The syntax of *be like* quotatives

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1. Introduction

**Focus:** Syntax and semantics of English *be like* quotatives (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999, D’ArCY 2005).

(1) Aaron *was like*, “Ok, fine.”
   a. ‘A. seemed to be thinking, “Ok, fine.”’ (reported thought)
   b. ‘A. said “Ok, fine.”’ (direct speech)
1. Introduction

Two main claims:

1. The ambiguity between direct speech and reported thought *be like* in (1) related to ambiguity between stative copular *be* and *be of activity* in contexts as in (2) and (3) (Partee 1977, Dowty 1979, Parsons 1990).

(2) John forced him to be quiet.
(3) Jane is being polite.

- Direct speech reading in (1) produced by coercion mechanism responsible for (2), (3) (Rothstein 1999).
1. Introduction

Two main claims:

2. *Be like* in direct speech contexts differs from say-type quotative verbs in having a null *something* under the copula (Kayne 2007, fn.9).

(4) Aaron was **SOMETHING** like **THAT**, **QUOTE**

- Null indefinite approach accounts for a range of properties of *be like* as a quote introducer.
1. Introduction

Outline:

1. Introduction
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs
3. One *be* or two?
4. The syntax of *be like*
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity

(1) Aaron was like “Ok, fine.”
   ‘Aaron seemed to be thinking, “Ok, fine.”’
   ‘Aaron said “Ok, fine.”’

(5) Aaron said “Ok, fine.”
   *‘Aaron seemed to be thinking, “Ok, fine.”’*
   ‘Aaron said “Ok, fine.”’
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity
2. **Indirect speech**
2. Differences between *be like* and say-type verbs

2. **Indirect speech**

- *Be like* differs from say-type verbs in that it cannot introduce indirect speech.

(6) *John was like* that he was hungry.
(7) John *said* that he was hungry.
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity
2. Indirect speech
3. **Opacity to wh-movement** (Flagg 2007)
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

3. Opacity to *wh*-movement (Flagg 2007)

(8) Aaron **was like** what?
   ‘What did Aaron say?’
   ‘What was Aaron’s state?’

(9) What **was** Aaron **like**?
   * ‘What did Aaron say?’
   ‘What was Aaron’s state?’

(10) What did Aaron **say**?
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity
2. Indirect speech
3. Opacity to *wh*-movement
4. **No quote raising**
2. Differences between be like and say-type verbs


(11) *“Shut up,” Tammy was like.
(12) *“Shut up,” was Tammy like.
(13) *“Shut up,” was like Tammy.

(14) “Shut up,” Tammy said.
(15) “Shut up,” said Tammy.
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity
2. Indirect speech
3. Opacity to *wh*-movement
4. No quote raising
5. Direct speech interpretation blocked by negation
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

5. Direct speech interpretation blocked by negation

(16) Aaron *wasn’t like*, “shut up.”
Ok ‘Aaron didn’t seem to be thinking, ‘shut up.’”
?? ‘Aaron didn’t say, ‘shut up.’”

(17)?? Aaron *wasn’t like*, “shut up” loudly.
(18) Aaron *didn’t say*, “shut up” loudly.
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

1. Direct speech-reported thought ambiguity
2. Indirect speech
3. Opacity to *wh*-movement
4. No quote raising
5. Direct speech interpretation with negation
6. **Paraphrase implicature**
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

6. Paraphrase implicature

(19) a. #Word for word, she was like, “I-didn't-plagiarize.”
   b. #She was exactly like, “I promise to be there.”

(20) a. Word for word, she said, “I-didn't-plagiarize.”
   b. She said exactly, “I promise to be there.”
2. Differences between *be like* and *say*-type verbs

6. Paraphrase implicature

- This meaning is cancellable:

  (21) A: She was like, “I-didn't-plagiarize.”
  
  B: Word for word?
  
  A: Yes.

  (22) She was like, “I like apples.” In fact, that was exactly what she said.
3. One *be* or two?

**Lexical ambiguity approach:**

- *Be like* ambiguity plausibly related to ambiguity between stative *be* and “*be of activity*”.

(23) John is being silly.
(24) Mary asked John to be silly.

- Early approaches posited lexical ambiguity $be_2 \approx [[\text{act}]]$ (Partee 1977, Dowty 1979, Parsons 1990)
3. One *be* or two?

**Lexical ambiguity approach:**

- We might expect this *be* not to be a T element, but rather merged lower (Chomsky 1995, Kratzer 1996). But *be* is Aux-like, even on eventive readings.

- **Subject Auxiliary Inversion:**
  (25) *Was* Aaron *like*, “Ok, fine”?

- **Adverb placement** (Jakendoff 1972):
  (26) She *was* quickly *like*, “Shut up.”
  (27) ?? She *said* quickly, “Shut up.”
3. One *be* or two?

Rothstein’s (1999) one-*be* approach:

- A basic ontological distinction between states and eventualities. Adjectives are of type <s,t>, agentive verbs are of type <e,t>.

- There is only one copula *be*, which takes states as its arguments and localizes them to an event:

\[
(28) \quad [[\text{be}]] = \lambda S \lambda e. \exists s \in S : e = \text{LOCAL}(s)
\]
3. One be or two?

Rothstein’s (1999) one-be approach:

- Under Rothstein’s view, “be of activity” is simply regular be, wherein the event being localized to is agentive.

- The verbal predicate produced can be contextually coerced into different aspectual classes in familiar ways:

  (29) Deborah painted the barn.
  (30) Deborah painted the barn for an hour.
3. One *be* or two?

Rothstein’s (1999) one-*be* approach:

- The same principle can apply to the ambiguity of *be* *like* –
  - *Reported thought reading* = state localized to a non-agentive eventuality (like “John is hungry”)
  - *Direct speech reading* = state localized to an agentive eventuality (like “John is being stupid”)
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

- *Like of be like* a garden variety manner preposition. In the spirit of Davidson (1968), *be like* quotatives involve a demonstrative THAT and describe a speech event by mimesis.

(31) The cake was like that, [gesture]

- In a few dialects the demonstrative is overt.  
(32) Glasgow English (Macaulay 2001:13)  
And they were like that, “How’re you doing, Mary.”
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

- A first approximation:

(33) \[ [_{TP} \text{Aaron} \ [_{T'} \text{was} \ [_{PP} \text{like} \ [_{DP} \text{THAT} \ [ \text{QUOTE}]]]]]]

- Something more needed to explain properties of direct speech *be like*:
  - opacity to extraction
  - paraphrase implicature
  - effect of negation
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

- Kayne’s (2007 fn. 9) null SOMETHING proposal.
  (34) She was like, “He’s gotta be kidding.”
  (35) She was GOING SOMETHING like, “He’s gotta be kidding.”

- Temporal adverbials don’t support a null GOING:
  (36) Amy was like, “He’s gotta be kidding,” *when I walked in*.
  (37) Amy was GOING SOMETHING like, “He’s gotta be kidding,” *when I walked in*. 
4. The syntax of be like quotatives

- **Reported thought interpretations:**
  (33) \([_{TP} \text{She} \, [_{T} \text{was} \, [_{PP} \text{like} \, [_{DP} \text{THAT} \, [QUOTE}

- **Direct speech interpretations:**
  (38) \([_{TP} \text{She} \, [_{T} \text{was} \, [_{DP} \text{SOMETHING} \, [_{PP} \text{like} \, [_{DP} \text{THAT} \, [QUOTE
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

- Opacity to extraction now reminiscent of the restrictions on *wh*-raising out of *some*-quantified DPs.

(39) ?? Who did you see some picture of <who>?

- Negation effect follows since *some* is a positive polarity item, i.e. can’t scope below neg. (Szabolcsi 2004).

(40) I didn’t see some boy.
* ∃>¬ (I didn’t see any boy.)
4. The syntax of be like quotatives

- “Mere paraphrase” implicature follows from this syntax, since a sentence like (41) asserts that the speaker said *something like* the quote.

(41) $\text{[TP} \text{She [T. was [DP SOMETHING [PP like [DP THAT [QUOTE}$

- Incompatibility of *exactly* and *word-for-word*, similar to oddness of (42).

(42) #A cougar is exactly *something* like a mountain lion.
(43) A cougar is exactly like a mountain lion.
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

- On this approach, *be like* a species of manner deictic (‘thus’, ‘so’) quotative (Güldemann 2001, Munro 1982).

(44) **Vedic sanskrit** (Hock 1982, Saxena 1995)

“tvām ̄stoṣāma…” iti tvā agne ṛṣayaḥ avocan
You-ACC praise thus tva-ACC Agni-VOC sages say-AOR.3PL
“We shall praise you…” the sages tell you, Agni.

(45) **Plains Cree** (Blain & Déchaine 2007)

“â, namôy,” itwêw,
well neg say.3sg
‘He said thus, “Well, no.”’
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

(46) **Icelandic**
Hann eitthvað, “ja”.
He something yes
‘He was like, “yes.”’

(47) **German** (Golato 2000)
Und ich so “Ja, wir glauben.”
And I like yes we think-3pl
‘And I was like, “Yes, we think.”’
4. The syntax of *be like* quotatives

- Icelandic, German, Plains Cree quotatives share some properties with *be like*:
  - Don’t introduce indirect speech
  - Introduce both direct speech and reported thought.

- The similarity between these constructions, nevertheless, suggests a partially unified approach such that these languages will differ, among other ways, in terms of which elements may be left unpronounced.
Summary

Main claims:

1. Ambiguity between direct speech and reported thought *be like* in relatable to the availability of copula *be* in active contexts.

2. *Be like* a species of manner quotatives differs from *say*-type quotative verbs in having a null *something* under the copula.
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