snippets

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1.

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Questioning innovative quotatives

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Since Butters (1980, 1982) noted the quotative use of *go* and *be like* in American English, subsequent literature on these expressions in a variety of world Englishes has focused almost exclusively on their discourse functions, pragmatic features, and the sociolinguistic factors that affect a speaker's choice of quotatives in narratives with speech reports (see the relevant bibliography 3-13). However, Butters' original observations also noted that *wh*-interrogatives with quotative *go* are ungrammatical, a syntactic restriction (which also holds for *be like*) that has not garnered similar attention.

(1) a. Howard said "Good morning, everybody."
    b. What did Howard say?
(2) a. Howard went "Good morning, everybody."
    b. *What did Howard go?
(3) a. Howard was like "Good morning, everybody."
    b. *What was Howard like? (with (1b) interpretation)

Butters (1980) speculated that interrogatives with these innovative quotatives "may come in due time," but almost 30 years later, their grammaticality status has not changed. Schourup (1982) proposed a functional explanation for the absence of *wh*-interrogatives with *go*, according to which "*go* is not needed in those interrogatives, and other sentences, where it does not introduce directly quoted material." Schourup reasoned that the meaning of *go* stands in opposition to that of *say* – since *say* is often potentially ambiguous between direct and indirect speech report readings when the complementizer *that* is absent (5-6), *go* functions for speakers/hearers as an unambiguous introducer of direct speech (6) that thus cannot introduce indirect speech (7). While Schourup did not address *be like*, the facts mirror those for *go*.

(4)   John said "I was responsible for Lauren's failure."
(5)   John said (that) I was responsible for Lauren's failure.
(6)   John went/was like "I was responsible for Lauren's failure."
(7)   *John went/was like that I was responsible for Lauren's failure.

Schourup suggested that the ungrammaticality of (2b) is related to (7); in *wh*-interrogatives, *go* is associated not with an actual direct speech complement, but a *wh*-word. However, this approach makes incorrect predictions for the behavior of *go*/*be like* in quotative contexts where direct speech (or inner monologue/reaction) *is* present (*cf* Suñer 2000).

(8) a. Howard said, "Hey now."
     b. "Hey now," Howard said/said Howard.
(9) a. Howard went/was like, "Hey now"
     b. "Hey now," Howard *was like/?went.
(10) a. Howard went/was like, "Hey now."
     b. "Hey now," *was like/?went Howard.

Both (9b) and (10b) are highly degraded, yet this cannot be due to the absence of actual dialogue. By Schourup's reasoning, (9-10b) should parallel (8b), in which the quoted material is fronted (with or without quotative inversion).

Once we consider (9-10) alongside (2-3) and (7), it is clear that *go* and *be like* are not simply innovative near-equivalents of the canonical quotative *say*. Schourup himself noted that simple substitutions of *go* for *say* fail.

(11) I felt that I had nothing to say/*go/(*be like).
(12) Please say/*go/(*be like) your name.

Given the differences we have seen in their syntactic behavior, it is insufficient simply to assume that *go* and *be like* share the quotative status of *say*.

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