the expression “setting up the tent,” but not necessarily that they were doing something that could be approximately characterized at tent-setting-up. From a precisely-placed functional-*like* perspective, *like* may appear as a product of an individual’s speaking style because those who want to mark discrepancies between what they are saying and what they are thinking will be more likely to use *like*.

Unlike random-sprinkling and purposeful-but-substitutable, the particular-purpose-at-a-particular-time approach encompasses both interactional and context uses. Insofar as the conversational participants, the thoughts being expressed, and the utterances used to express them change over time, the use of *like* should also change, both in placement and quantity across

dialogues. For example, one hypothesis is that *like* is a “real-time marker of lexical indecision,” and that consequently *likes* increase as planning time decreases (Siegel, 2002, 66). This would lead to the prediction that there are fewer *likes* in a subsequent telling of a story compared to the first telling, because the story has already been planned and produced. The fact that *like* does possess a free-floating grammaticality (Siegel, 2002) further suggests that *like* is not planned in advance.

On the other hand, insofar as the thoughts being expressed and the utterances used to express them may not change that drastically over time, *like* may occur in similar, perhaps even exact, locations across multiple tellings. That is, as a precise marker of imprecision, *like* may be not only informative, but obligatory for the expression of some ideas. Only the particular-purpose-at-a-particular-time approach allows the use of *like* to be decoupled from the dynamics of the particular conversation in which it occurs.

To test these hypotheses, students told the same personal story twice and their use of discourse markers was counted and compared. Tellers first told their story to a fellow experimental participant. After they were finished, they were asked, without warning, to tell the same story to another fellow experimental participant. To assess the influence of discourse markers on addressees, some of the addressees retold the tellers’ stories to a research assistant, who was also an undergraduate student. The markers evaluated were *um* and *uh*, *like*, *you know*, *I mean*, *oh*, *well*, and *I dunno*. These were the most common markers in the corpus.

If *like* is a marker of loose use of language arising out of planning decisions, then people should not reuse *like* in similar locations, except in cases of similar planning difficulty. If *like* is a marker of personal style, or a bad habit caught from others, then people should also not reuse *like* in similar locations, and should further demonstrate a sprinkling pattern (that is, the *likes* should

not necessarily be associated with planning problems). If *like* is a marker of loose use of language that is tied to surrounding words, then people should sometimes reuse *like* at similar positions when telling stories on multiple occasions. If *ums* and *likes* are similar, then speakers who used a lot of *ums* should also use a lot of *likes*. If *ums* and *likes* trade off, then those who use more *ums* should use fewer *likes*. Finally, depending on whether *likes* are linked to the propositional content of the utterances or address the current collaborative needs of conversational participants, addressees may or may not use *likes* in the same or similar locations when retelling a speaker's story to a new listener.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Eighteen trios of people (54 people total) participated in exchange for course credit. They were randomly assigned to the roles of Speaker, Listener 1, or Listener 2, although they were not informed of these labels.

#### *Procedure*

While Listener 2 completed an unrelated task in another room, the Speaker was instructed to spend up to fifteen minutes telling Listener 1 about an event they experienced. Participants were given the following list of topics to choose from: (1) a concert you attended that you enjoyed, or hated, (2) a camping trip that you enjoyed, (3) the day you moved to UCSC, (4) a memorable experience you had playing a sport, (5) a vacation that was fun, or not so fun, and (6) a time that your car broke down on the road. After the story was told, Listener 1 left the room and Listener 2 entered. The Speaker was then asked to tell the same story again; this was the moment that Speakers discovered they would be telling their stories twice. Listeners were instructed not to ask Speakers questions or make comments about the stories. While the Speakers

were retelling their stories to Listener 2s, 11 of the 18 Listener 1s retold the Speakers' stories to a research assistant in a separate room. Speakers' stories were recorded onto DAT audio tape.

Listener 1 retellings were recorded onto audio cassette.

### *Coding*

The tapes were transcribed and double-checked by a minimum of three people. Four coders then identified every discourse marker use of *like*, *um*, *uh*, *you know*, *I mean*, *I don't know*, *oh*, and *well* in the corpus. The coders then compared the two tellings of the same story and identified any discourse markers that occurred in *similar* or *exact* locations. Two discourse markers were deemed to have occurred in similar locations if they were within a few words of each other in similar phrases, as in the following examples:

- (8) First Telling: and he walked up with *like* the bottle  
       Second Telling: and my brother had *like* a Heineken bottle
- (9) First Telling: he's *like* legendary  
       Second Telling: he's *like* a legend practically
- (10) First Telling: we *like* had this huge party  
       Second Telling: we had *like* this gnarly party
- (11) First Telling: and *like* a stage  
       Second Telling: and this *like* stage

If they preceded identical syntactic and semantic information, they were further coded as exact, with the provision that up to one content word from the first telling could be replaced by a homonym in the second telling, as in the following examples:

- (12) First Telling: their drummer always *like* flails around more than most drummers  
       Second Telling: just always *like* flails around ridiculously

- (13) First Telling: people were coming and *like* going to the bathroom  
Second Telling: people were coming and *like* using the bathroom
- (14) First Telling: drive over *like* bumpy roads  
Second Telling: go over *like* unpaved roads
- (15) First Telling: there was *like* a mountainside  
Second Telling: there was *like* this hillside

In some cases, the discourse markers preceded verbatim information in the two tellings; these occurrences were grouped with exact occurrences, as in the following:

- (16) First and Second Tellings: I was *like* really excited
- (17) First and Second Tellings: four *like* skinny guys
- (18) First and Second Tellings: it was *like* really empty
- (19) First and Second Telling: he's been *like* rapping
- (20) First and Second Tellings: it was *like* the first time I'd been away from home
- (21) First Telling: that was *like* the size of this room  
Second Telling: the whole clinic was *like* the size of this room

Every discourse marker use of the primary discourse markers in this corpus was counted, even though in some specific cases, the uses arguably differ from each other. In particular, cases of *ums* following conjunctions were counted, even though these uses typically occur at the beginning of ideas in a story, and may be more likely to re-occur in the same location relative to *ums* that do not follow conjunctions (in this corpus, there were no cases of repeating *uhs* following conjunctions, only repeating *ums*).

## Results

*Like* was the most common discourse marker in the corpus. There were about as many *likes* as all the other discourse markers combined (see Table 1). At the same time, there is huge variation in individual speakers' uses of discourse markers. One speaker used only 1 *like* in a story, and another used 116. The average use was 25 (s.d. 26) and the median was 14. *Ums* and *uhs* ranged from 3 to 47, with an average of 17 (s.d. 11) and median of 13. The other markers were used much less frequently, measured as both averages and medians: *you know* ranged from 0 to 18 with an average of 2 (s.d. 4) and median of 0; *oh* ranged from 0 to 15 with an average of 2 (s.d. 3) and median of 1; *well* ranged from 0 to 7 with an average of 1 (s.d. 1) and median of 0; *I don't know* ranged from 0 to 4 with an average of 1 (s.d. 1) and median and 1; *I mean* ranged from 0 to 7 with an average of 1 (s.d. 1) and median of 0.

*First versus Second Telling*

Although speakers varied greatly in how many words they used to tell their stories -- from 207 to 2069 words -- the number of words used in the first and second tellings did not differ reliably, 899 (s.d. 442) words in the first telling to 808 (s.d. 403) words in the second telling,  $t(17) = 1.2, p = .25$ . Speakers were also internally consistent in story length: both a speaker's stories were equally short or equally long,  $r(18) = .72, p = .001$ . That is, the average across the first and second tellings were not similar because some speakers told a second story that was longer while others told a second story that was shorter. The consistency of story length demonstrates that speakers did not shorten their second versions as they sometimes do with repeat descriptions (Isaacs & Clark, 1987); this may be because the current speakers had different addressees in the two tellings.

The changing of addressees and the repetition of stories did not affect the percentage of markers used, with the exception of *I mean*. Percentage was calculated as the number of uses of a marker divided by the number of words in the story. In the first and second tellings, speakers used equivalent percentages of *like* (2.5% to 2.7%,  $t(17) = .83, p = .42$ ), *ums* and *uhs* (1.9% to 2.8%,  $t(17) = 1.71, p = .11$ ), *I don't knows* (.1% to .2%,  $t(17) = .96, p = .35$ ), *you knows* (.2% to .6%,  $t(17) = .88, p = .94$ ), *ohs* (.3% in both,  $t(17) = .05, p = .96$ ), and *wells* (.1% in both,  $t(17) = .08, p = .94$ ). However, they used three times as many *I means* in the second tellings (.03% to .1%,  $t(17) = 2.13, p = .05$ ). This can be interpreted as reflecting speaker's greater adjustment of talk when telling the story a second time, possibly in efforts to make the two stories match as closely as possible.

There was compelling evidence that the use of *like*, *you know*, and *oh* reflected individual speaker's styles. Much as some speakers told short stories and some told long stories (an individual speaker style), some speakers used few *likes* and some used many,  $r(18) = .91, p < .001$  (correlating *likes* in the first and second tellings). Speakers were likewise dramatically consistent in their use of *you know*,  $r(18) = .85, p < .001$ , and *oh*,  $r(18) = .64, p = .004$ . They were not consistent in their uses of *um* and *uh* ( $r(18) = .32, p = .2$ ), *I don't know* ( $r(18) = .35, p = .16$ ), *well* ( $r(18) = .25, p = .33$ ), or *I mean* ( $r(18) = .13, p = .6$ ). This demonstrates that people's rate of *like* use was also not modulated by addressees. Of course, addressees in this study were similar in the two tellings – in both cases, addressees were other students from the teller's psychology course. It would be premature to conclude that addressees have no effect on tellers' rates of discourse marker use. Indeed, people report that they change their uses of *like*, *you know*, and *um* and *uh* with different addressees, such as professors versus family (Fox Tree, unpublished), and other researchers have also documented changes in use depending on

addressee (for review, see Clark & Fox Tree, 2002, regarding *ums* and *uhs* and Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002, regarding *you knows* and *I means*).

### *Recycling of Collateral Signals*

The only collateral signals that re-occurred in similar or exact locations with any frequency were the two least likely to re-occur a priori, *like* and *um/uh*. The recyclability of *ums* and *uhs* is overestimated, however, because it includes the arguably different expressions best described as *andums*. Including *andums*, people were more likely to recycle the position of *likes* than the position of *ums* and *uhs* when they retold a story,  $t(17) = 2.34, p = .03$ ; this is even starker if only exact locations are tested,  $t(17) = 4.1, p = .001$ , or if *andums* are excluded,  $t(17) = 4.84, p < .001$ . Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1: Number of Collateral Signals in Similar and Exact Locations

Collateral Signal	Total Number	Total Similar	Total Exact	(Similar + Exact)/Total
Like	885	100	96 (22 verbatim)	22%
Um and Uh	614	36 (20 andums)	20 (7 andums)	9%
You know	77	4	0	5%
Oh	86	2	4	7%
Well	33	0	2	6%
I don't know	39	0	0	0%
I mean	18	0	0	0%

The nine pairs of similar and exact *ums* and *uhs* that do not include an *andum*-type expression can be divided into two groups. One group consisted of cases where *um* or *uh* is used right at the beginning of the narrative, as follows:

- (22) First Telling: I hope you're ready for a novel here cause *uh* this is a story about the time that I moved up to Santa Cruz  
 Second Telling: Okay here I go *um* basically this is a story about sh\*t-luck I had coming up to Santa Cruz
- (23) First Telling: This is going to be about one of my camping trips *um* I went- last summer we went to the Mineral King Valley

Second Telling: I'm telling you about one of my camping trips that I had *um* I went on the camping trip last summer

(24) First Telling: *um* I'm going to be talking about a camping trip experience

Second Telling: *um* I'm gonna talk about a camping trip

(25) First Telling: some of my friends from the floor down the hall *uh* went to a concert

Second Telling: I guess about two weeks ago *um* went to a concert [sic]

The other group consisted of cases where *um* and *uh* is used in remembering a name, a time, or an element of a list, as follows:

(26) First Telling: my family and I went to Hawaii *um* I think it was my sophomore summer

Second Telling: I'm going to tell you about the best vacation that I had *um* when I was a sophomore

(27) First Telling: The first performers that were on were *uh* Jurassic Five

Second Telling: I went to see *um* Jurassic Five

(28) First Telling: we didn't bring *uh* like something to help us

Second Telling: we didn't bring *um* God I don't even know what it's called

(29) First Telling: *um* I went some time in July

Second Telling: *um* so we actually went sometime in like mid-July

(30) First Telling: So what else did I do? *Um* I just remember we had to sing songs

Second Telling: *um* what else, we sang songs

*Like* was not used in recycled positions at the beginning of a narrative. *Like* was, however, recycled before some names and times. Of the 98 pairs of *likes*, 19 pairs were quantities (19%).

Of these 19, 13 pairs were times, such as in the verbatim recycling of the expressions “for *like* twenty years” and “at *like* nine o’clock.” *Like* was recycled before names in 2 pairs: the verbatim recycling of “we flew to *like* Dallas” and the similar recycling of “gave us *like* Oakes pride,” where Oakes is the name of a local dormitory. *Like* was not recycled before elements of a list.

There were almost no cases of any other discourse marker occurring in similar or exact locations in the Speaker’s two story tellings. *Oh* and *well* were recycled exclusively at the beginning of quotes, as in the following:

(31) First Telling: He’s like “*oh* come up to the stage”

Second Telling: He’s like “*oh* hey B-boys come up here”

*You know* was the only expression that recycled in a pattern at all similar to *like*’s use. The following are the cases where *you know* was reused in similar locations:

(32) First Telling: but they’re *you know* they don’t they don’t run very well

Second Telling: it’s my my favorite car but *you know* they’re not they’re not great cars

(33) First Telling: so we sat there for a long time deciding *you know* what to do

Second Telling: we’re trying to figure out while *you know* what are we going to do

No *you knows* were recycled in exactly the same location. In the Listener 1 retellings, no *well*, *oh*, *I mean*, or *you know* was used in a position similar to the Speaker’s.

#### *Um/Uh and Like: Different Versions of the Same Thing?*

Although they may occur in some similar positions before names and times, there is evidence that *like* and *um/uh* are not different versions of the same thing: the two are not correlated with each other,  $r(36) = .1, p = .57$ . If *likes* and *ums/uhs* were interchangeable, those

who use many of one should use many of the other (a positive correlation). If *likes* replace *ums/uhs*, then the more *likes* a speaker used, the fewer *ums* and *uhs* (a negative correlation). Neither is the case; instead, how often people use *like* is unrelated to how often they use *um*.

To further test if *like* is repeated because of planning difficulty, and to compare *like*'s use in planning to *um/uh*'s use, phrases after the recycled *likes* and *um/uhs* were coded for presence of repetitions, restarts, and other discourse markers, as in the following:

- (34) we went to *like* all the the the stands
- (35) I guess *like* it- we had a dance
- (36) so *um* and then there was- it was so hectic
- (37) um *um* oh the night before I packed all my stuff in the car

Of the 56 recycled *um/uhs*, 21, or 38%, were following by repetitions, restarts, or discourse markers -- evidence of speech production trouble. Because the corpus does not contain fine-grained pause information, pausing was not included in the evaluation of production trouble. Of the 196 recycled *likes*, only 25 displayed similar evidence of production trouble, 13%. Most repeated *likes* were produced fluently, which goes against the hypothesis that *likes* are repeated because of similar planning difficulty across stories. Almost three times as many *um/uh* phrases evidenced non-pause planning trouble compared to *like* phrases.

#### *Do Speaker Uses Affect Addressee Retellings?*

Surprisingly, speaker's uses of *ums*, *uhs*, and *likes* may have affected addressees' uses. Eight out of 124 *ums* and *uhs* in Listener 1's retellings of the Speaker's story to the research assistant were in similar or exact locations to where the Speaker had used them. This is about the same percentage of time that the Speaker recycled *ums* and *uhs* across tellings, 7% to 9%. In almost every case, the *ums* and *uhs* were either at the beginning of the story, or before a name or

a time, such as “*um* Jurassic Five.” The two exceptions were cases involving an *andum* expression, such as *but um* in the following:

- (38) Speaker: it was really hard on me *but um*, it was like the first time I’d been away  
 Listener 1: the bus ride was uncomfortable *um* it was her first time being away  
 from home

All of Listener 1’s recycled uses of *um* and *uh* could conceivably be because Listener 1 had production problems in the same locations as the Speaker.

More dramatic was the storytellers’ influencing the listeners’ uses of *likes*. Listener 1s recycled 36 out of 127 *likes* in similar or exact locations, which is about the same percentage of the time that the Speaker recycled *likes* across tellings, 28% to 22%. Eight of the recycled *likes* were before quantities, as in the following:

- (39) Speaker: We probably had a group of *like* eight dads and their daughters  
 Listener 1: it was *like* maybe eight fathers with their daughters

These recyclings could conceivably occur because Listeners want to express the quantities as loosely as the Speakers. But the majority of *likes* that were recycled were not quantities, as was true of the Speaker’s two stories as well, and by about the same percentage, 78% to 81%.

Examples of Listeners’ recycling *likes* in positions similar to Speakers’ follow:

- (40) Speaker: and then there was *like* a balcony thing set up here  
 Listener 1: and there was *like* balconies and stuff
- (41) Speaker: he was *like* pretending to be Jamaican  
 Listener 1: he was *like* some fake Jamaican guy
- (42) Speaker: I hear *like* a loud *like* clang, my gear is just like being destroyed  
 Listener 1: he heard *like* a really loud ugly noise

Even more dramatic, half the Listeners' recycled *likes* occurred in positions where the Speakers recycled their own *likes* between the first and second tellings. That is, although Speakers recycled 22% of their *likes* between Telling 1 and Telling 2, and Listeners recycled 28% of their *likes*, fully 50% of the *likes* that Listeners chose to recycle were also chosen for recycling by the speakers. This demonstrates that there are some *likes* that are more important than others.

Listeners used each of the other discourse markers -- *you know*, *oh*, *well*, *I mean*, and *I dunno* -- in their retellings to the research assistant. But only *um/uh* and *like* were recycled in similar or exact locations from the Speakers' stories.

Once again, *likes* and *ums/uhs* were not correlated in the Listeners' retellings,  $r(11) = .31$ ,  $p = .35$ , supporting the argument that *likes* and *ums/uhs* are not different versions of the same thing. And although Listeners recycled some of the Speakers' *likes* and *ums/uhs*, Listeners' uses were not correlated with Speakers' uses,  $r(11) = .48$ ,  $p = .14$  for *likes* and  $r(11) = .31$ ,  $p = .35$  for *ums/uhs*. This goes against the hypothesis that *like*-use (or *um/uh* use) is catching.

#### Further Evidence

As further support for the observations made in this experiment, thirty retellings of a Monty Python sketch were compared. The sketch was about the purchasing of an ant and its accommodations. These retellings are part of a corpus of stories collected by Herbert Clark at Stanford University in the 1980's. The speakers were analogous to Listener 1 in that they retold someone else's story. They were different in that they heard no discourse marker *likes* in the original story productions. According to the *like*-as-interactional-only approach, there is no reason to expect that any of the retellers' *likes* would occur in similar positions. According to the *like*-as-content-oriented approach, some re-occurrence of *likes* in similar positions might be expected. However, the lack of re-occurrence cannot be accepted as evidence against the *like*-as-

content-oriented approach. Because they were not retelling a story with *likes* in them, and because there was great variation in how the thirty people chose to retell the story, the rate of recycling may be too rare to measure with this set of data.

Analysis revealed that there were four concepts where a *like* was used in similar or exact locations by multiple speakers. One of these concepts was the price of the high-end ants. Each of the thirty speakers mentioned the price range, out of which four inserted *likes* in their retellings:

- (43) they vary in price from five to *like* twenty cents
- (44) and *like* twenty cents for a champion ant
- (45) our champion ants are *like* twenty cents
- (46) he goes on to explain to her well there's um *like* five cent ants, ten cent ants, and u- f- *like* a champion ant might be fifteen t- cents

So, of the four people who inserted *like* in describing the price range, three of them inserted *like* in exactly the same place (according to the original story, the champion ants were twenty cents).

Twenty-seven people mentioned the overall cost. Of these, three inserted *likes*:

- (47) it was *like* a hundred dollars and five cents
- (48) it's *like* a hundred and one dollars
- (49) the total of the purchases was *like* I think a hundred and five dollars

The cost, \$100.05, was recollected incorrectly by two of these three retellers. But the cost was recollected incorrectly by six of the twenty-four people who did not use *like* in their quantities as well.

*Likes* were inserted in similar locations by multiple retellers even when they were not referring to quantities. Seventeen of the thirty retellers mentioned that the salesperson

recommended a lion's cage for the ant. Of these seventeen, four used *like* when providing this information:

- (50) which was a small *like* miniature *like* lion cage
- (51) and he brought out a big- *like* lion's cage
- (52) and he brought up *like* a fairgates small lion's cage
- (53) he pulled out this little uh *like* lion lion cage tent for an ant

In three of these four cases, *like* was used right before the word *lion*. Nineteen of the thirty provided a reason for purchasing such a large cage, and two of these people used *like* in their explanations:

- (54) it's always nice to have *like* a home base
- (55) everyone needs a place to call home or *like* their headquarters

Both of these *likes* are in similar locations.

In addition to these four concepts where *like* is used by more than one person in similar or exact locations, *like* is used by multiple speakers in reporting about one additional concept. Twenty-three of the thirty people mentioned the extra parts that could be purchased with the cage. Of these, four used *like* when providing the information:

- (56) he also *like* tells her some of the parts of the cage that are *like* extra parts
- (57) and then a third one was *like* a little bell at the top
- (58) and he said also *like* a thing where *like* his- you can up- the ant can go up this thing and ring a bell
- (59) an ant house uh that has kinda *like* a ring and a place where you can do tricks

Other than these examples, *like* use was idiosyncractic.

These examples provide additional evidence for the hypothesis that discourse marker *like* is used to qualify the content of upcoming speech. People spontaneously insert *likes* into stories in similar locations because they share the same need for *like* at those points. Without thirty retellings of the same story, this pattern may not have emerged, given that the original story contained no *likes*.

### Discussion

The discourse marker use of *like*, as in “they were *like* these four *like* skinny guys,” is considered by many to be a bad habit best avoided; a meaningless speech tic superfluously sprinkled into talk. But a comparison of the use of *like* to other discourse markers demonstrates that *like* is used at particular times for particular reasons. When students spontaneously retold spontaneous stories, they used *like* in second story in a similar or exact location about one out of every five times. No other marker was used this way to nearly the same extent.

*Um* and *uh*, the next most prominent markers, occurred in similar or exact locations about one in ten times, but about half of these uses were cases of *um* or *uh* in expressions such as *andum*. The other half consisted of uses of *um* or *uh* right at the beginning of the story, and uses preceding problems producing names, times, and elements of a list. These are all occasions where speakers were likely to have delays in producing speech. Some *likes* also recycled before quantities, including times, and occasionally before names.

But by hypothesis, the use of *ums* and *uhs* versus *likes* is different. Where *um* or *uh* occurred, speakers were having trouble producing the next word or phrase, such as remembering exactly the time or next element in a list. Where *like* occurred, speakers were indicating that the next quantity would be a loose expression. This is demonstrated by the fact that the quantities preceded by a recycled *um* or *uh* were similar across the two tellings, whereas the quantities

preceded by *like* sometimes varied across the two tellings, as in the following:

- (60) First Telling: charged me *like* two hundred, three hundred bucks for it  
 Second Telling: it ended up costing me *like* two hundred and thirty bucks
- (61) First Telling: waited for *like* two hours  
 Second Telling: skateboarding around for *like* two and a half hours
- (62) First Telling: we got back around *like* 2:30  
 Second Telling: we got home *like* really really late *like* at at *like* I don't know *like* 2:30 or 3:00
- (63) First Telling: got to San Francisco *like* twenty minutes later  
 Second Telling: we probably got to Slim's *like* a half-hour later

While recognizing that the small number of cases of discourse markers before quantities precludes firm conclusions, these observations are consistent with the hypotheses that *um* and *uh* function differently from *like*.

Further evidence for the distinction between *ums* and *uhs* and *likes* is provided by the statistical evidence that uses of *like* and *um/uh* were independent of each other. A person could be a *like*-er, but not an *um*-er, or a *like*-er and an *um*-er. Their use of one marker had no implications for their use of the other marker. This makes sense given the hypothesis that *ums* and *uhs* and *likes* are used for different reasons: *ums* and *uhs* to indicate upcoming delay, and *likes* to indicate an upcoming loose use of language. Although *um* and *uh* were the next most frequently recycled discourse markers to *like*, it is not because *like* is the modern *um*.

The other discourse markers in the corpus rarely re-occurred in similar or exact locations, and that makes sense. In particular, there is no reason to expect people to reorder the same ideas

in multiple tellings, and so *oh* would not re-occur in similar locations. The following uses of *oh*, for example, did not re-occur:

- (64) I have a really bad memory but um, *oh*, we also went um parasailing
- (65) [regarding warm-up bands at a concert] and then they put in another group, *oh* wait, it was some, it was some weird guy

The *ohs* that did re-occur were part of a quotation. Similarly, there is no reason to expect speakers to need to readjust speech at the same location in multiple tellings, and so *I mean* should not re-occur in similar locations. The following uses of *I mean*, for example, did not re-occur:

- (66) [upon returning from trip, told friends:] about what a sh\*tty journey I had from Santa Cruz- *I mean* from San Diego
- (67) there was kind of a dam up on the river where you could swim around and shower and- *I mean* it's not really that clean but still

In fact, no *I means* were used in similar or exact locations in multiple tellings. So, *ohs* and *I means* are not likely to re-occur in similar locations, and they don't.

Other discourse markers seemed a priori like they should, at times, re-occur in similar or exact locations. For example, people may want to use *well* to indicate a mismatch between what's about to be said and what's expected at the same point in a story. Or people may want to solicit addressees' mental completion of a thought left off-record with *you know* at similar times in multiple tellings. In this corpus, *well* did not re-occur in similar positions, with the exception of a single use in the expression *oh well*, which has been considered by some to be a conventionalized expression of resignation (Schourup, 2001). Some examples of non-re-occurring *well* follow:

(68) and he's like 'oh Josh got in a car accident,' *well* it turns out that stupid Josh drove us all the way there on a suspended license

(69) the leader like sort of went ahead of us and like didn't stop, so *well* we weren't really lost, it was just because it was dark

*You know*, on the other hand, did re-occur a few times as described earlier, but generally it did not, as in the following cases:

(70) he's furious because by now there are people at his house and he doesn't want them there partying without him, one because he has this huge fear of missing anything, and two it's his house *you know*

(71) it's a convertible and they know we're we're we're looking good *you know* uh stylin'

*I dunno* can be used to soften disagreement or to distance speakers from something they've said (Diani, 2004). This use could recycle in multiple tellings, but it didn't in the current corpus.

Some examples follow:

(72) I think he was trying to sell us marijuana and we were like what? It was so weird and just like *I dunno* it was just beautiful

(73) this was at the Catalyst *I dunno*, have you ever heard of that place? And then um so we went inside and there was like all these tables

So, *well*, *you know*, and *I dunno* might be expected to re-occur in similar locations, but this only happened in a handful of cases.

Although the recyclability of *like* was unknown, most popular conceptions of the use *like* and many scientific explanations suggested that *like* would not re-occur in similar or exact locations in multiple tellings of a story. That is, that *like* was solely an interactional discourse

marker, and not a content one. The hypothesis that *like* is a precise marker of imprecision, however, does suggest that speakers should, at times, re-use *like* at similar points in multiple tellings of a story. The study presented here demonstrated that of all the discourse markers that frequently occurred in the corpus studied, *like* is the most word-like of all. Unlike the other collateral signals, which do seem to be used on the fly for immediate discourse needs, *like* is the one most likely to appear in similar or even the exact same location on successive tellings of a story, indicating that it can be deliberately chosen by speakers as part of the fabric of their narratives, even to the point where a listener would re-use a speaker's *likes*.

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Acknowledgements

This work was supported by faculty research funds granted by the University of California Santa Cruz. I thank the many research assistants who helped me with this project, including Christine Bowen, Erin Bunnell, Melanie Crane, Amanda Gutwirth, KC Moffatt, Jessica Petersen, Sarah Phillips, and Jacqueline Rivers. I also thank Chad Schrock for collecting the early pilot corpus from which I made the observations that form the basis of this experiment, and for helpful discussion of the ideas presented here. Last but not least, I thank Herbert Clark for encouragement and advice regarding an earlier version of this manuscript.

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