

Use of “like” by English speakers as a filler in Japanese conversation

Kazuko TANABE

1. Introduction

This study examines a transition phenomenon that is often interpreted as misuse from the point of view of language education. An analysis of the linguistic structure and interpersonal relationships that constitute the conversational context and scene is performed to clarify that the usage of the native tongue is an assertion of identity and not the result of insufficient language skills. The specific transition phenomenon examined is the usage of the word “like,” which appears within Japanese conversation as a filler, particularly among young American women from California. Many of these women develop the habit of using specific “filler” words in English conversation, and it was found that this phenomenon occurs even within Japanese conversation. For example: “Tabun *like* watashi dake no mondai desukedo” (Maybe it’s like only me).

Two questions were proposed at the outset. First, in which location within Japanese conversation is “like” used, and what kind of compromise is made with the Japanese syntactic form? Second, what is the psychological context of the usage?

2. Method of Investigation and Analysis

To begin the investigation, the subjects (two American students and two German students) were shown Japanese conversation teaching materials created by the author and published on the Japanese Women’s University website (URL:http://www.jwu.ac.jp/unv/international_exchange/foreign/welcome/basic-course.html). They were then asked to provide their comments. The investigation consisted of an analysis of their comments on two topics: “Pasmo,” and the “Health Center”; this paper will cover only the data on “Pasmo.”

The methodology utilized a mixed methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative research. This approach was used because syntactic consideration lends to higher accuracy when there are more examples of the usage; however, analysis of psychological

aspects of individuals can only be clarified through qualitative analysis. ⁽¹⁾

3. Analysis Perspectives

Although “like” is metastatic, the analysis was based on the premise that it has a role as a discourse and philological indicator even within Japanese conversation. Therefore, even though it might act as a “hedge” within conversation, without an actual dictionary meaning, the author of this paper believes that, pragmatically, it fulfils the function of carrying discourse.

Ostman (1982:169) states, “The emergence of pragmatic indicators is the result of informality through grammatical/discourse fragmentation for the purpose of buying time.” Briton (1966:33) states that “like” transforms from a preposition with dictionary meaning to a citation/context index, and at the very end, becomes a focuser. This study is based on the analysis of verbal indicators by Miller and Weinert (1995), Underhill (1988), Dailey-O’Cain (2000), and Romaine and Lange (1991) with reference to the inter-language comparison of discourse indicators by Briz & Estellés (2010). The function of each instance of “like” was defined and the recorded data were classified as follows:

A. Pragmatic Indicators

(1) Approximater

Usage of “like” as a euphemism. Used in any location.

(2) Focuser

The approximated opposite of (1); it is used to draw attention.

(3) Quotative marker

Used to show an example or change to a more concrete expression.

(4) Rhythm maker

No particular meaning. It is close to a speech habit and is used to establish rhythm.

B. Discourse Indicator

(1) Discourse marker

Used at the beginning of the sentence upon receiving the other party’s utterance in order to control the discourse, conversation flow, and connection.

Also included for analysis is the placement of the utterance within the sentence (beginning, middle, or end). The four words used before and after “like” are summarized in Table 2. Tabulating the total number by function is not necessary for the quantitative analysis, as the main objective is to process samples by a specific criterion and then search for an overall trend.

4. Data Description and Qualitative Analysis

The data are listed in the following sections. Transcription rules are shown in Table 1. Each “like” is marked with the indication of an American speaker (A or B) of P (conversation about Pasmō) and the order of utterance (P-A-1). The left column shows the utterances and the right column shows the data conceptualized (categorization) as representing qualitative research, with reference to the grounded theory approach (Saiki, Craighill & Shigeko: 2017). This methodology seeks to understand how an individual approaches and responds to a certain situation, and what kind of actions/corresponding actions occur, with the intention of capturing the diversity of the process as the situation changes (Saiki, Craighill & Shigeko: 2017).

Conversation about Pasmō: Speaker A Example

A:	えっとー、たぶん like 私だけの問題ですけど etto-, tabun like ↓ (0.5) ^{P-A-1} watashi dake no mondai desu kedo, 時々 電車に乗ってるのときは、バスモはー like、 tokidoki densha ni notteru no toki wa, pasmo wa- like ↓ (1) ^{P-A-2} , 使わないの時ーとか like、で like、 tsukawanai no toki-toka, like ↓ (0.5) ^{P-A-3} , de, like ↓ (0.5) ^{P-A-4} , 出口に時は使わない。 deguchi ni, toki wa tsukawanai.
A:	それから like sorekara like ↓ (1) ^{P-A-5} .
B:	あー、そっかー。 [a-, sokka-]
A:	あー、駅員に like、ごめん、何をしましょうか? like、 a-, ekiin ni, like ↓ (1) ^{P-A-6} , gomen, nani o-shimasho-ka, like ↓ (1) ^{P-A-7} , できませんの時の説明もー、 dekimasen no toki no setsumei mo-.
B:	あー、そっかー。 [a-, sokka-]
A:	良いとは思いますが。 ii to wa omoimasu
B:	あー、そっかー。 [a-, sokka-]

Grounded Theory Application (1)

	Property	Dimension	Label⊙
Part I			
P-A-1	Intro	Refuse (just me)	Negative POV
P-A-2	Puzzled	Not used	
P-A-3	Daily	Not used	
P-A-4	Reconfirm	Will (huh?) not use at exit	
	Property	Dimension	Label⊙
Part II			
P-A-5	Continued	Continue category⊙	Argumentative
P-A-6	New topic	Event at the station	
P-A-7	Puzzled	Concrete: at a loss for words	
P-B	Response 2x	Agreement	

A: like たぶん3から5回ぐらい 私はこの
like ↓ (^{P-A-8}) tabun, san kara go kan gurai watashi wa kono no
 問題がありましたー。
 mondai ga arimashita- <laugh>

T: ちゃんと抑えなかったの？
 chanto osaenakatta no?

B: yeah, 時々、yeah, 問題多かった。
 yeah, tokidoki, yeah, mondai okatta.

T: あー、こう ちゃんとしなかったのね。
 a-, ko chanto shinakatta no ne.

T: で、registration してないの。
 de, registration shitenai no.

B: うん、うん、色々な時は
 [un, un, iroirona toki wa.]

A: それから like, どうしよう、どうしよう、使わなーい。
 sorekara *like* ↓ (0.5) ^{P-A-9} do-shiyou, do-shiyou. tsukawana-i

T: あ、こうパチンといかない。
 a', ko pachinto ikana.

T: 開かないの？
 akanai no?

A: うん、そう。
 [un, so-]

All: うーん。
 u-n.

A: 開かないとか like, あー、出口の時は
 akanai toka, *like* ↓ (1) ^{P-A-10} a-, deguchi no toki wa
 たぶん like, 入るの時は scan をしないからー。
 tabun *like* ↓ (0.5) ^{P-A-11} hairu no toki wa scan o shinai kara-.

T: <laugh>

A: yeah 出てこなーい。
 yeah detekona-i

Property

Dimension

LabelⓄ

Part III

P-A-8	Puzzlement summary	Past retrospection	Over a long period Unresolved feelings
P-A-9	Repeat	Not (huh?) used	
P-A-10	Filler	Lengthy speech	
P-A-11	Puzzlement case	Presumed reason case	

English Translation

A: Well, maybe, *like* It is my problem, sometimes, when I'm on a train, PASMO, *like*, when I don't use, *like*, then, *like*, come to the exit, I don't use it.

A: And then, *like*

B: Oh, I see,

A: Um, to a station attendant, *like*, excuse me, what I do? *like*, I cannot do, and when I tell him, too,

B: I see,

A: It is good, I think.

B: I understand.

A: *Like*, maybe three to five, I had this problem.

T: You didn't press it properly?

B: *Yeah*, sometimes, *yeah*, many problems.

T: Ah, you didn't do it like this.

T: And, you haven't done the *registration*?

B: Exactly, yes, in various situations,

A: And then, *like*, oh no, oh no, okay I don't use.

T: Ah, it doesn't go right,

T: Doesn't it open?

A: No.

All: Hmmm...

A: It doesn't open, and also, *like*, um, at the exit, maybe *like*, when I go in, it doesn't *scan*.

T: (laughing)

A: *Yeah*, it doesn't come out!

Considerations

In this section, we will create associations (abduction) among the concepts (categories and labels). This represents the final stage of the application of grounded theory.

When Speaker A observed the video on PasmO, she recalled the problems she experienced, stating that the whole PasmO system was extremely difficult. With her insufficient language skills, the problem she encountered could not be solved through a conversation with the station staff. In these circumstances, "like" was simply used out of habit, similar to its use in English, but it was not used in contravention of the rule of interjection insertion in Japanese. However, in some cases, "like" was used to signify the turning point in the statement, to provide emphasis, or to unify the sequence that appeared before and after the use of "like." It may also have been used to control the discourse as the events in the conversation unfolded.

Conversation about Pasmu: Speaker B Example

Grounded Theory Application (2)

B: yeah,時々、本当にー like、 yeah,yeah, 私は
yeah, tokidoki-, hontoni-like↓(0.5) ^{P-B-1}, yeah, yeah, watashi wa

たぶん like、 その 3回しました。
tabun like ↓() ^{P-B-2}, sono san kai shimashita.

B: like たくさん like、 ふつうー、 it's like うーん。
like ↓() ^{P-B-3} takusan like ↓(0.5) ^{P-B-4}, futsu-, it's like ↓() ^{P-B-5} u-n.

T: ちゃんと おさないの？
chanto osanai no ?

B: yeah
yeah.

B: we are like、 時々 yeah, like、 乗り換える
we are like ↓() ^{P-B-6}, tokidoki yeah, like ↓() ^{P-B-7} norikaeru

ときは一時々ー、 it's like、 ちょっと like、
toki wa- tokidoki-, it's like ↓(0.5) ^{P-B-8}, chotto like ↓(0.5) ^{P-B-9},

問題起こります。
mondai okori masu.

T: 問題、じゃあもうこの使い方は***。
mondai, ja-, mo kono, tsukaikata desu **

B: 【そっかー、*****】
[sokka,*****]

T: もっと
motto

B: うん
un

B: ああ、
a-,

T: 買い、買い方から使い方ねー。
kai, kaikata kara tsukaikata ne-.

B: えー、そして
e-, soshite.

T: うん
un.

B: その切符のはえるの時はー、そのイメージがー欲しいです。
sono kippu no haeru notoki wa-, sono image ga- hoshii desu.

ほんとにー like、その like、を 全部の
hontoni-like ↓(0.5) ^{P-B-10}, sono, like ↓(0.5) ^{P-B-11}, o, zenbu no

like、日本にきる友達はー どこにー 入れて
like ↓(0.5) ^{P-B-12}, nihon ni kiru tomodachi wa- doko ni- irete

はー わかりません。
wa- wakarimasen.

*****like、とても like、 うん
***like ↓() ^{P-B-13}, totemo, like ↓() ^{P-B-14}, un

Part I

	Property	Dimension	Label
P-B-1	Emphasis	Really	
P-A	Succeed the opinion		
P-B-2	Estimated number of failures	3x	Negative POV
P-B-3	Begin describing	Interjectory role	
P-B-4	Daily	Normal event	
P-B-5	Repeat	Lengthy speech	

Part II

	Property	Dimension	Label
P-B-6	Insert English	Call attention	Own opinion
P-B-7	Provide topic	During transfer	
P-B-8	Confirm problem	Negative POV	
P-B-9	Notice problem	Confess difficulty	
P-B-10	Provide topic	Friend who came to Japan	Rationale
P-B-11	Provide topic	Notice problem	

English Translation

B: Yeah, sometimes, really, like, yeah, yeah, I, maybe like, I did it three times.

B: like, a lot, like, normally, it's like, hmmm,

T: You didn't press it properly?

B: yeah

B: We are like, sometimes, yeah, like, when transfer, sometimes, it's like, a bit, like, problems happen.

T: Problems, then it is this particular way.

B: [I see]

T: More

B: Yeah

B: Ah,

T: Buy, How to buy and how to use.

B: Um, and,

T: Okay.

B: That ticket, to put in, I want the image of it.

Really, like, that, like, whole thing,

like, my friends in Japan, where they put, that's not clear.

***** like, very, like, yeah

Table 1

Transcription rule	
Numbers in () indicate the length of pause	
(1)	1 sec pause
(0.5)	0.5 sec pause
(.)	Very short pause
↓	Falling intonation
↑	Rising intonation
[]	Duplicate remark
<laugh>	laughing voice
NNN	lengthy speech
** ~*****	indecipherable words

Considerations

Speaker B's utterances started with her own opinions, while also supporting A's views. Around lines P-B-10, -11, and -12, B tries to comply with a request to make comments on the original Pasma video, stating that the information displayed (the place to hold out a Pasma card or insert a ticket) is difficult for foreigners to understand. Speaker B has a higher Japanese language proficiency than Speaker A, but her heavy use of "like" might indicate a psychologically uplifted state; perhaps she wanted to flaunt her authority over Speaker A or to hold in check the German students, who were listening to the conversation. It might be better to accept this use of "like" as a representation of the positive identity of the speaker, instead of treating it as an indicator of insufficient skill in the language.

Table 2

like No	4	3	2	1	Like	pause	intonation	1	2	3	4	position	pragmatic/discourse marker
P-A-1	0	etto-		tabun	like	0.5	↓	watashi	dake	no	mondai		Approximater
P-A-2	wa		pasmo	wa-	like	1	↓	tsukawanai		no	toki		Focuser
P-A-3	no	toki-	toka		like	0.5	↓	de	deguchi	ni	like		Approximater
P-A-4	like	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0	FINAL	Rhythm maker
P-A-5	0	ekiin	ni	0	like	fp	↓	gomen			nani		Approximater
P-A-6	nani	o-	shimasho-ka	0	like	1	↓	dekimasen		no	toki		Quotative
P-A-7	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	tabun	do-shiyou	san	kara	INITIAL	Quotative
P-A-8	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0	INITIAL	Discourse marker
P-A-9	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0	INITIAL	Discourse marker
P-A-10	0	akanai	toka	0	like	1	↓	a-	deguchi		deguchi		Approximater
P-A-11	no	toki	wa	tabun	like	0.5	↓	hairu	hairu	no	toki		Approximater
P-B-1		tokidoki-		hontoni-	like	0.5	↓	yeah	yeah	no	yeah		Focuser
P-B-2		watashi	wa	tabun	like	0.5	↓	takusan	like	san	kai		Approximater
P-B-3	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0	INITIAL	Discourse marker
P-B-4	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0	INITIAL	Focuser
P-B-5		futsu-		it's	like	0.5	↓	u-n	futsu-	0	0		Approximater
P-B-6	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0	INITIAL	Discourse marker
P-B-7		tokidoki	yeah	are	like	0.5	↓	no	tokidoki	yeah	0		Approximater
P-B-8	wa-	tokidoki-		it's	like	0.5	↓	no	tokidoki	wa-	tokidoki-		Approximater
P-B-9	it's	like		chotto	like	0.5	↓	chotto	chotto	like	masu		Focuser
P-B-10	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Focuser
P-B-11	like	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Approximater
P-B-12	o	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Quotative
P-B-13	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Focuser
P-B-14	like	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Quotative
P-B-15	yeah	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Focuser
P-B-16	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Quotative
P-B-17	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Approximater
P-B-18	like	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Focuser
P-B-19	charge	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Approximater
P-B-20	yeah	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Discourse marker
P-B-21	do	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Discourse marker
P-A-16	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Focuser
P-B-22	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Approximater
P-B-23	it's	like	feel	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Discourse marker
P-B-24	exchange	like	sono	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Discourse marker
P-A-17	0	0	0	0	like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Approximater
					like	0.5	↓	0	0	0	0		Discourse marker

5. Quantitative Analysis

Eleven instances of “like” were analyzed for Subject A and 14 instances for Subject B, but for the actual Pasmō conversation, there are 17 instances of “like” for Subject A and 24 instances for Subject B. The total number of instances (41) was examined by type (see Table 1). Qualitative analysis results of the data shown in Table 2 are as follows:

- ① Both Speakers A and B made use of example combinations such as “tabun (maybe), like,” “sorekara (then), like,” and “akanaitoka (won’t open), like.” These were deemed to represent usage as an Approximater of “like.” Within both Speaker A’s 17 total instances and Speaker B’s 24 total instances, Approximaters numbered 17. Meanwhile, combinations such as “hontoni (really), like,” and “Pasmō wa (the Pasmō), like,” usage as a Focuser occurred in 10 instances. When considering its role in conversation and utterance, and not only as a prefix or suffix, Quotative usage such as “nani-wo shimashou-ka (what shall we do), like, dekimasen no toki (when we cannot),” “sorekara (and then), like, tokidoki, hairu (sometimes, we can enter)” had 5 instances.
- ② For positioning, there were 8 instances where “like” was used at the beginning of the utterance. These Discourse Markers, a cue for the order of utterances, were interpreted as signals to control the conversation flow. In the second half, when Speaker B began using English frequently, “like” was used as a signal to begin. This may be close to the usage of “like” by youth from California.
- ③ For the examples counted as an Approximater in ①, when placed in the final position of Speaker A and B’s respective utterances, the usage is similar to the final ending particle in Japanese.
- ④ Only one instance of Speaker A’s “like de like” was, as a pair, counted as a Rhythm maker.

6. Summary

In this paper, “like,” a transition word used by native English speakers, was examined in terms of its usage within Japanese conversation and analyzed by utilizing mixed methods research. Mixed methods research uses qualitative and quantitative research methods in the analysis. The quantitative research method is appropriate for grasping the uniqueness of research subjects from an outsider’s point of view and understanding the overall usage trends. On the other hand, the qualitative research method is suitable for evaluating the intuitive motivations of the subjects: knowing their linguistic consciousness and understanding their beliefs and thoughts. To analyze group behavior, it is important to accurately grasp the factors of these behaviors quantitatively; to analyze the reasons for individual actions, observing them

qualitatively is also necessary. The author of this paper believes that mixed methods research should be adopted more extensively in future studies in the field of social linguistics.

Notes:

(1) Mixed methods research (MMR) is suitable for studies whose main purpose is to correctly describe, explain, and evaluate phenomena. It is mainly used in the field of social and behavioral sciences, where the goal is to promote community development and social reform. Since it integrates qualitative and quantitative data, it can be utilized to comprehensively understand phenomena. When contemplating the real meaning of “truth,” these two concepts have been in conflict from ancient through modern times. The historical background of mixed methods (MM) is grounded in the differences between the beliefs of Plato or Socrates and the beliefs of the Sophists. The former sought universality in knowledge while the latter prioritized relativity. MM as a research method was introduced at the beginning of the 21st century. It wields both approaches to knowledge and advocates anti-dogmatism. An MM perspective is pluralistic: it accepts multiple kinds of knowledge, views both order and change as important parts of reality, and recognizes that some domains are more lawful than others (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; 81,58_Figure2.2). There is no authoritative approach to combine the two research methods. In the present study, the same data were simultaneously analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, but this approach makes use of characteristics that are unique to language research.

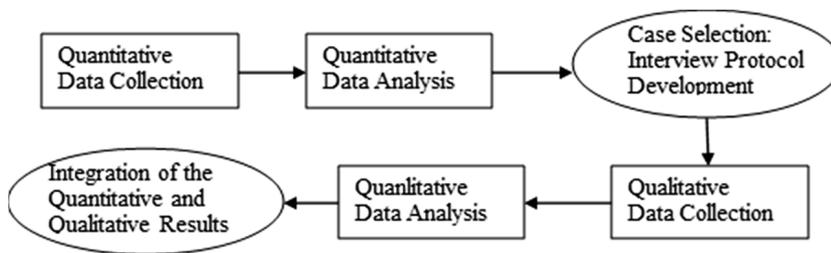


Figure 1 (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010 ; 58)

- ① Methods also exist that combine the questionnaire and interview, wherein respondents are asked about the thinking behind their answers to the questionnaire. This is often adopted in language education, nursing, and similar fields. In this case, the order of research is as follows:

Quantitative research → Qualitative research → Integration

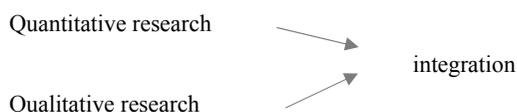
- ② “What are the problems?” Creating a survey table by identifying the problem areas during an interview can be an effective method in research.

In this case, the order of research is as follows:

Qualitative research → Quantitative research → Integration

- ③ Along with a survey investigation, another option is to concurrently execute a Focus Group (Focused Group Discussion) for members who were not respondents.

In this case, the order of research is as follows:



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