

I was Like as a Quotative Device: Implications for Indirect or Reported Speech in Nigerian English Usage

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Abstract - Reporting is naturally a feature of narratives or speech involving self-explaining activities, especially those in which the reporter may be a participant or simply narrates certain actions or events. In English usage, the task of reporting is such that a reporting verb is chosen to show the time of the actions or events narrated, and the tense in the original action reported undergoes certain modifications along with the perspective or point of view. However, there are exceptions to the rules of tense in cases involving the reporting of actions that are constant, the expression of eternal truths or religious principles and beliefs. This paper highlights the use of “I was like” by Nigerians as a quotative device in reporting events. This is with a view to identifying the various communicative functions of “I was like” in this regard, and its implications for English usage in a second language setting. The speech samples of purposively selected Nigerians who have either acquired or are in the process of acquiring tertiary education served as data for the study. The participants featured in formal radio and television talk shows. The findings revealed that even in formal speech situations, “I was like” can be employed by Nigerians in reported speech and by it, they can scale the hurdle of having to abide by the rules of reporting in English usage. This, no doubt, has implications for performance in English language, especially in formal settings.

Keywords – Communicative Functions, Quotative Device, Reporting

INTRODUCTION

Discourse in English usage, particularly in non-native settings has consistently generated much scholarly research. The fact remains that language is dynamic in nature, and various languages have been found to always adapt to the socio-cultural milieu within which they function. Over the years, synchronic and diachronic studies on the use of English by different social groups have revealed the emergence of varieties of the English language so that specific social classes can become identified and categorized based on the linguistic behavior of members of the classes.

Language is a very important means of communicating social meaning. It is therefore very important to study language and its use in social contexts. Spolsky [1] explains that “language – any language – is full of systematic variation, variation that can only be accounted for by appealing, outside language, to socially-relevant forces and facts”. English language in Nigeria has spread to so many domains of human life. Its importance is revealed in

the various opportunities attached to mastery or proficiency in the language. However, different aspects of English usage have been found to pose great challenges to second language learners. Chukwu [2] explains the ignorance displayed by learners and scholars who are second language users of English in Nigeria, in the use of copula verbs, Sotiloye *et al* [3] examine prepositional errors in the use of English by selected second language learners of English in Nigeria, to mention a few. All of these establish the fact that there are many challenges attached to English usage in non-native settings.

According to Mphande [4], Language is a guide to social reality, and human beings at times seem to be at the mercy of the language that has become the medium of expression for their society.

Therefore, from this perspective, experience is largely determined by the language habits of the community, and that each separate structure

represents a separate reality. One of the challenges identified in Nigerian English usage is that of reported or indirect speech in which case, the speaker retells an earlier activity or experience of his or of others. Since language, in addition to its function as a means of communicating meaning, is also a means by which phatic communion or social rapport can be established by members within a community or social group, it is important that the techniques involved in self-explaining activities or narratives be examined. The use of *I was like* in reporting, particularly in informal speech situations has attracted attention in contexts outside Nigeria, with no specific mention of the implications of such usage in second-language settings. This study therefore investigates the occurrence of *I was like* as a quotative device in Nigerian English usage, focusing on the different strategies of its usage in different, formal, self-explaining activities by educated Nigerians. It also highlights the implications of the use of this expression for public speaking in English, particularly in completely formal situations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine English language usage by educated Nigerians, especially regarding the constructional features of indirect or reported speech. Specifically, the study seeks to highlight the significant structures and communicative roles of *I was like* or its variants as a quotative device in the indirect speech samples collected. Also, the possible effects of this speech behavior in English usage in a second language situation are extensively discussed.

METHODOLOGY

The 24 speech samples used in this study are excerpts from formal interviews on television between 2010 and 2014. The programmes which were purposively selected on NTA, Channels TV, LTV 8, and OGTV featured 23 purposively sampled educated Nigerians - 14 graduate participants (5 males and 9 females), and 9 undergraduates (6 males and 3 females) who were either in the process of acquiring or had already acquired tertiary education. Information about their educational statuses was revealed either at the beginning or close to the end of the programme.

Rules of Reporting

There are certain important rules to be observed when reporting. Fakoya [5] captures these rules as follows:

- i. ***This* becomes *the* or *that*; *today* becomes *that day*; *I* becomes *he* or *she*; *we* becomes *they*, etc.**
- ii. ***Tenses* have to move one step backwards in time: *present* becomes *past*; *past* becomes *perfect*, and so on.**
- iii. ***The usual word order for direct statements* has to be modified.**
- iv. ***Before questions which do not have a question-word, (e.g. *who*, *where*), *if* or *whether* is used.***
- v. ***Sometimes, even after past reporting verbs, for instance when reporting facts, the tenses are the same as the original speaker's***
- vi. ***Some verb forms do not change when reported.***

The rules above show that there could be challenges that can possibly attend the processing of reported or indirect speech, especially by non-native speakers of English.

Errors in Reported Speech

Based on the observation of the speech behaviour of some educated Nigerian users of English, there are certain errors identified in reporting. These errors arise from either the inadequate knowledge of the processes involved in reporting or what Kperogi [6] regards as hypercorrection. His comments on "Common Errors of Reported Speech in Nigerian English" state thus:

There is a pervasive kind of error in reported speech in Nigerian English, especially in Nigerian media English, that is inspired by what grammarians call hypercorrection - the tendency to be misguided by false, ill-digested analogies and insufficient familiarity with the complexity of grammatical rules.

However, Kperogi's [6] discussion does not include the role of *I was like* in reported speech as is done in this paper. The example he cites is based on the violation of the rules of verb inflection, especially in cases where the tense ought not to change if constantly-true facts are being reported.

Schourup's [7] and Siegel's [8] works reveal that *like* is used as a hedge by adolescents in the US and that the discourse particle is capable of signaling a possible slight mismatch between words and

meaning. Siegel [8] studies tape-recorded informal interviews of 23 suburban high school students in Philadelphia, a town in Mississippi, United States. The study excludes *I was like* or any of its variants discussed extensively in this research. It concentrates on the kind of *like* that can be described as a sort of a hedge, common in the spoken expressions of adolescent girls in the U.S. This kind of speech behaviour which results in poor management of indirect or reported speech is completely and deliberately excluded in Siegel's [8] study on the use of *like*. He says that "I am not including, as part of this construction, another contemporary nonstandard use of *like* which can be paraphrased as 'say'". He cites "She was like "Get out of here" as an example of this usage.

I have heard many carelessly composed reported expressions made by educated Nigerians in different speech situations. Some of these are stated below:

Errors Relating to Tense

Incorrect

- i. They told me that they **are** looking for the stolen money.
- ii. The girl said that her friend **has** taken the bag.
- iii. She **has** been born before grandma died.

Direct speech:

- iva. This is where we kept the book.
- iv.b He told me that **this is** where they kept the book

Correct

- i. They told me that they **were** looking for the stolen money.
- ii. The girl said that her father **had** taken the bag.
- iii. She **had** been born before grandma died.
- iv. He told me that **that was** where they kept the book

Beyond these identified patterns, the use of *I was like* in reported speech reveals another dimension of English usage and the possible danger that this portends for the construction of indirect speech by second-language users, particularly in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) settings. This development ought to be of interest to scholars and stakeholders in the educational system who are concerned about the performance of Nigerian students in English language

in public examinations such as the SSCE, NECO, UTME, among others.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The samples collected for this study reveal that in a reported sentence, the subject can be any of the personal pronouns – *I, we, you, he, she, they*, or their noun equivalents. This is followed by any of the *be* forms that agrees with the subject in terms of number and tense. The manner of the occurrence of *like* in reported speech is such that any of the structure described becomes followed by *like*. This is discussed in the following section.

The Structure of The *Np+Aux(Be)+Like* and Its Variants In Reported Speech

In the interviews used for this study, participants were expected to express their feelings or opinions about something, which of course may necessitate the need to refer to other people's opinions, expectations or assumptions. The use of *I was like, we were like*, etc. became preponderant as seen in the samples. This use of *I'm like* with its *NP+AUX (verb to be)+like* structure reveals some dynamisms, especially in the co-occurrence of *like* with personal and indefinite pronouns and nouns or noun phrases.

1. The Use of *AUX(be)+Like* With Personal Pronouns

In the samples below, the personal pronouns come first, followed by a form of the auxiliary verb - *to be* and *like*.

Sample 1: I'm very very happy because I was shocked when I heard that Diamond is involved in this **so I was like ah** so this boy does not want to stop this his dance stuff. I believe this is going to take him to a higher level. (*Male, Graduate, NTA, Sept. 2010, Interview*)

Sample 2: Number one, the families we met in this academy, at least we got close to know each other. **We were like we knew how to dance** until we got here and saw another thing entirely. (*Male, Undergraduate, NTA, 2010, Interview*)

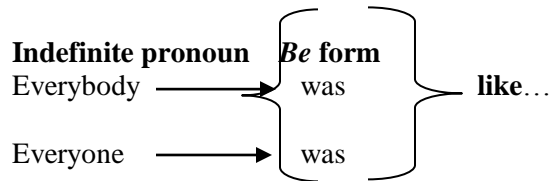
Sample 3: The NASS commotion started like a drama and **we were like** maybe they didn't know the Speaker of the House of Assembly. (*Male, Graduate, a chairman of one of the House of Reps committees,*

Friday, Nov. 21, 2014, Channels TV, 07am-09.00am, Topic: NASS Commotion)

around. **Everybody was like happy**(Male, Undergraduate, 2012, Interview)

Sample 4:We are going to see a lot of animals too at the Father Christmas zoo. I saw the porcupine. You know I told you not to allow it to shake its ... and **you were like no** it can't. (Female, Graduate, Presenter, Saturday Dec. 6, 2014, 08am-09.00am, LTV 8, Interview)

Sample 9: So **everyone was like kind of ah waoh**, will they call us on phone? (Male, Undergraduate, 2012, Interview)



Sample 5:I told my mum I wanted to marry a Muslim and **she is like** why do you want to do that? (Female, Graduate, June 28, 2012, 10pm, NTA, Interview, Topic: "Intermarriages between Christians and Muslims")

3. The Use of AUX (be) + Like with Nouns/Noun Phrases

Instances of the use of the BE forms with *like* are shown below:

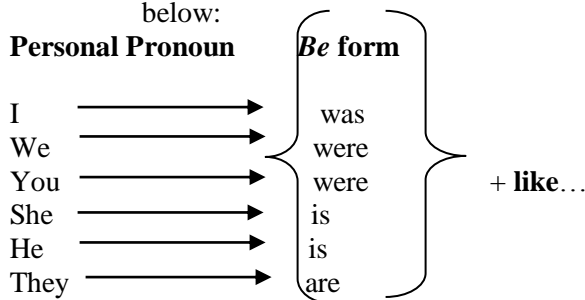
Sample 6:What is so cool about him is that when he is dancing, he has this ferocious look and when I give him the microphone, **he is like thank you very much**. I'm so humbled. (Female, Graduate, Presenter, Sept. 2012, NTA, Interview)

Sample 10: When a woman goes into politics, **men are like "a woman"**? What is she doing there? She is not serious. (Female, Graduate, Political leader and member of an NGO, Wednesday, Nov. 26, 2014, 9.00am-9.30am, LTV 8, Interview, Topic: Eradicating Violence against Women)

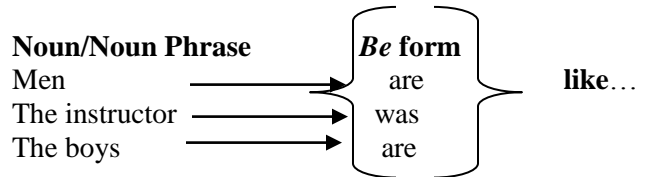
Sample 7:There are young boys working with me. ...When I ask them if they are enjoying it, **they are like yes**. (Female, Graduate, Architect turned artist, Oct. 14, 2014, 9.00pm-10.00pm, LTV 8, an interview supported by Ford Foundation)

Sample 11: ...but when we got there, we just did something and after doing it, **the instructor was like "nice performance"**(Male, Undergraduate, Sept. 20, 2010, NTA, Interview)

Like is seen to occur with *I, we, you, she, he, they* in samples 1 to 7 above. This is shown below:



Sample 12: **The boys are like you girls sweep**, wash the plates. These chores are for girls. (Female, Graduate, Political leader and member of an NGO, Wednesday, Nov. 26, 2014, 9.00am-9.30am, LTV 8, Interview, Topic: Eradicating Violence against Women)



2. The Use of AUX (be)+Like with Indefinite Pronouns

The samples below show the combined use of *like* and the verb *-to be* with the indefinite pronoun - *everybody* and *everyone*.

Men are like, the instructor was like, and the boys are like in the samples illustrate the use of noun, and noun phrases with *like*. This use of NP+AUX (be)+*like* will henceforth be referred to as *I was like*.

Sample 8: My mum was like waoh we are going to participate in this great show this time

The Occurrence of *I Was Like* and Its Variants in Reported Speech

1. **NP+AUX(be)+like in Reported Questions** *I was like* or any of its variants is seen to occur in reported interrogative sentences as shown in sample 10 above:

When a woman goes into politics, **men are like a woman?** What is she doing there? She is not serious. (*Female, political leader*)

Other instances are seen in the collected samples below:

Sample 13: Everybody is like whymust we come out for eviction all the time.... (*Male, Undergraduate, Sept. 21, 2010, NTA, Interview*)

Sample 14: You just had your head up there like oh God, when is it going to be over? (*Male, Graduate, Sept. 19, 2011, NTA, Interview*)

See Sample 5 Above

I told my mum I wanted to marry a Muslim and **she is like** why do you want to do that? (*Female, Undergraduate, June 28, 2012, 10pm, NTA, Interview, Topic: Intermarriages between Christians and Muslims*)

See Sample 9 Above:

So **everyone was like kind of ah waoh**, will they call us on phone? (*Male, Undergraduate, 2012, NTA, Interview*)

Sample 15: A guy said “we will kill them today”. **I was like what’s that?** I got to know that he was talking about a particular foreign football club he has aligned himself to (*Female, Graduate, Presenter, May 4, 2012, NTA, She discusses football and narrates her experience on a journey in a bus with other passengers,).*

2. NP+AUX(be)+Like in Reported Declaratives

Samples 11 and 12 above show the use of the NP+AUX(be)+like in reported declarative sentences:

The instructor was like “nice performance”

The boys are like you girls sweep, wash the plates. These chores are for girls.

Other examples found in the collected speech samples are shown below:

Sample 16: The police told us we needed a permit, we couldn’t protest, we needed to get out of there. **We were like we are citizens; we have the right to protest.** (*Female, Graduate, an Executive Director of an NGO, May, 2014, 3.00pm, Channels TV, Interview, Bring Back our Girls: State of the Nation*)

Sample 17: My daughter came back from school and I told her that Pheba had died and **she was like I already know** (*Male, Graduate, CEO of an online newspaper, Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2014, 07pm, Interview, OGTV*)

Sample 18: Benue state is the best. When I was serving in this state, **I was like** let me do something for the state (*Male, Graduate who served in Benue State, May 4, 2012, 2.00PM – 2.30pm, NTA, Interview*)

All the samples reveal the use of *I was like* in reported declaratives.

The Communicative Functions of *I Was Like* In Reported Speech

The use of *I was like* in reported speech, no doubt performs some communicative functions for its users. The processing of indirect or reported speech involves certain dynamics which have been highlighted above. The result is thought reorganization on the part of the speaker. The use of *I’m like* or any of its variants allows the speaker to avoid this process of thought reorganization. The use of *I’m like* reveals the monologue going on in the speaker’s mind so that his thought-flow becomes expressed exactly as they are, in the words following *I’m like*, *I was like*, *we are like*, etc.

1. The Use of *I was Like* as a Means of Avoiding Thought Reorganization

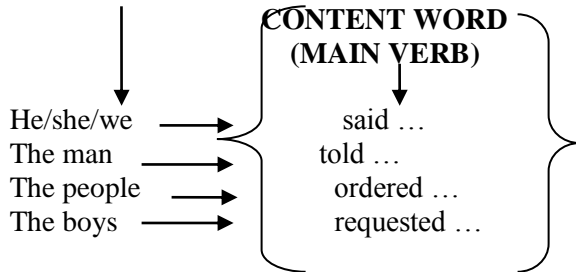
The process of thought reorganization in indirect or reported speech requires the introduction of content words and the use of appropriate tense markers on the part of the narrator or reporter.

i. The Use of *I was like* as a Means of Avoiding Content Word Usage

Content words (reporting verbs) are usually introduced after the subject in a reported sentence.

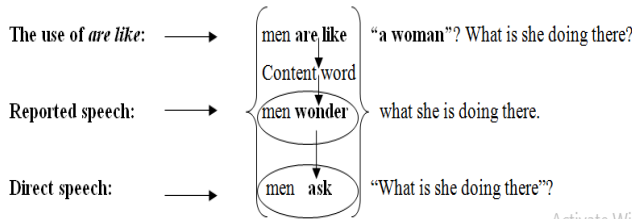
This could be *said, told, ordered, requested, asked, etc.* depending on the context.

Noun/Noun Phrase/Pronoun



The reporting verbs are usually employed to introduce the event that is being narrated by the speaker. However, in the samples, the speaker does not need to belabour himself with the task of employing reporting verbs which of course are content words that are appropriate for his speech. He is also able to avoid the onerous task of reorganising his thought and engaging in the act of indirect reporting. Below are some samples to illustrate this:

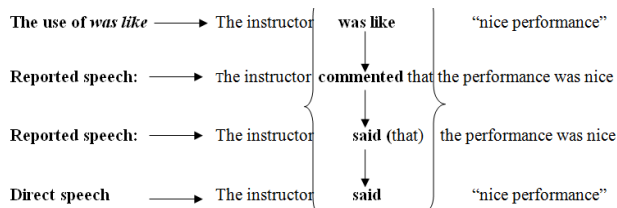
See Sample 10: (Female, political leader)



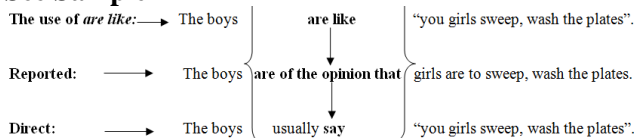
Activate Wind

The content words - *wonder* and *ask* in *men wonder*, and *men ask*, have been used to replace *are like* in *men are like*.

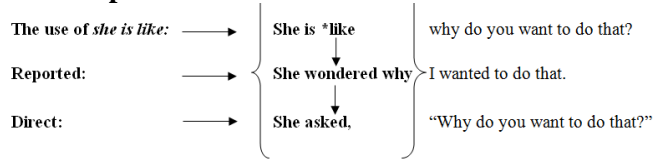
See Sample 11



See Sample 12

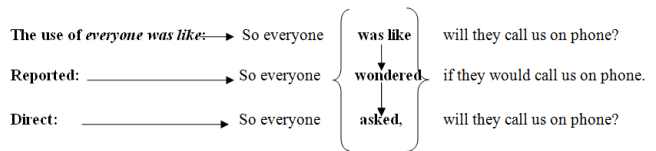


See Sample 15

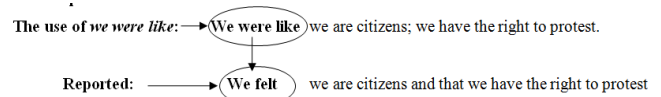


Note that there is a case of inappropriate use of tense in sample 15. This is discussed in the section on implications of the use of *I was like* in reported speech.

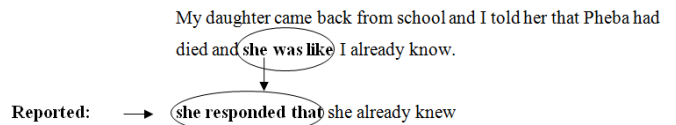
See Sample 9



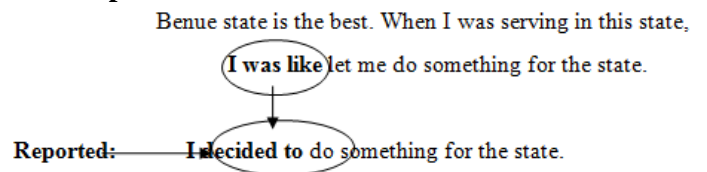
See Sample 16



See Sample 17

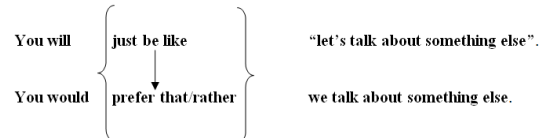


See Sample 18:



Sample 19: If I met you on the way and I start to ask “what do you understand about the economic conditions of the nation”, you will just be like let’s talk about something else. (Female, Graduate, Head of Business Desk of a TV Station)

In this sample, you will be like is used where you would prefer that or you would rather is appropriate.



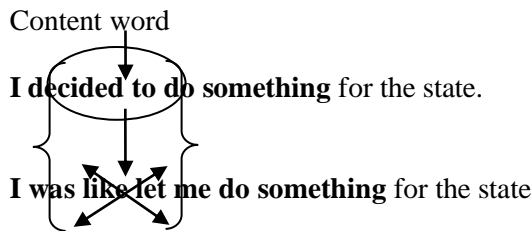
The participants used *men are like, the instructor was like, the boys are like, she is like, everyone was like, we were like, she was like, I was like, and you*

would be like in place of expressions which contain reporting verbs – *men wonder/ask, the instructor commented/said that, the boys are of the opinion/usually say that, she wondered/ asked, everyone wondered/asked, we felt, she responded, I decided to, and you will prefer that* respectively. They expressed their opinions exactly as they felt or expressed them at the time of the reported events.

ii. The Use of *I was Like* as a Means of Avoiding Tense Rules

I was like or any of its variants is seen to be employed by users as a means of managing the possible challenges that may attend tense usage, particularly in an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) setting. This is another communicative function that *I'm like* or any of its variants in reported speech performs for users. Below are some explanations:

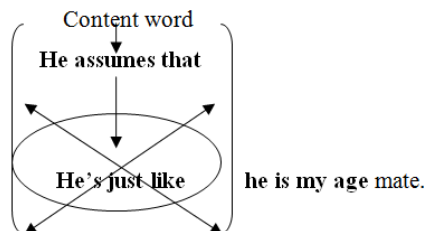
See Sample 18 Above: Benue state is the best. When I was serving in this state, **I was like let me do something** for the state. (*Male, graduate*)



In this sample, the expression - *decided to* has been used in place of *I was like* and the content word – *decided* reflects the simple past tense.

Sample 20: Sometimes, I do some things with my father and **he's just like he is my agemate....** (*Male, Undergraduate, Sept. 20, 2010, NTA, Interview*)

He's just like in the sample is replaced with *he assumes that*, as shown below. The content word is *assumes* and it reflects the simple present tense.



One thing leads to another; the adoption of a reporting verb requires that the verb must reflect the appropriate tense form. It is therefore easier to use (*he*) *is like*, (*she*) *is like*, (*they*) *are like* etc. in place of such content words indicating the time of the action expressed in the given sentence. For example, in the sentence - *he is like he is my age mate*, other forms of *NP+be +Like* is suitable as long as they each agree with the subject in terms of number. This is shown below:

<i>I am like</i>	→	I am his age mate
<i>We are like</i>	→	we are your age mate
<i>He's like</i>	→	he is my age mate
<i>She is like</i>	→	she is my age mate.
<i>You are like</i>	→	you are my age mate.
<i>They are like</i>	→	they are my age mates.

Consider the use of the *I was like* series with the new substitutes (containing a content word which reflects the tense) below:

<i>1st person singular pronoun</i>	→	<i>I assume</i>	I am his age mate
<i>1st person plural pronoun</i>	→	<i>We assume</i>	we are his age mates
<i>2nd person singular pronoun</i>	→	<i>You assume</i>	you are my age mate.
<i>3rd person singular pronoun</i>	→	<i>He/She assumes</i>	she is my age mate.
<i>3rd person plural pronoun</i>	→	<i>They assume</i>	they are my age mates.

The verb - *assume* changes to *assumes* as soon as there is a change in the personal pronouns from the 1st person, 2nd person, and 3rd person plural to the 3rd person singular pronouns respectively as shown above. With the use of *I was like*, the speaker avoids the task of selecting the appropriate verb form for the subject in a bid to obey the rule of concord (subject-verb agreement). The use of *he is like he is, she is like she is, you are like you are, and they are like they are*, is less challenging and therefore more convenient.

Another example is shown below:

Sample 21: I'm very challenged for a lady to become our instructor. When she was performing, **I was like oh God, "I pray to be like her someday"** and of which I know I will do better than her (*Female, Undergraduate, Sept. 2012, NTA, Interview*)

When she was dancing, **I was like "oh God, I pray to be like her someday"**.

When she was dancing, **I prayed to God so that I could be like her someday.**

In the sample above, the reorganization process that the speaker chose to ignore is displayed in the new sentence. The sentence has been reorganized as the usual word order for the direct statement becomes modified - *I was like oh God, "I pray to be like her someday"* becomes *I prayed to God so that I could be like her someday*. The direct speech is now an indirect one. This is shown below:

Direct speech: *I was like "oh God, I pray to be like her someday".*

Indirect speech: *I prayed to God so that I could be like her someday.*

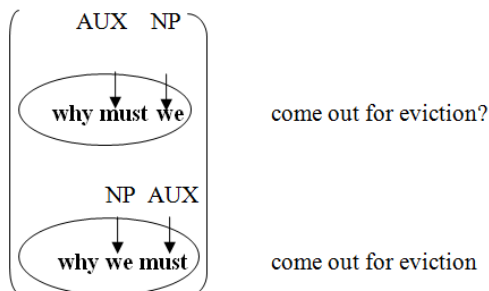
I was like is used instead of *I prayed* which includes a verb (content word) that reflects the simple past tense form. The samples reveal the use of *like* in a range of tenses indicating the past (*I was like*), the present (*he is like*) and the future (*you will be like*).

iii. The Use of *I was Like* as a Means of Avoiding the Reorganization of Reported Questions

The use of *I was like* also affords the user the opportunity to avoid the process of reporting questions in a reorganized manner; a manner in which the word order changes or becomes modified. The auxiliary verb in the questions must be carefully handled. With the use of *I was like*, however, the speaker goes on to report the question verbatim so that he avoids the process of NP/AUX inversion. Consider the following recorded sample:

See Sample 13: *Everybody is like why must we come out for eviction all the time?*

Reported: *Everybody wondered why we must come out for eviction all the time*



Sample 22: Yeah though I expected I was going to get to this level because I worked hard for it and also at a time, **I was like am I sure** I'm going to get to this level when I came in and I saw the people I was going to compete with. (*Female, Undergraduate, Sept. 7, 2010, NTA, Interview*)

I was like am I sure I'm going to get to **this** level?

I asked myself if I was sure that I was going to get to that level.

In sample 22, the statement - *I was like am I sure I'm going to get to this level?* is replaced with *I asked myself if I was sure that I was going to get to that level*.

The newly introduced content word is *asked* and the sentence has been reorganized; the question form has been changed to a statement or declarative form as the NP/AUX inversion process and the tense has moved a step back, and *this level* has become *that level* as shown below:

Question: *(I was like) am I sure I'm going to get to this level?*

Statement: *I asked myself if I was sure that I was going to get to that level.*

See Sample 15 Above: A guy said "we will kill them today". **I was like what's that?** I got to know that he was talking about a particular foreign football club he has aligned himself to. (*Female, Graduate, TV Presenter, May 4, 2012, NTA, she discusses football and narrates her experience on a journey in a bus with other passengers*)

I was like "what's that?"

I wondered what that was

The use of the contracted form – *what's*:

I was like what's that?

I was like what is that?

Direct speech:

I was like "What is that?"

Below is the indirect speech reflecting the use of a reporting verb in place of *I was like* and the modification of the interrogative sentence to show the inversion process in the positioning of the auxiliary verb and the noun phrase (AUX/NP inversion):

I wondered what that was.

The Implications of the Use of *I Was Like* In Reported Speech For Second Language Learners of English

The use of *I was like* as shown in the samples has certain implications for the use of English in formal contexts by learners.

i. Low Word Power Due to the Avoidance of Content Words

The use of *like* as replacements for content words may result in low word power in English usage. This is because users may become complacent about developing themselves in the vocabulary of the English language. *I was like and its variants* are substitutes which enable them to keep talking without bothering too much about content word usage. The speech samples show that *like* occurred as substitutes for common words or reported verbs in day-today discourse.

ii. Careless or Improper Handling of Tenses

The use of *I was like* and its various forms encourages a careless handling of tense forms. In situations involving events in the past, there is the tendency for the speaker to rattle on without actually taking note of the appropriate tense forms to use. The convenience provided by the use of *I was like* and its series facilitates this.

Sample 23: They said I was pregnant and they put an EDD there... and this was like the third time ...**So I'm like** how many times am I going to get pregnant in a year? People started coming to my place and you know **I'm like I'm okay, I'm okay**. Even in the hall, I would say sweetheart smile ... and **he would be like** "why am I smiling. There are too many people here.... (Female artiste, Graduate, comments on her failed marriage, Sept. 2014, 3.00pm, Channels TV, Interview)

This speaker did not observe the rules of tense in her narration of a past experience she had. Even in her use of the *I was like* series, she violated the rules! Consider these:

Incorrect: **So I'm like** how many times **am I** going to get pregnant in a year?

Correct: **So I was like** how many times **was**

I going to get pregnant in a year?

Incorrect: People started coming to my place and ...**I'm like**"**I'm okay, I'm okay**".

Correct: People started coming to my place and you know **I was like**"**I'm okay, I'm okay**".

See Sample 5 Above:

Incorrect: I told my mum I wanted to marry a Muslim and **she is like** why do you want to do that? (Female, Graduate, June 28, 2012, 10pm, NTA, Interview, Topic: Intermarriages between Christians and Muslims)

Correct: I told my mum I wanted to marry a Muslim and **she was like** why do you want to do that?

Sample 24: After having that fun **we are just like yes**, we are going to do this thing, we can do it... (Female, Undergraduate, Sept. 5, 2012, NTA, Interview)

This ought to be **we were just like...**

In each of the samples, there is the use of *I'm like* or any of its variants in the narration of experience or events in the past. However, none of these reflects the correct tense which indicates the time of the action.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In coping with the challenges of English usage, educated Nigerians have been found to devise means by which they can keep expressing themselves without as much hitch as possible. *I was like* becomes readily available in spontaneous narratives. This kind of speech behavior results in poor management of indirect or reported speech. Although, to an extent, the speaker is able to continue talking such that he assumes that he has been able to achieve fluency in his use of English, he becomes more unfamiliar with the processes involved in reported speech. The speech samples used in this study were collected in formal speech situations on television programmes. For a second-language learner of English, this trend is dangerous as his ability in the language, with regard to the use of indirect speech, particularly in formal discourse worsens by the day.

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