How to Use Like：

Filler in American English Conversations

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Like の使い方: アメリカ英語におけるフィラー

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When speaking, we do not only connect words, phrases, and clauses that we've learned at school: but also respond (back channeling), interrupt, and pad a word to other speakers' words (filler). In this study I focus on filler use by analyzing conversation data called 'Mister O Corpus'. The study report was written by a Japanese linguist who teaches at college in Japan, and analyzed through the viewpoint of a non-native speaker of English. In the corpus data 11 American pairs talked about a common topic. I observe the frequency and positions in the turn of which American English speakers use the filler in conversations. Through my previous research I found that American English speakers tended to use filler, *like* frequently, and I wondered for what they used it. According to an American friend of mine, they used it to gather their thoughts: in this study speakers used the filler as a pause to think about the next word to say. Reading the transcribed scripts of the Mister O Corpus, I found some speech patterns of the native English speakers: young speakers tended to use *like* more often than middle-aged speakers. This study is content analysis.

1. Introduction

1 － 1 Overview

　　Throughout my linguistic studies, I have observed American people's conversations and Japanese ones. I sometimes recorded conversations of two languages by making some groups of 6 native speakers for each language, and I sometimes listened to the conversations collected by other researchers. Throughout the work, I found that both of the two language groups tended to use specific fillers in their speech, for example, American people like to use *like*. It was not until I went abroad after I finished college education that I heard American people talking in this way. This is interesting for non-native speakers of English like me because language teachers in Japan taught us two meanings of the word such as prefer and having some resembles. To my surprise, no teacher has ever pointed out a role of *like* as filler. And what is more, I read transcribed scrips and found that American people tended to use *like* as filler more often than as a verb and an adverb. This taught me a fact that textbook-English is one thing and colloquial one is quite another.

　　Filler is a discourse marker which shows up frequently in conversations, so I listened to a corpus dialogue data trying to find out characteristics of the filler use of American English speakers. In this study I used a corpus data called Mr. O Corpus1) to see how the speakers use the filler, *like* when talking. An editor of the corpus made some groups of two American women and gave each unit a common topic to talk about. I observed how much and in what kind of occasions they used *like* in the conversations.

1 － 2 Previous Studies

　　Yamane says in her book that the filler use has been studied for a long time in Western countries with huge academic storage about them, but it is not related to linguistics but to psychology (Yamane, 2000 p.43). Few linguists have studied fillers in the west, but if I must choose one, Amiridze et al (2010) mention that a filler plays a role as a placeholder where there is hesitation in speech. As for fillers in Japanese language, Endo (1953) considers some Japanese filler words, ehto, sono, sokodedesune as 'batsunagi-kotoba (stuffing word),' which enables a speaker to have time to think about the next word he is going to say, and pads a stuffing thing between words. Shiozawa (1979) focuses on fillers as hesitation observing how they function and which part in the utterance they were spoken. Maynard (1989) is a Japanese linguist who resides in the United States, and points out four functions of fillers; 1 avoidance of silence, 2 a suggestion that a speaker wants to keep talking, 3 an expression of hesitation and ambiguity, 4 mitigation of force of utterance. As long as I know, no linguist has ever studied mainly about *like*, filler used by American English speakers.

1 － 3 Mr. O Corpus

　　Mr. O Corpus is a corpus data of the pragmatics research project collected by Japanese linguists through 2004 to 2014. In this project they recorded three kinds of dialogues; 1 collaborative story making, 2 looking back at the story made in collaboration (a story told in the dialogue #1), 3 a given topic (a surprising story). In my study I chose the third type of dialogue, what I was surprised by as conversation data for filler analysis. Dialogues in other languages were recorded in their project, but I chose American English ones conducted in 2004. All participants of the data were female speakers born and brought up in the United States. There were 11 groups of these Americans, and a half of whom was teachers and another half was college students. So each group was consisted of a teacher and a student. All the students were in their 20s whereas ages of the teachers varied. The relationship between them is unfamiliar, but the editors of the data don't tell us whether or not they met each other for the first time at the recording. Here is information about participants' background.

Chart 1. Participants' information

unit	speaker	age	birthplace	unit	speaker	age	Birthplace
E01	ES2	21	Pennsylvania	E13	ES14	21	Tennessee
	ET1	30	Hawaii		ET7	27	Washington
E03	ES4	20	Oregon	E15	ES16	21	Virginia
	ET2	30	Florida		ET8	63	Oregon
E05	ES6	20	Wisconsin	E17	ES18	unknown	Pennsylvania
	ET3	54	Wisconsin		ET9	30	Iowa
E07	ES7	unknown	New York	E19	ES20	21	Virginia
	ET4	27	Massachusetts		ET10	30	Washington
E09	ES10	23	California	E21	ES22	20	Connecticut
	ET5	27	Washington		ET11	37	California
E11	ES12	21	Idaho				
	ET6	30	California				

2．Results

2－1 Statistical data of the use of *like*

One of my American co-workers pointed out that the frequent use of *like* is a typical speech manner of someone known as 'Valley girl'. He mentions that Valley girl is a stereotype as a group of young women speaking the colloquial California English dialect Valleyspeak. They tend to be interested more in shopping and personal appearance than intellectual activities or personal accomplishment. According to an article in the Washington Post (2013), Valleyspeak is the dialect also known as "Valley Girl Talk", the one which is totally full of the word *like*.

An American woman in her 20s from California used *like* very frequently in the experiment I conducted in the past (58 times out of 117 turns). Because she was late for the experiment, one of the participants phoned her. She wore a very fancy outfit, and said that she would go to the basketball club after the discussion. I asked if she played basketball, and she said, "No, I don't. I'm *like* the mascot (of the team)." She must have been a valley girl. An example shown below is a part of the conversation talking about language education.

(1) … And then we would do **like**, almost **like** electives and America you will have **like** music or something **like**, or the arts. We will take an extra class **like** based on Chinese culture.

Like this she used *like* 5 times for just two sentences. Then I moved to New York last year and took part in a visiting program at a university. I had a chance to make a presentation about my research at one of classrooms on the campus I belong to. When I talked about Example (1) above, one of listeners pointed out that New Yorkers don't speak in this way. So I wonder if speech manner varies depending on the area just as the American man pointed out. Here are charts of the statistical data collected from Mr. O Corpus with classifications of age group and birthplace.

2－2 Statistical data sorted by age

Chart 2. A rate of filler use

unit	speaker	age	rate (%)	Unit	speaker	age	rate (%)
E01	ES2	21	0.44	E13	ES14	21	1.49
	ET1	30	0.97		ET7	27	0.55
E03	ES4	20	0.75	E15	ES16	21	1.46
	ET2	30	0.84		ET8	63	0.29
E05	ES6	20	1.53	E17	ES18	unknown	3.96
	ET3	54	0.30		ET9	30	2.90
E07	ES7	unknown	2.48	E19	ES20	21	1.11
	ET4	27	1.37		ET10	30	0.14
E09	ES10	23	6.76	E21	ES22	20	3.07
	ET5	27	2.08		ET11	37	1.17
E11	ES12	21	2.86				
	ET6	30	3.88				

Chart 3. Average value sorted by age group

age group	rate
in their early 20's	2.16%
in their late 20's	1.33%
around 30	1.75%
over the mid 30's	0.58%

Table 1. A column chart of Chart 3
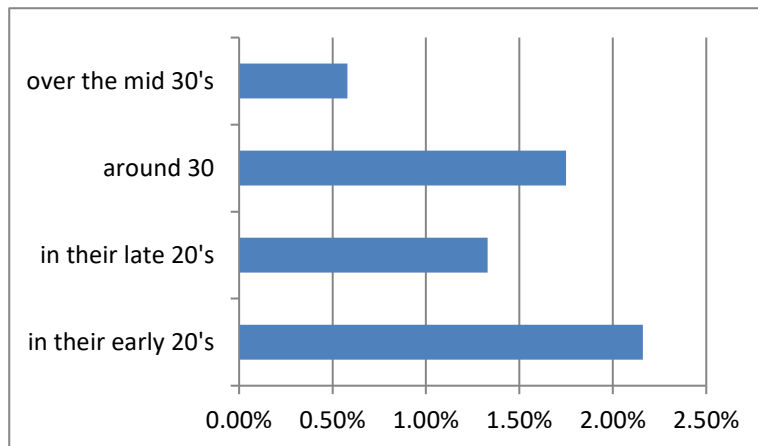
I collected some statistical data based on the transcribed scripts of Mr. O Corpus. The grid named 'rate' in Chart 2 and 3 denotes the rate of *like* used by the speakers out of the total amount of utterance. Chart 2 shows the average numbers of four age groups. There were two students with unknown age, and I excluded them when making Chart 3 and Table 1. I presumed that they were as young as the other students, but the editor of Mr. O Corpus did not make any comments to confirm this. According to Table 1, speakers in their 20's used the filler the most (2.16%) and speakers around 30's came the second (1.75%). Speakers over the mid 30's used the least (0.58%), which differs very much from the data of the other age groups. ET3 and ET8, whose age is over 50, used *like* less often than

the other speakers (0.30% and 0.29% respectively) whereas ES10 in her early 20's used it the most often (6.76%), which implies that younger speakers of American English tend to use *like* more often than older speakers. As the quoted article from the Washington Post I mentioned above, it might be said that the frequent use of *like* as filler in conversations is a typical speech manner of young American females.

Also, I collected the other type of data according to the classification of their status, 'student' and 'teacher'. An average value of the student group is 2.35% and another one of the teacher group is 1.32%. Many of the students were composed of people in 20's. Seeing the data shown previously in Chart 2, 3 and Table 1, there is no wonder about the students' tendency to use more *like* than teachers.

2－3 Statistical data sorted by region

Chart 4. Statistical data sorted by state

speaker	state	rate (%)	speaker	state	rate (%)
ES10	California	6.76	ES14	Tennessee	1.49
ET6	California	3.88	ES6	Wisconsin	1.53
ET11	California	1.17	ET3	Wisconsin	0.30
ET1	Hawaii	0.97	ET2	Florida	0.84
ES4	Oregon	0.75	ES16	Virginia	1.46
ET8	Oregon	0.29	ES20	Virginia	1.11
ET5	Washington	2.08	ES2	Pennsylvania	0.44
ET7	Washington	0.55	ES18	Pennsylvania	3.96
ET10	Washington	0.14	ES7	New York	2.48
ES12	Idaho	2.86	ET4	Massachusetts	1.37
ET9	Iowa	2.90	ES22	Connecticut	3.07

Table 2. A column chart of Chart 4
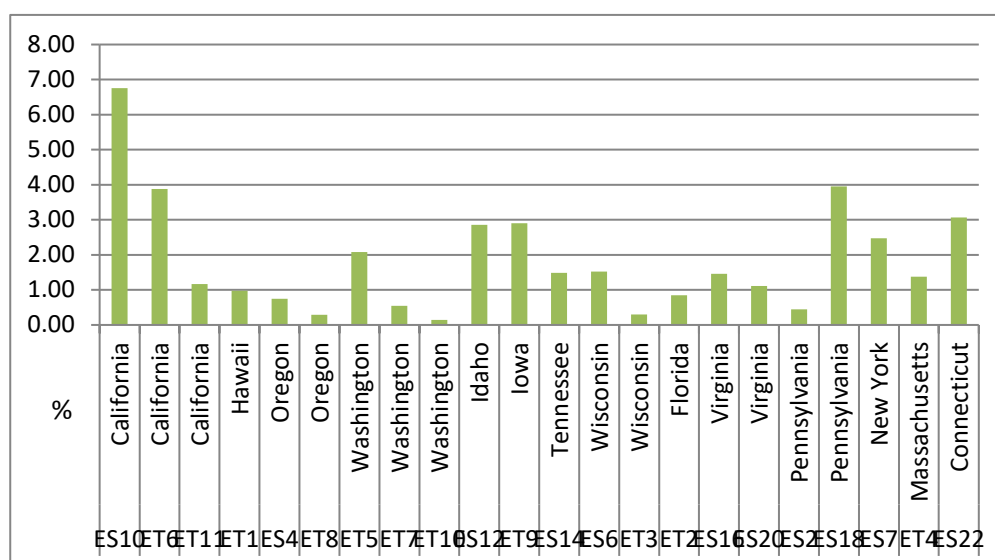
The grid named 'rate' in Chart 4 denotes the rate of *like* used by the speakers out of the total amount of utterance. Two young speakers from California, ES10 and ET6 show a high percentage (6.76% and 3.88% respectively), which reminds me of the article on

the Washington Post mentioned in 2.1, a group of young women speaking the colloquial California English dialect Valleyspeak. An interesting thing is that no other speakers from the rest of states in the Pacific area (Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington) had the same tendency as the one of the speakers from California. This speech manner is overserved only in the state of California, not in the other states in the West Coast. Two of the least users of *like* are ET10 from Washington (0.14%) and ET8 from Oregon (0.29%). The theory of Valleygirl speak does not always apply to Californian girls because ES18, a student from Pennsylvania and ES22 from Connecticut also show a relatively high rate (3.96% and 3.07% respectively).

2－4 Examples of the *like* use as filler

I picked up sentences with *like* and classified them into seven types; ahead of part / preposition, behind preposition, numbers, ahead of clause / sentence, describing feeling in the past, describing utterance in the past, and other characteristics of the *like* use.

2－4－1 Ahead of part / preposition

Like comes ahead of parts and prepositions as well as clauses and sentences; the following turns are examples of it.

(2) ES12: and then he throws(.) he **like** <u>grabs</u> a hand-towel, **like** <u>wipes</u> the sweat off his face, and he throws it out to the crowd

(3) ES20: I was just **like** <u>walking</u> into the station

The filler is placed ahead of verbs in Example (2) and ahead of a verb in the past progressive in Example (3).

(4) ES16: Yeah, it's funny to be reminded of **like**, <u>America</u>

(5) ES18: I think, maybe because I have **like**(..) <u>a really good host family</u> too,

(6) ET11: It wasn't just our family, but it was actually quite a religious community, so(..) I mean <u>there was</u> **like** <u>a grocery store</u>, and so I(.) I wasn't exposed to that(.) much secular lifestyle

(7) ES18: Because, um, we, um(.) I go to school in Washington, so it's a city, but <u>kind of</u> **like** <u>a strange city</u> and everybody leaves on the weekends

Like is placed ahead of a noun in Example (4) and a noun phrase in Example (5). The bracketed code denotes that ES 18 paused to choose a right phrase by saying *like*. *Like* is also placed in a sentence structure with 'there + be-verb' in Example (6) and ahead of a noun phrase with 'kind of' in Example (7). Some speakers in the data used the filler accompanied by 'kind of' or 'sort of'.

(8) ES18: Yeah. Well, the first time we went to Shibuya, **like** <u>a Friday night</u>,

(9) ES18: And there were just like, it(.) about like a million people just in front of **like** <u>the Hachiko statue</u>(..)

Looking back at the past event, speakers pause and wonder where and when it was. In Example (8) and (9), ES18 uses *like* to pause and think about time and place; the Statue of Hachiko is a common meeting point in Tokyo. The Japanese language has some filler with the same function as this, so it sounds natural for us to use the filler ahead of time and place.

(10) ET9: And, on the Japan sea coast and everyone around here they're **like** <u>farmers and fisherman</u>

(11) ES18: It seemed so **like** <u>normal</u> to me

(12) ET11: It's kind of funny(.) I mean it's(.) it's(.) I mean it's funny now, at the time I was **like** <u>devastated</u>, but

Like is placed ahead of the complement, such as a noun (noun phrase) in Example (10), an adjective in Example (11), and a verb as past particle in Example (12). The speakers need to take a short moment to think about a right word.

(13) ET6: It(.) wer(.) it landed **like** <u>right</u> towards me,

(14) ET5: she just killed her friend just because her friend talked about that(.) **like** <u>about</u> her looks or her hair or something

Also, the filler comes ahead of a phrase referring to direction in Example (13) and a preposition in Example (14).

2−4−2 Behind preposition

Unlike the Example (15) above *like* sometimes comes behind the preposition; the following is an example.

(15) ES18: I talked <u>about</u> **like** coming to Japan, because we couldn't think of anything

2−4−3 Numbers

When talking about the number of something in the past, speakers pause and wonder how many it was; the number does not come up to their mind immediately. The following are examples of the filler use by English speakers having a pause to recall the number.

(16) ES16: My host mom's explained it **like** <u>four</u> different times(.)

(17) ET9: And some people really think of it as **like** a fo(.) a <u>third</u> world country or something,

(18) ET9: And then seeing all these vending machines on the street and **like** <u>hundreds of thousands of</u> people like(.) walking around in Shinjuku station

Because the speaker is not sure about the exact number, ET6 in Example (16) says 'five or six'. ET9 stops to say 'fourth' and then says 'third' after a short pause in Example (17); *like* in this case shows speaker's uncertainty about the number. Also, when the speaker is not sure about the exact number but knows it is big, she uses 'hundreds of thousands of' with filler ahead of the noun phrase shown in Example (18).

2−4−4 Ahead of clause / sentence

(19) ES4: Yeah, I didn't really have any sort of(.) thoughts as to what it was going to be **like** <u>before</u> I came here,

(20) ET4: so **like** he didn't get us stuck in the mud or anything

(21) ES7: But, I don't know(.) like(..) it's one of those things for me(.) **like** it has to come off the pot(.)

(22) ES10: Yeah, and **like**, most Chinese parents, even the ones in America, **like**, where you raise a child in America, **like**, even if your child has problems it's very rare that they'll ever seek

The filler, *like* comes ahead of a clause and a sentence in the turn. It comes ahead of a clause with a conjunction, 'before' in Example (19) and ahead of a main clause in Example (20). Example (21) has two sentences with *like*. Example (22) is more complicated; it has

a noun phrase and two clauses with the filler ahead of them. When Japanese learners of English speak English, we usually do not use multiplex-structured sentences like Example (22). We use complex or compound sentences, for example a sentence with a main clause and a sub clause. That's it! We try not to use ungrammatical expressions following the textbook-rule, and never connect too many clauses together by using filler.

(23) ES12: **Like**, **like**, I got an A on my mid-term and I didn't think I would, so I was surprised, but that's not interesting

(24) ES14: **Like**, I really don't know

Example (23) and Example (24) have filler in the beginning of the turns; I suppose this has the same function as filler, 'well'. The speakers pause to start saying the words by using the filler ahead of their utterance. In the classrooms in Japan we learned 'well' and 'let me see' as filler for hesitation, but never have seen this example of *like* as filler.

2－4－5 Describing feeling in the past

(25) ET2: I was **like**, "whoa! very interesting"

(26) ES14: but I was **like**,(..) "I'm in Japan right now?"

(27) ET1: It was kind of **like** "Wow... everyone's kind of large, and loud"

(28) ES20: That it comes to mind? Because I can't think of anything! {laugh} I'm just, I'm **like**, "Well, what did I see that's surprising?"

English speakers use *like* to describe their feelings in the past, and it is always accompanied by a quotation mark. This speech manner is very different from textbook-English I have studied in Japan, which makes me feel the speech is a little awkward. In Example (25) ET2 does not use a verb, 'thought' but a be-verb and *like* instead of saying "I thought, 'Whoa! Very interesting!'" like the one in textbook. In Example (26) is a question and ES14 uses a filler expression instead of saying "I wondered if I was in Japan". In Example (27) the speaker places 'kind of' ahead of *like* to describe her feeling. Example (28) shows that the speaker uses both a verb and filler in her turn.

2－4－6 Describing utterance in the past

(29) ES6: And(..) and she called me, and she was **like** "yeah, just hop on over"

(30) ES14: I was **like**, "Excuse me", and they were **like**, "Ah, wakarimasen (I don't know.)" {laugh}

(31) ES22: And then my mom came home and I said "Oh, I got my letter from Georgetown", and she's **like**, "Oh, my god!", because I wasn't surprised, I was **like** "Oh, I got in", and then she flipped out too, so

(32) ES12: First we came(.) we(.) we came out in (Medigokokuji) Temple, and then we walked down here, and then, "Oh, it's the wrong direction", so we went back and asked at the koban (police box), and we were **like** "Where's(.) where's, you know, the Japanese Women's University?", he's **like** "Oh go that way", so we went part of the way and we were **like** "I don't know, so we asked somebody else", and she was **like**, "No, no, go that way!", so we went that way

English speakers use the filler, *like* when describing utterance in the past, and just the same as the examples of feeling I mentioned above, it is always accompanied by a quotation mark. This speech manner is also the one that I have never seen in English textbooks.

Example (29) and (30) are turns that describe words spoken in the past without using a verb 'said'. If the Example (31) was in a textbook, it would be "she said, 'Yeah, just hop on over'" in 'direct narration' or 'she said that I could hop on over' in indirect narration. The speaker uses both a verb and filler in her turn in Example (31) whereas the speaker never uses a verb to describe the utterance in her long turn of Example (32).

2－4－7 Other characteristics of the *like* use

I found some other characteristics of the *like* use in the conversations of Mr. O Corpus.

(33) ET1: For example you were saying, you know, it's kind of commonplace in America for advanced technology **like**(.) you know(.) ahh(.) cameras on the telephone to be(.)

(34) ES4: Well, all my life I had(..) planned to be an artist, you know **like**, drawing things, and

English speakers use *like* to give an example in conversations. In Example (33) ET1 uses it ahead of 'cameras' to give an example of advanced technology and Example (34) gives an example of creative activity of artists, 'drawing things'. English speakers tend to use the filler when they give an example in conversations.

(35) ET3: And then I(.) I heard <u>wings</u>, **like** <u>wings</u>, hitting the side(..) so I couldn't(.)

(36) ES10: It's(.) it's(.) it's horrible, yeah, I was just **like**(.) I was **like**(...) wha(.) **like**(.) it's(.) I don't know, it's horrible, to think that a twelve year old can do that(.) **like**(.) to **like**(.) ooh **like**(.) she **like**, I think she put she t(.) took her(.) took her to the study, and she like, pulled the curtain, then she tried to blindfold her, and then(.) I think the girl fought back, so she just like, ooh(.) it's horrible

(37) ES6: It's **like**(.) it's a really amazing country, <u>I mean</u>(..) well, continent, more, because, <u>I mean</u>, every country is so remarkably different, and

(38) ES7: Well, I have **like**(.) you know(.) I've (got) funny experiences I can tell old stories(.) <u>you know</u>(.) <u>I like</u>(.) <u>I like</u> to(.) <u>you know</u>(.) make people laugh, it's something I really enjoy

Speakers tend to use *like* when there is hesitation in their speech; four examples are shown above. The speaker, ET3 repeats a noun, 'wing' with the filler between the nouns in Example (35). ES10 uses *like* nine times in Example (36), and percentage of it is more than 10% of the total number of her utterance in this turn. She is the speaker who used *like* the most often of all speakers according to Chart 2 (the rate: 6.76%). The speakers use *like* with other filler such as 'I mean' and 'well' in Example (37) and 'you know' in Example (38). ES7 repeats 'I like' (*like* is not filler but a verb), which also shows hesitation in her speech.

(39) ET4: I have a lo(.) Oh I(.) I don't think that they're bad(.) they're **like**(..) I think that they're just <u>funny</u>, I have lots of <u>surprising</u> experiences, but **like**(.) I just(.) you know(.) maybe they're <u>embarrassing</u> at the time, but I just think they're <u>funny</u>
(In this example a pronoun, 'they' refers to her memories)

(40) ET6: Honestly, I guess it's **like**, <u>yeah</u>, it's almost **like** being in a foreign country or something there, so

The speakers use *like* in the turn when they take some time to choose a right word. In Example (39) ET4 is asked if how her memories in the life are like, and she says some adjectives to modify them. In Example (40) ET6 needs to say 'yeah' just after the filler to think about a right word. *Like* is the filler used for selecting words.

(41) ES6: Luckily I was already dressed, and everything, but <u>it was</u> **like**, she called and I ran out the door(..) rode the bus, rode the

    train, rode the taxi

(42) ES10: Yeah, that {laugh} made me so mad, it's **like**, I don't think so {laugh}

    As shown in two examples above, like + is (was) changes flow of the speech; it might be said it functions as a kind of stuffing and switcher. I suppose that the word 'it's' is not a combination of a pronoun and a be-verb but means nothing because there is no complemental word following it.

(43) ET4: Yeah, it's beautiful, I hear(.) **like**, uhh, that's just something I have to do

(44) ET5 I wo(.) do(.) do you know what's going to happen to her?

    ES10: I don't know, **like**, they said that **like**, I think the last time I read it was, they were deciding whether they were gonna put

    her through a trial,

    The filler is also used in Examples in (43) and (44) where the speakers says a new word just after saying another one; Hashiuchi (1999) calls this speech act 'repair' by using filler. He is a Japanese linguist who analyzes Japanese discourses, and points out that speakers use filler to cancel the word and repair it.

(45) ET3: So, I thought maybe the crows thought the cat had killed the bird, ate the bird or something

    ES6: Hmm, yeah, do you think it really ate it? **like** have you seen the body anywhere?

(46) ES16: Jeanie and I were talking about if(...) I mean if it were just one part of your life, **like** <u>if</u> they said the most surprising

    thing   in the last month maybe(..) it'd be easier to think of things, 'cause when it's your whole life, it's a lot of pressure, {laugh} the

    most surprising thing ever

    The filler is placed in the series of speech. The speakers use some sort of expression more than twice by using filler, *like* in the joint parts. In Example (45) the speaker repeated questions and there is the filler between two sentences. Example (46) has two if-clauses with the filler between them; just as I mentioned above in 2.4.4, it is very colloquial and uncommon in the textbooks. Even a long sentence of textbook-English usually has a main clause and a sub-clause only, and it is not like Example (46) shown above.

3．Discussion

3－1 Discussing the results

    As I mentioned in 2.4.1, the filler *like* comes ahead of noun, verb, adjective and preposition, which denotes that speakers use it to pad a time to think about a right word. There is no example of an adverb with *like* in the data, but I wonder if other native speakers of English use it in adverbial phrases when talking. An adverb is a kind of part, so I suppose speakers use *like* with an adverb the same way as the examples of the other parts when they need a time to think in the turn, for example '*like* slowly'.

    As for some examples given in 2.4.4, 2.4.5, and 2.4.6, the filler functions as a substitute as well as stuffing. In Examples (23) and (24) the speakers place *like* ahead of their turns, and it has the same function as filler for hesitation, 'well'. Also, a combination of a be-verb and *like* functions as a verb: the speakers use it instead of the verbs 'think' and 'say' in Examples (25), (26), (27), (28), (29),

(30), (31), and (32). I think that this is one of the most interesting discoveries in my study because we never use filler as a substitute (placeholder) of a verb in the Japanese language. If a Japanese learner of English language listens to American people speaking this way, she (he) will be confused, saying "What does this guy prefer to?" The language teachers have never taught this speech act in classrooms.

The examples shown in 2.4.7 seem to be more natural for Japanese: we use filler, placing it in joint parts in the turn just as the English speakers do. Here is an example of the Japanese filler use in the conversation I collected in 2014: the speaker is a young Japanese female in 20's using 'a (あ)' once and 'nanka (なんか)' three time in her turn. In this example she uses the filler ahead of the turn like Examples (23) and (24), and places two different kinds of filler together (なんか、あ) like Examples (33), (34), (37), and (38).

(47) なんか確かに、なんか小っちゃい２学年ずつ分ける傾向はあるから、５，６で切るのはある意味妥当性はあるのかもしれんけど、なんか、あ、何でここなんだろうとふと。

(There is definitely a tendency to divide elementary school children into two groups according to the grade, so I think that it might be valid to do it in the 5th and 6th grades. But I wonder why the thing goes like this. This is translated by the author.)

3－2 Comparison to conversation of English speakers from other area

The American man pointed out in Introduction that the frequent use of *like* is a typical speech manner of young American women. Although Mister O Corpus[1] does not contain any conversation data of native English speakers of other areas in the world, I wonder how mush *like* they use in conversations, and wonder if this speech act is observed more often in American English speakers than them. Then I looked at the data I collected through my past research. I recorded a conversation among six English speakers in 2014: they talked about two topics for about 90 minutes.

The nationalities of the English speakers varied. They were all ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers), who worked at public schools in Japan through the JET Program, organized by the Ministry of Education. There are three men and three women in the group. For this study I focused on data of three female British people in 20's out of the group and analyzed the frequency of their *like* use. The three women are as follows: Kl is 26 years old and taught at a high school for one year and six months. Sr is 23 years old and who has taught at a junior high school for one year and a half. St is 23 years old and who has taught for one year and seven months. All of them are British. I listened to the recorded data and transcribed it. The grid named 'rate' in Chart 5 denotes the rate of *like* used by the speakers out of the total amount of utterance.

Chart 5. Statistical data of like used by the British English speakers

speakers	Kl	Sr	St
rate (%)	0.89	0.60	0.61

I have collected data of only three British English speakers so far, which might not be much enough to generalize the speech manner of them. I know that it is not easy to compare two different kinds of corpus data because I collected my own data in a different way from Mister O Corpus. But Chart 5 gives us a hint that the British English speakers tend to use less *like* as filler than the American

English speakers in conversations. The percentage of all the British speakers is less than 1% (the average rate: 0.7%) whereas the average rate of the American speakers in 20's from Mister O Corpus is 1.75%. The rate of the Americans is much higher than that of the British, which indicates that this is a typical speech act of American English speakers, observed especially in young speakers.

4．Conclusions

An American language teacher in Japan said to me one day that Japanese language has many dialects and accents depending on the area even if it is spoken in a small country (He is from California!). He wondered why American English has fewer regional variations even if it is spoken in a large country, compared to Japanese. However, when it comes to the filler use, the English language varies. It did not matter for me whether it was American English or British one: English was English. It was not until I recorded conversations among native speakers of English from the various areas that I found there is diversity. The filler use is one example of the language variation.

When I first transcribed a speech script a few years ago and read the speech which if full of *like*, as the one shown in Example (1), I wondered what on the earth this speech act was. It was very different from the grammar I have learned at school. I did not even know the fact that the act is often observed among young females in California. In my study, some Californian girls tend to use *like* frequently: two young speakers from California used *like* more frequently than the speakers from other area. The region reflects not only accent but filler. But I am not sure if what the American man says in 2.1 is correct: these girls tend to be interested more in shopping and personal appearance than intellectual activities or personal accomplishment. Also, the age reflects the frequency: young speakers tend to use *like* more often than middle-aged speakers. It should be important for non-native learners of English to keep this speech habit in our mind when listening to a conversation among American English speakers.

註

(1) The 'Mister O Corpus' is a cross-linguistic video corpus collected for the projects funded by a Grand-in Aid for Scientific Research (B) from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. The corpus consists of three types of interactions: problem-solving tasks, narratives, and conversations in Japanese, American English, Korean, Libyan Arabic, Thai and Chinese. The data was collected at Japan Women's University in Tokyo, Japan, in 2004 for American English.

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