

Like in Korean English speech

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Abstract

This article focuses on the use of *like* by Korean speakers of English. South Korea is a fascinating context for world Englishes studies: English is generally learned as a foreign language, but deep political and historical ties facilitate a high visibility and prominent status of the language in Korean society. In this study, the use of *like* by Korean speakers of English with particular attention to discourse-pragmatic aspects are investigated with the help of the Spoken Korean English Corpus (SPOKE). *Like* is a high frequency item in SPOKE and clearly forms part of the Korean English repertoire across its functional range. Even though usage of *like* as discourse marker and particle is influenced by having spent time abroad and (self-reported) English proficiency, it forms part of the repertoire of nearly all surveyed speakers. Quotative *like* has also found a place in the Korean English repertoire, albeit to a lesser degree.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Two consonants and a diphthong (depending, of course, on the variety of English spoken): *like* is an inconspicuous word but, nevertheless, has been at the forefront of much public language stigmatization. The word has been compared to a virus and its use has even been conceptualized as a *like* ‘epidemic’ (Gonsalves, 2017, n.p.). This negativity is made tangible in the following question posted on Quora (a website for asking and answering all kinds of questions):

Why do people use the word “like” as a filler word? How did it spread so quickly when it makes us sound so unintelligent?

(Quora, 2020)

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Reproducing some of the answers further illustrates the, at times extremely, negative attitudes people display towards *like*:

- It's a **verbal tic**, spread **virally** (so to speak) through speech. [...]
- It may also be a proverbial **death knell** for the development of English language, as a proof of our **Western society decaying and cultural decline**. [...] The term "Like" is now an every other word **bastardization** and demeaning cliché of language that now defines English among most young and even middle-aged Americans. [...]
- Filler words [such as *like*] are signs or signals of a **low intellectual capacity**. [...]

(Examples from the above mentioned Quora thread; spelling retained from the original, emphasis added)

These writers (presumably 'native' speakers of English) consider *like* a 'tic', 'a death knell', and a sign of 'cultural decline' as well as 'low intellectual capacity'. However, another answer in this particular thread takes quite a different perspective: 'I guess a good answer, then, is that it's, like, impressively widely applicable'. The number of word classes as which *like* can be used is indeed impressive – D'Arcy (2017, pp. 3–23) lists 11 different ones, plus its use as a suffix (see Section 2.2 for details). This super-versatility, in contrast to the stark stigmatization by speakers, might also be the reason why linguists are fascinated with *like* (as reflected in the plethora of research on this item; see the references and notes in the next section). For scholars of world Englishes, discourse-pragmatic features should be of particular interest. They are often not explicitly taught in school settings and their use by 'non-native' speakers of English, especially in Expanding Circle contexts, could thus be particularly insightful for questions of variety status and norm orientation. Nevertheless, discourse markers have not comprehensively been studied in world Englishes, especially not in contexts where English is learned and used as a foreign language. This might be, at least partially, due to the labor-intensive manual tagging which is often involved in this kind of research. This study contributes to filling this gap by investigating the uses of *like* in South Korea.

In the first part of this article, I will briefly introduce previous research on discourse-pragmatic variation, with a particular focus on discourse markers in world Englishes research in general and previous studies on *like* in different contexts of use (mainly Inner Circle) in particular. This will be followed by a description of the background of this study, that is, English in South Korea (henceforth Korea), and the data and methodology underlying this study: a corpus of spoken Korean English which was manually annotated for the use of *like*. As it turns out, *like* forms an important part of the Korean English discourse-pragmatic repertoire and the remainder of the article surveys the uses and users of *like* as found in the corpus data.

2 | DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC VARIATION

Discourse-pragmatic features are items with a 'range of interpersonal and/or textual functions in discourse' (Pichler, 2016, p. 3). These units of language are surrounded by quite a bit of linguistic controversy, going to the very bones of the matter: what to call them – the most common contenders being *discourse markers* and *discourse particles* (Fischer, 2006, pp. 4–6; Ranger, 2018, p. 2) – and how to define them succinctly and distinctly (see Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011 for an overview). As they often overlap in function with other items, the matter of definition is notoriously difficult (Fischer, 2006, p. 5). Among those functions are conversation management (such as contributing to turn-taking structure, repair, backchannel; Brinton, 1996, p. 37), stance, and discourse coherence, that is, 'how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said' (Schiffrin, 1987/1996, p. 49). Fischer (2006, pp. 8–11) thus suggests taking different dimensions into account when describing discourse-pragmatic features: their integration in the host utterance, function, medium, and the nature of the host unit.

2.1 | Discourse markers and world Englishes

While having been abundantly researched in many L1 varieties, discourse markers have not been extensively studied in the world Englishes paradigm (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011, p. 238). If studies on discourse markers in non-L1 varieties (Inner Circle) can be found, they usually focus on L2 varieties (Outer Circle) neglecting other contexts of English use (that is, Expanding Circle Englishes, English as a lingua franca; but see House, 2009, 2013). These include studies on discourse markers in Indian English (Valentine, 1991; Lange, 2009), Singapore English (Gupta, 2006; Leimgruber, 2016), and Philippine English (Aijmer, 2016; Morales, 2013). Moreover, many studies of non-L1 varieties examine the use of discourse markers borrowed from indigenous languages (rather than the use and functional range of English discourse particles). For example, Unuabonah and Oladipupo (2021) focused on borrowed discourse-pragmatic markers in Nigerian English. These are items such as *jare*, *biko*, *lor*, *shebi*, *shey*, and *fa* (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2021, p. 391) as well as *o*, *sha*, and *abi* (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2018) stemming from various indigenous languages.

In general, there seems to be a tendency for smaller lexical inventories of discourse-pragmatic items in non-L1 English: this concerns, for example, intensifiers (de Klerk, 2005, for Xhosa English in South Africa; Coronel, 2011 for Philippine English), commentary markers (Unuabonah & Gut, 2018, for Nigerian English), and discourse markers with elaborative, inferential, and contrastive function (Unuabonah, 2019 for Nigerian English). Lee (2004) found that different generations (that is, 1st, 1.5, and 2nd) of Korean immigrants in the United States used and had preferences for different discourse markers (regardless of whether they were born in Korea or the United States and regardless of age of immigration). Lee (2004, pp. 125–126) thus concludes that ‘although discourse markers are not taught through formal English instruction they are acquired not only by native speakers but non-native English speakers as well’. Müller (2004) compared elicited American English to the English used by German speakers and observed that, depending on function, *well* is either used more often by the Germans than the Americans, or vice versa. Similar studies have carved out other differences, such as lower overall frequencies of use for specific discourse-pragmatic markers (Fuller, 2003a) or discourse-pragmatic markers in general (Gilquin, 2016, p. 220) by non-native speakers. In addition, it appears that ‘non-native speakers with more exposure to naturalistic English are more likely to use discourse markers (and to use them appropriately)’ (Gilquin, 2016, p. 244). This can be related to an under-representation of discourse-pragmatic features in typical language-teaching materials, the specifics of the classroom setting, and the individual discourse-pragmatic feature repertoire of the language teacher (Gilquin, 2016, p. 216; Hellermann & Vergun, 2007). While a comprehensive overview of the discourse-pragmatic repertoire of Korean English speakers is certainly desirable, the present study begins this investigation by focusing on a single item, that is, *like*, which is at the heart of the following section.

2.2 | Focus on *like*

Like has been in use since at least the Middle English period (D’Arcy, 2017, p. 2). In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), some uses of *like*, for example, as verb or adjective, even date back to the Old English period (OED, 2020). As mentioned before, the range of word classes in which *like* appears is impressive: it can be used as verb, adjective, preposition, noun, conjunction, comparative complementizer, approximative adverb, sentence adverb, discourse marker, discourse particle, or quotative (D’Arcy, 2017, pp. 3–23). In addition, *like* can also be used as a suffix. Examples (1–12) below give one example for each use drawn from either the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SB; Du Bois et al., 2000–2005) or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; Davies, 2009).¹ Transcription symbols (such as lengthening, pauses) have been omitted from the SB examples.

(1) Well that’s what I **like** about fractals. (SB) (verb)

- (2) State Department officials and the **like** people are currently serving, they have listened to the subpoenas and not the instructions from the administration. (COCA, spoken) (adjective)
- (3) he does look **like** a baby Belgian. (SB) (preposition)
- (4) So, this threat on our borders from terrorists, from drug traffickers and the **like** is very serious (COCA, spoken) (noun)
- (5) You mean **like** I do every night? (COCA, spoken) (conjunction)
- (6) I mean it seems **like** she'd pay more attention to her, but maybe it's because she wanted to have a little fun in her life too (SB) (comparative complementizer)
- (7) He was becoming kind of zombie-**like**. (COCA, spoken) (suffix)
- (8) And I sat there for **like** two or three hours. (SB) (approximative adverb)
- (9) And, of course, that alligator enjoys being petted. I'd be happy, too, if my food came right to me and gave me a massage, **like**. (COCA, spoken) (sentence adverb)
- (10) They had heard of each other. **Like**, they knew. (SB) (discourse marker)
- (11) I told you about the time he got **like** a blowjob at the lakefront (SB) (discourse particle)
- (12) So then I went to the psychiatrist and, he's **like** well what's the problem (SB) (quotative)

Of particular interest for this study are instances (10), (11), and (12), as these are the uses of *like* which are usually considered 'discourse-pragmatic': discourse marker, discourse particle, and quotative. While I discuss discourse marker and particle *like* in the same section, quotative *like*, which is used to introduce reported direct speech, thought, or attitude (Fleischman & Yaguello, 2004, pp. 135–138), will be treated separately in this article. Beforehand, however, a short note on the difference between *like* as a discourse **marker** and as a discourse **particle** is in order. Used as a discourse marker (see (13) and (14)), *like* occurs at the left boundary of utterances, 'encodes textual relations' (D'Arcy, 2017, p. 14) such as exemplification, illustration, elaboration, and clarification, and connects the utterance following it to the previous speech. As a discourse particle (see (15) and (16)), however, *like* can occur in different slots within an utterance and functions as subjectivity marker (D'Arcy, 2017, p. 15).

- (13) **Like** I love her but she's like dumb. (TEA,² from D'Arcy, 2017, p. 215)
- (14) **Like** it real cracks me up. (from Drager, 2016, p. 236)
- (15) He **like** sat on a chair and **like** didn't say anything. (TEA, from D'Arcy, 2017, p. 227)
- (16) Lily was **like** checking out my brother. (from Drager, 2016, p. 236)

The functions as discourse marker and discourse particle are also the uses of *like* which have received an abundance of attention by linguists (Buchstaller, 2001; D'Arcy, 2007, 2017; Diskin, 2017; Fuller, 2003b; Miller & Weinert, 1995; Schweinberger, 2020; Tagliamonte, 2005; to name just a few). In non-L1 contexts, however, discourse marker and particle *like* have not been researched extensively and, to the best of my knowledge, no comprehensive study of *like* by Korean English speakers has been conducted yet. The next section will thus describe the background to this study: English in South Korea.

3 | ENGLISH IN KOREA

In the Korean education system, official English education starts in the third grade of elementary school (Garton, 2014). Private English education, however, often starts earlier, for example, through lessons in kindergarten. In general, various additional measures are available to Koreans of all ages when it comes to furthering knowledge of and contact with the English language: attendance at private education institutes (so-called *hagwon*), visiting English villages emulating life in English-speaking countries and staffed with 'native' speakers of English (Lee, 2011), study

abroad, and work abroad. The extreme desire for English as found in Korean society has sometimes been likened by researchers to a disease, most commonly designated 'English Fever' (Park, 2009). *English Fever* refers to Koreans' 'excessive parental efforts in pushing their children to learn English' (Park, 2009, p. 56) as well as individuals' and whole societal groups' extreme efforts in acquiring English.

Particularly relevant for assessing the current notion of English in Korea is the establishment of the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) after World War II, which also brought an end to Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). The USAMGIK governed South Korea for three years, until 1948, after which a local government took over and the US soldiers stationed on the peninsula started to re-deploy or return home (Macdonald, 1990, p. 48). Attacks from North Korean troops in 1950, however, kindled the Korean War, and meant a return of large numbers of American soldiers (Macdonald, 1990, p. 50; ca. 328,000 American soldiers were deployed to the Korean peninsula in this context). A 1953 armistice agreement led to a cease-fire and a subsequent reduction of the US military personnel. Despite the withdrawal of most of the American divisions, around 28,500 US soldiers are still stationed in Korea nowadays (Hayes, 2012). This presence of American military personnel established important points of linguistic and cultural contact with Koreans. In other, more common, areas of life, the presence of English is also persistent and ubiquitous. This concerns not only the education system but also the linguistic landscape (Tan & Tan, 2015). English is visible in many areas of pop culture, such as movies and TV shows (Lee, 2014), advertising (Lee, 2006), and especially popular music/K-Pop (Lawrence, 2012; Rüdiger, 2021), but also in the print media (for example, the English-medium newspapers *The Korea Herald*, *Korea Times*, and *JoongAng Daily*). The level of penetration of English in the Korean society becomes particularly evident when surveying Koreans with little or no proficiency in English. Lee (2016, p. 333) interviewed elderly Koreans learning English, who revealed that 'not knowing English is treated as synonymous with being illiterate or an "ignoramus"'. In general, the participants 'discursively frame their sociolinguistic inadequacy as equivalent to a disability – either physical or intellectual' (Lee, 2016, p. 330). Additionally, they perceive English as being omnipresent; as one of Lee's (2016, p. 331) participants puts it, 'everywhere you go, you see English'. Of particular interest is also the reason why some of the participants expressed a desire to learn English at their old age: to communicate and connect with their grandchildren (Lee, 2016, p. 329). Despite being commonly characterized as a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically homogeneous society (Brown & Koo, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2012), the factors of return migration, tourism, and other short- and long-term stays in Korea by foreigners lead to ever-increasing grounds to use English in the Korean setting. Koreans leave the peninsula for transitional, long-term, or permanent stays in other countries 'in record numbers' (Park & Lo, 2012, p. 148), which then potentially increases the factor of return migration. The prominent role of English is further amplified by processes of globalization and global mobilities, which also apply to the Korean context, where globalization is strongly connected to the English language (Lee, 2011, p. 146).

As this section has demonstrated, there is much more to English in the Korean context than meets the eye, and it seems lackluster to dismiss English as used by Koreans as mere learner language (see also Lee & Jenks's 2017 notion of Korean Englishes, where English is considered a Korean language and which draws attention to the plurality of Englishes in the Korean context). However, despite the interesting contact situation and the highly complex functional and attitudinal ranges that English has in the Korean setting (Park, 2009), only few studies have investigated the actual form(s) of English used by Koreans in non-educational settings. It has, nevertheless, been asserted that English is 'actively [...] adopted, desired, modified, and resignified by Koreans for their own purposes' (Shim & Park, 2008, p. 141). The question of which forms these adoptions, modifications, and resignifications have taken has so far only marginally been addressed from a linguistic point of view. Hadikin (2014) finds that specific collocations and expressions are more or less frequently represented in Korean English speech when compared to British English data and interprets this as an indication that a Korean English variety exists. Jung and Min (1999) investigate the use of modals and prepositions in a Korean English newspaper and find differences in usage frequencies for the modals and semantic range for the analyzed prepositions. Rüdiger (2014, 2017, 2019) identified a range of morpho-syntactic patterns concerning prepositions, pronouns, plural marking on the noun, articles, and verbs. The discourse-pragmatic system of Korean speakers of English has received even more scarce attention in world Englishes research; notable exceptions

are Shim (1999, pp. 254–255), who encountered differences in the degree of formality (without going into any detail) in her study of a Korean high school English textbook, and Leuckert and Rüdiger (2020), who identified relatively low rates of topicalization and high rates of left-dislocation in Korean English discourse.

While filling this gap is of course desirable for the description of Korean English per se, it is even more so when considering modern approaches to world Englishes modelling and theorizing. For example, the Extra- and Intra-territorial Forces (EIF) Model by Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2017) provides a dynamic and integrative model for Englishes across variety types. To place a variety into one of the different stages provided by the model (based on Schneider's 2003, 2007 Dynamic Model), it is necessary to not only have detailed information on the (extra- and intra-territorial) forces at play but also on the resulting linguistic forms and functions. The discourse-pragmatic level might be of particular relevance here, as these forms are often not explicitly taught and might rely more on acquisition via exposure to English. Using the currently available evidence, it has been proposed to place English in Korea between phase 2 (stabilization) and phase 3 (nativization) of the EIF model (Rüdiger, 2020).

4 | DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study stems from the **Spoken Korean English (SPOKE)** corpus. SPOKE was collected in 2014 using the cuppa coffee framework (Rüdiger, 2016). Under this framework, participants in the corpus collection process met with the researcher for short informal conversations over a (usually hot) beverage, preferentially in a café. The interviews were actively framed as 'conversations' with a new acquaintance and as such include nearly equal conversational shares between researcher and participants. In accordance with research ethics, participants were introduced to the research procedure and signed informed consent before the recording started. The research setup established English as natural and common language choice between the German researcher and the Korean speakers. Altogether, 115 Korean speakers are represented in the corpus and the recordings amount to 60 hours (including interviewer speech). The orthographic transcription resulted in ~300,000 words by the Korean speakers (interviewer speech was also transcribed and contributes a further 250,000 words to the overall word count). While most recordings are dyadic conversations between the researcher and one participant, in 10 cases (involving 20 participants) the recordings were made in a triadic constellation. The demographic captured in SPOKE can generally be described as young, educated Koreans. All of them were of Korean nationality and reported having acquired Korean as L1. Sixty-four female and 51 male speakers, with an average age of 27 years (ranging from 18 to 44), contributed material to the corpus. Sixty-five of the speakers were students at the time of recording, 42 were employed in various professions, four were both working and studying, and four were currently unemployed. As described above, discourse-pragmatic variation has so far been understudied in world Englishes research, particularly in Expanding Circle contexts. This study sets out to contribute fundamental insight into the use of *like* by Korean speakers of English. While it would be equally worthwhile to also study other discourse markers and particles, *like* was selected as the first item to be investigated in detail as it coincidentally stood out in the investigation of prepositional usage (Rüdiger, 2019, pp. 151–155) and due to the general interest this item has generated across lay and professional discourses alike. Correspondingly, the research questions (RQs) underlying this study were:

RQ1: What role does *like* (across its functional range) play in the Korean English repertoire?

RQ2: Who uses *like* with discourse-pragmatic function in South Korea and how?

Using AntConc (Anthony, 2018), 4,497 instances of *like* were identified in SPOKE (15.0 per thousand words [ptw]). All concordance lines were exported to a spreadsheet program and manually annotated as verb, adjective, noun, preposition, conjunction, comparative complementizer, suffix, approximative adverb, sentence adverb, discourse marker, discourse particle, and quotative (as established by D'Arcy, 2017). An *unclear* and a *repetition* category were added to this. Due to incomplete utterances and false starts, it was not always clear how an instance of *like* had to be

TABLE 1 The functional range of like in SPOKE

	Functional category	Raw frequency	Normalized frequency (ptw)	% of all instances of <i>like</i>
1	Discourse particle	2,095	7.0	46.6%
2	Verb	875	2.9	19.5%
3	Preposition	647	2.2	14.4%
4	Discourse marker	340	1.1	7.6%
5	Approximative adverb	224	0.7	5.0%
6	Quotative	140	0.5	3.1%
7	Comparative complementizer	40	0.1	0.9%
8	Conjunction	17	0.1	0.4%
9	Suffix	1	0.0	0.0%
10	Sentence adverb	0	0.0	0.0%
11	Noun	0	0.0	0.0%
12	Repetition	76	0.3	1.7%
13	Unclear	42	0.1	0.9%
	Σ	4,497	15.0	100%

classified; these items were moved to the unclear category ($n = 42$). In cases where *like* was repeated (as in *like like*) or was part of a repeated phrase (for example, *I was like I was like...*), only the last instance was classified with regard to functional category and the other instances found in the repetition were tagged as 'repetition' ($n = 76$).

5 | LIKE IN KOREAN ENGLISH SPEECH

Like clearly forms part of the Korean English repertoire as it occurs altogether 4,497 times in SPOKE. The manual coding of the data reveals the distribution of functional categories as depicted in Table 1 (the functions considered in this study are set in bold).

On average, each speaker in SPOKE used 21.2 instances of *like* as discourse marker or particle (8.1 ptw). An additional 140 instances of quotative *like* (0.5 ptw) were identified.

5.1 | Like as a discourse marker or discourse particle

There are only four speakers in SPOKE who do not use *like* as discourse marker or particle at all: Participant 2 (male, 29, working in IT), Participant 73 (female, 26, youth education student), Participant 83 (male, 25, electronics student), and Participant 107 (female, 21, business management student). None of them reported a stay abroad experience in an Anglophone context. Even though neither of them used *like* as a quotative either, they did use *like* in the function of verb or preposition. However, there are also speakers who have clearly taken to this item. A case in point is excerpt (17), which was produced by a 24-year-old woman, who, in the example, uses discourse marker and particle *like* 14 times across a span of 131 words (relevant instances marked in bold). The excerpt also includes *like* as verb and approximative adverb, as well as a repeated instance of *like*; those are not of concern here.

(17) he doesn't really like Korean culture **like** he's **like** really not into it I think I I guess **like** **like** now he started to learn Korean because of me I think but **like** (.) yeah I think he had no chance to see **like** real Korean things cause **like** whenever I send **like** pictures of **like** traditional Koreans or like (.) **like** Koreans that I see **like** the way he sees is **like** different so he told me it's **like** really new for him **like** he's like thirty two and he was looking for it for like thirty years and couldn't find it so (.) he just didn't find it interesting but now he's **like** really interested but I mean yah (laughs) I think he would have loved it here though (17j_f24)³

[In this and the following examples, (.) marks a short pause; (2) marks longer pauses, giving the length of the pause in seconds; other material within round brackets gives extra-linguistic material, such as laughter]

The speaker, a student of German language and literature and business administration, had spent eight months in the United States and had a Korean American boyfriend. She is also the most prolific user of *like* with discourse-pragmatic function in the dataset: discourse marker (n = 25; 8.8 ptw), discourse particle (n = 175; 61.2 ptw), and quotative (n = 25; 8.8 ptw). The interview was conducted jointly with her sister (27 years old; also a student of German language and literature), who, despite having spent even more time in the United States (one year), showed lower rates of *like* use: discourse marker (n = 11; 5.9 ptw), discourse particle (n = 51; 27.4 ptw), and quotative (n = 12; 6.4 ptw).

The most common use of *like* in SPOKE is as a discourse particle (n = 2,095), making up approximately half of all uses in the corpus altogether (47%). This in itself is hardly surprising as it is also the most unrestricted use of *like* (as it can occur in any position in the utterance; unlike, for example, nouns, verbs, and so on). As the sheer number of occurrences and examples (18–21) indicate, discourse particle *like* is clearly part of the Korean English pragmatic repertoire.

- (18) that's what I learned **like** from my two different internship (101_f23)
 (19) he was **like** furious that we did block and parking in his private space (48_m19)
 (20) I had to **like** fold my arms like this but my arms automatically **like** hold the airplane (99_f27)
 (21) so (.) like many famousee always come to our school and they tell us about **like** market economy (49_f19)

On rank 4, with 340 instances, is *like* as discourse marker (that is, at the left-periphery of utterances; see examples (22–25)); these add up to 8 per cent of all uses of *like* in the corpus.

- (22) so (.) **like** many famousee always come to our school and they tell us about like market economy (49_f19)
 (23) **like** there were many sort of strange people you know (11_f22)
 (24) **like** one night my sister you know organized like ladies' night to go to the club all together (16j_f27)
 (25) **like** (.) we call it jjimjjilbang⁴ and we stayed in there (37_m23)

Demographically, there is no significant difference in the use of *like* as discourse marker or particle depending on the sex of the speaker. While women, on average, use both discourse marker and particle *like* slightly more often than men (discourse marker: mean 1.2 ptw vs. 0.8 ptw; discourse particle: mean 7.5 ptw vs. 4.5 ptw), the wide spread of observed usage of *like* in both data sets (standard deviation [SD] discourse marker 2.0 for female and 1.8 for male speakers; SD discourse particle 10.9 for female and 4.5 for male speakers) points to no significant difference in the usage pattern of this item related to speaker sex. This is confirmed by a Welch two-sample t-test which results in a p-value of 0.2341 (t = 1.1963, df = 111.41) for discourse markers and a p-value of 0.0675 (t = 1.8476, df = 104.27) for discourse particles. According to results from D'Arcy (2007, p. 396) based on American English, one might have expected a corresponding 'finely articulated' usage pattern of *like* depending on speaker sex; that is, the discourse marker used significantly more by women and the discourse particle more by men (note that D'Arcy, 2007 also distinguished between different uses of the discourse particle). However, this is not the case for the Korean English speakers (on the contrary, the female speakers' usage rate of *like* as a discourse particle is close to being significantly higher when compared to the male speakers with p = 0.0675).

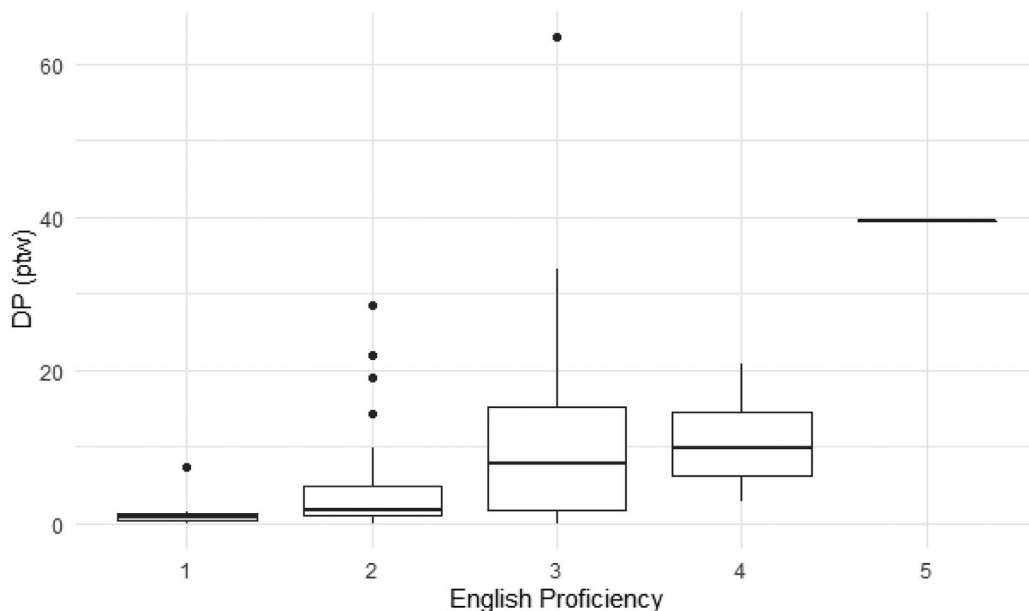


FIGURE 1 Self-rated English proficiency and use of *like* as discourse particle (normalized frequency ptw); figure produced with RStudio (RStudio Team, 2019) and the ggplot2 package (Wickham, 2016)

No significant difference was found either between the groups of students and early professionals (discourse marker: mean 1.1 ptw vs. 1.0 ptw; discourse particle: mean 6.1 ptw vs. 6.6 ptw; Welch t-test discourse marker: $p = 0.7215$, $t = 0.7215$, $df = 87.315$; discourse particle: $p = 0.7972$, $t = -0.25761$, $df = 102.96$). However, speakers who reported having spent time abroad in an Anglophone environment use discourse marker and particle *like* significantly more often than speakers who did not make this experience (discourse marker: 1.2 ptw vs. 0.4 ptw; SD 2.1 and 0.7; Welch t-test: $p = 0.001766$, $t = 3.2033$, $df = 112.91$; discourse particle: 7.3 ptw vs. 2.6 ptw; SD 10.1 and 4.8; Welch t-test: $p = 0.00127$, $t = 3.3205$, $df = 96.268$). Having spent time abroad thus seems to facilitate the adoption of discourse marker and particle *like* into the repertoires of speakers, but high interspeaker variation exists. The corpus speakers also provided a self-rated proficiency rating (from 1 to 5; 1 = beginner, 2 = intermediate, 3 = advanced, 4 = near-native, 5 = native/bilingual) and we can observe a rise of frequency of discourse particle *like* with reported higher confidence in English (see Figure 1).⁵ The picture is less conclusive for use of discourse marker *like* and no clear trend is observable here; this might be due to the overall lower occurrence numbers of *like* in this function. As self-rated proficiency measures are usually problematic (see MacIntyre et al., 1997; Ross, 1998) and due to the uneven distribution of scores (only one participant rated themselves as 5; the other ratings are distributed as follows: beginner $n = 14$, intermediate $n = 62$, advanced $n = 34$, near-native $n = 4$), this should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, it points to a higher use of discourse particle *like* with rising proficiency or, depending on how the self-rating is interpreted, confidence in one's own English skills.

5.2 | *Like* as a filler/disfluency marker

While I refrain here from an in-depth analysis of the discursive functions of discourse marker and particle *like* in SPOKE, a short comment on the use of *like* as a filler and disfluency marker is nevertheless in order. As Lee (2004, p. 117) remarked '[c]oncerning the function of discourse markers, they are often regarded as having a verbal filler function which provides the speaker with linguistic planning time. In this sense, the discourse marker serves as a

hesitation device'. This has been attested in world Englishes studies for *actually* in Xhosa English, which at times is 'used as a filler, when the speaker had nothing to say, or was seeking a word' (de Klerk, 2006, p. 169). However, this is not unique to Expanding Circle or Learner Englishes (D'Arcy, 2017, pp. 15–16). In example (26), the researcher (S) asked about drinking habits and the pressure to drink alcohol. In her answer, the Korean speaker uses two instances of discourse-pragmatic *like* (in italics). Her whole turn, however, is marked by hesitation markers (*uh*), pauses, a repetition (*so so*), and a false start (*he j-*); many of them in very close vicinity to an instance of *like* (most of them within five words to the left or right).

(26) S: isn't it very hard to keep up?

I: *uh* but *like uh* he doesn't want to hurry (.) of drinking *so so like he j-* we just we drink (.) without caring about that

(64_f24)

Pauses, repetitions, and hesitation markers around *like* point towards its use as a filler or disfluency marker. Repetition of *like* itself is, nevertheless, relatively rare ($n = 76$; 0.2 ptw; 2% of all instances of *like*) and thus does not seem to be the main function of this item.

5.3 | Like as a quotative

In 140 instances, the Korean English speakers represented in the corpus employ *like* as a quotative (0.5 ptw). Twenty-eight different speakers thus display that quotative *like* is part of their English repertoire. As examples (27–30) demonstrate, it also occurs together with a variety of introductory elements, for example, *be*, *say*, *ask*, and *zero*:

(27) I *was like* yo back off (17j_f24) [*be* + *like*]

(28) yah he stepped on the bus and my dad *say like* get off (93_f25) [*say* + *like*]

(29) and her boyfriend you know gave us a ride to the home and he was *asking like* are you from China? (16j_f27) [*ask* + *like*]

(30) we always *like oh my god our apartment is so dirty* (86_f24) [*zero* + *like*]

Table 2 lists the verbs used in combination with *like* for quotative function. Eleven verbs (including *zero*) are employed in this regard by the Korean speakers represented in SPOKE. The most prominent one, making up nearly 50 per cent of all quotative *like* instances, is *be*. This is followed by uses of *zero*, *say*, and *ask*. Other verbs are also in use, although they seem to play a more marginal role. Among them is *go*, which is only used once in SPOKE in combination with quotative *like*; see example (31). This particular instance forms part of an animated reproduction of spoken passages related to taking the speaker's mother to an American dance club, originally produced by different actors (that is, the speaker [as in I], the speaker together with her sister [as in we], and the men trying to hit on the mother [as in they]). The speaker uses three different verb plus quotative *like* constructions: *tell them like* (twice), *go like*, and *be like*.

(31) I I went there and *told them like* (.) hey that's (.) you know what that's my mum and *they go like* (.) that's your mum? cool mum can I have your number? and *we were like* yeah yeah (laughs) and *I was telling them like* fuck off (16j_f27)

Of the 28 speakers who use quotative *like* in SPOKE, 10 are men and 18 are women. Altogether the women contribute more instances of quotative *like* ($n = 111$; 6.2 instances per speaker) than the men ($n = 29$; 2.9 instances per speaker). This broadly corresponds to speaker patterns in the United States (Barbieri, 2009) and Canada and Britain (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999). All but two quotative *like* users had spent time abroad. A full overview of the quotative

TABLE 2 Verb + *like* combinations in SPOKE (lemmatized)

X + <i>like</i>	Raw occurrences	% of all quotative <i>like</i>
<i>be</i>	67	47.9%
zero	26	18.6%
<i>say</i>	21	15.0%
<i>ask</i>	11	7.9%
<i>tell</i>	5	3.6%
<i>talk</i>	3	2.1%
<i>think</i>	3	2.1%
<i>answer</i>	1	0.7%
<i>feel</i>	1	0.7%
<i>go</i>	1	0.7%
<i>introduce</i>	1	0.7%
Σ	140	100%

system of spoken Korean English is beyond the scope of this paper, but future studies might want to consider other quotative items as well.

6 | CONCLUSION

This study has shown that *like* is part of the spoken Korean English discursive repertoire, both as discourse marker and particle, as well as quotative. Whereas speaker sex does not play a role in the use of *like* as discourse marker or particle, this factor is relevant for the quotative use. Speakers with experiences abroad and with higher confidence/self-reported English proficiency use *like* more often as discourse-pragmatic marker and particle, but, in general, *like* is well-dispersed across the corpus speakers. It thus forms a part of the overall spoken Korean English repertoire, even though it is used more frequently by particular speaker groups. As discourse markers and particles are outside of the scope of many classroom activities, maybe even more so in the test-driven language learning environment of South Korea (see the background section), this is an important hint towards language contact outside of the classroom setting (such as via pop culture, media consumption, usage with English-speaking acquaintances and friends) and contradicts the conceptualization of Korean English as learner language. In general, this corresponds to the description of the setting and attitudes as outlined in the background section (Section 3), which concluded that English has clearly established a presence beyond the Korean English classroom.

World Englishes theorizing and modeling can get important pointers from the discourse-pragmatic realm and it would be highly welcome to see more inclusion of this area in the study of world Englishes. This is not to say that morpho-syntax does not play an important role in investigating processes of nativization, but expanding this to features such as discourse markers, (im)politeness strategies, and speech acts is likely to result in new impetus for the field due to them often being overlooked in classroom language learning contexts and their close connection to aspects of identity. Here is where the increasing mobility of speakers and digital ties with others around the globe, or the lack thereof, also get a prominent bearing. As the first description of discourse marker use in Korean English speech, the study at hand leaves a number of issues and questions open. Outside the scope of this study were the functions which *like* has as a discourse feature in Korean English speech (such as exemplification, illustration, elaboration, clarification) and in which structural contexts it occurs. This remains a desideratum for future research on the use of this specific item in Korean English speech. Further desiderata include a comprehensive overview of other discourse markers and

features as used by Korean speakers of English (in SPOKE we find *actually* $n = 870$, *anyway* $n = 87$, *ok* $n = 608$, *well* $n = 566$) and a contrastive linguistic approach including a comparison to Korean discourse features (see Park, 1998, for a small cross-linguistic study on contrastive connectives in English, Japanese, and Korean).

NOTES

- ¹ The examples stem from two corpora of American English, which were selected for examples here as American English is also the input variety in South Korea. The SB corpus was modified to only include transcripts of conversational material (excluding task-based spoken material such as museum tours). The COCA examples come from the spoken subcorpus, which is based on transcripts from TV and radio shows and thus cannot be considered 'conversational' in the traditional sense. COCA is available at www.english-corpora.org/coca
- ² TEA refers to the *Toronto English Archive*.
- ³ SPOKE speaker IDs consist of consecutive numbers, followed by speaker sex (m = male, f = female) and age. The 'j' indicates that the respective interview was a joint interview, conducted with two interviewees.
- ⁴ *Jjimjilbang* is the Korean sauna.
- ⁵ One would assume that speakers with experience abroad would also rate themselves higher on the proficiency scale, but this is not the case (participants with no stay abroad rated themselves 2.1 on average whereas participants with experience abroad rated themselves 2.3; Welch t-test: $t = -1.0694$, $df = 49.242$, $p = 0.2901$).

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