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‘Telling it like it is’ An assessment of attitudes to language change based on the use of *like*

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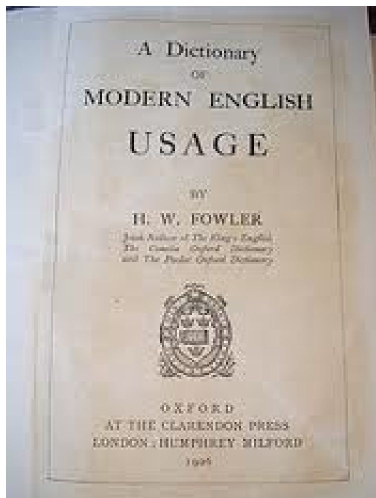

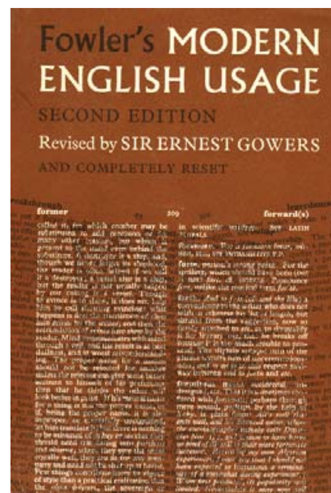

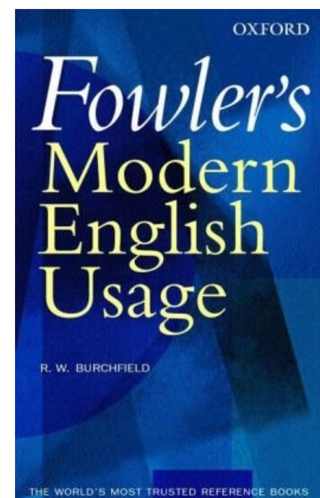

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INTRODUCTION

1. **Background**

   1.1 Introductory remarks
   1.2 Standard English: does it exist?
   1.3 Grammar teaching in English state schools
   1.4 The usage guide
   1.5 The complaint tradition
      1.5.1 Brief history
      1.5.2 The complaint tradition today
   1.6 Internet, or the e-effect
   1.7 Concluding remarks

2. **Discussion of existing data**

   2.1 Introductory remarks
   2.2 Survey model
   2.3 Design of the present survey
   2.4 H.W. Fowler as authority
   2.5 Usage guides on *like* and *as*
   2.6 Concluding remarks

3. **Methodology**

   3.1 Introductory remarks
   3.2 Design of the present study
   3.3 Method of analysis
   3.4 Discussion of extra-linguistic factors:
      3.4.1 Total group
      3.4.2 Age
      3.4.3 Education
      3.4.4 Profession
      3.4.5 Native language
      3.4.6 Frequency of use of digital media

   3.3 Discussion of Kingsley Amis sentence
   3.4 Other non-standard features mentioned by respondents
   3.5 Concluding remarks

4. Presentation and discussion of survey findings

4.1 Introductory remarks

4.2 Discussion of extra-linguistic factors:
- 4.2.1 Total group
- 4.2.2 Age
- 4.2.3 Education
- 4.2.4 Profession
- 4.2.5 Native language
- 4.2.6 Frequency of use of digital media

4.3 Discussion of Kingsley Amis sentence
4.4 Other non-standard features mentioned by respondents
4.5 Concluding remarks

5. Conclusions drawn from survey

5.1 Introductory remarks
5.2 Comparison of findings of present survey with findings from model survey
5.3 Effects of use of digital media
5.4 Summary of findings
5.5 Concluding remarks

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

1. Questionnaire
2. List of non-standard features mentioned by respondents

INTRODUCTION

Q. 'You see an attractive person. What do you call them, one slang word, beginning with P?'

This question appeared in an article on youth slang in *The Week* of 16 April 2011. The article was published in connection with the recently completed Evolving English project at the British Library, and highlights the effect of youth language on the English language. It invites the reader to test his or her familiarity with modern-day youth slang, by answering the question above. What the article shows is that the Jamaican patois from which the slang word in question (*peng*) derives has been completely absorbed into contemporary British speech, 'across all classes, regions, everywhere' in the words of Johnnie Robinson, sociolinguistics curator of the British Library. This absorption is, however, restricted to teenagers, or those who parent or teach teenagers. The rest of us are 'dinosaurs'. I cite this article as a very up-to-the-minute illustration of the current interest in language change that in part forms the basis of this thesis.

Language change is addressed in this thesis in different contexts: spoken, written and digital. In addressing this topic, I explore one particular feature, the use of the word *like*, as a vehicle to assess to what extent standard grammatical rules are observed in different usage environments. The acceptance of changes in grammatical features is an issue in which I am interested generally, and it also relates to my work as a translator and editor. It was partly through my work that the decision to base this study on *like* came about.

'I'm getting a complex about using *like* because you keep changing it to *as*.' This comment, made by a (Dutch) PhD fellow whose dissertation I had edited, brought home to me how much uncertainty there is on the part of non-linguist authors about the standard usage of *like* in formal written contexts. Fortunately, most individuals who write in English are spared the development of a 'complex', but my experience as an editor tells me that the uncertainty is for many people quite real. It was this realisation that provided one of the stimuli for opting to focus

on attitudes to language change in this thesis, and on the use of *like* in particular. According to Mair (2006), the use of *like* as a conjunction was one of the 'changes suspected to be going on in present-day standard English' that was investigated by Barber (1964: 130-144). In addition, having consulted a range of grammar books and usage guides (e.g. Partridge 1975; Quirk et al. 1985; Huddleston & Pullum 2002), I found that language authorities hold differing views on the acceptability of the use of *like* in different contexts, in particular its use as a conjunction, which indicates that this feature is in a state of flux. This further endorses the subject as an interesting and useful topic for study.

A second motivation occurred one morning when, as I drove to work, I heard on BBC Radio 4 a discussion between a member of The Queen's English Society and a representative of users of digital media, during which the former disputed the necessity of the abbreviations, icons and symbols to communicate via email and sms, while the latter strongly advocated their usage, praising the ingenuity of users of digital media in overcoming the shortcomings of this form of communication. The two interviewees were at opposite ends of the spectrum in their attitudes to the need for such innovations to the English language and the desirability or otherwise of the potential changes that the advent of the Internet was causing to the English language. This discussion further fuelled my interest in the subject of attitudes to language change, related in this instance to the issue of the effects of the Internet on present-day language use.

I am interested in investigating the extent to which present-day language users exhibit acceptance of differing usage norms in differing contexts. The aim of this thesis is to assess whether attitudes to language use have changed in recent decades, and whether these attitudes vary for different contexts. I also wanted to investigate the effect of such variables as age, frequency of internet use, education, native language and profession. To this end, I carried out a survey among a range of users, based on a questionnaire drawn up for the purpose (see Appendix 1). I modelled my questionnaire on an extensive study reported on in 1970 by Mittins et al. of 55 features of English to test respondents' usage of these features in formal and informal written contexts. Obviously, at the time when the

Mittins et al. survey was carried out the Internet was not available, and there is therefore no mention in the study of digital media. In the present day, however, the Internet is an integral and growing communication medium that, as the Radio 4 discussion indicates, is having strong repercussions on the development of the English language. I therefore added the medium of digital communication to the contexts discussed in the Mittins et al. study.

Forty years have passed since the Mittins et al. survey. During this period, developments such as the Internet, youth language and the rise of global English have had their effect on the English language. According to Beal, there is currently ‘a perceived decline in educational standards since the so-called “golden age” of traditional grammar teaching before 1965’ (2010: 62). One effect of this can be seen in a resurgence of interest in prescriptive grammars and usage guides in recent years. Beal talks of ‘a new spirit of prescriptivism [that is] abroad’ (2009: 35), citing the best non-fiction book of 2003 as being Truss’s *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, which ‘ushered in a swathe of self-proclaimedly prescriptive texts by authors who made a virtue of their lack of training in linguistics’ (2009: 35). Beal also mentions elocution lessons, that had been a feature of the eighteenth century but had died out in the late twentieth century, only to reappear in the twenty-first century in the guise of ‘accent reduction’ (2009: 39). Beal comments that these sit ‘alongside a range of other “self-improvement” offerings from life-coaching to cosmetic surgery, claiming to provide the client with “confidence” and a competitive edge’ (2009: 39). This trend, too, can be seen as an indication of present-day concerns about speaking – as well as writing – what is considered to be ‘correct’ English. In terms of usage guides, Beal refers to Fowler’s *Modern English Usage* (1926, 3rd ed. Burchfield 1996) as being a publication of the ‘middle path’: prescriptive, but of a more subtle kind. Interestingly, as an example of a grammatical feature from this publication, Beal herself happens to alight on the feature of *like*, in this instance as a conjunction. All the above point to a current climate of intense language awareness, including among those who are not professionally involved with language.

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 provides some background to the current debate on English, taking in the concept of Standard English, the status of teaching of English grammar in state schools in the UK, a discussion on the usage guides that are currently attracting a great deal of public interest, the complaint tradition that expresses particular attitudes to the state of the English language and finally the effects of the Internet. In Chapter 2 I discuss some of the existing data relating to attitudes to language, including the 1970 survey by Mittins et al. on which my questionnaire is based. The grammatical basis of my questionnaire is informed by Fowler's *Modern English Usage,* so a discussion is provided of this work and a justification for considering it as a present-day authority. I then present the various uses of the feature *like* that occur in my questionnaire, indicating how these usages are regarded by various authorities, in usage guides. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the present survey and includes notes on the method of analysis and a discussion of the extra-linguistic factors included in the survey. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire, discussing such variables as age, education, nationality and profession. Finally in Chapter 5 I present the conclusions drawn from this analysis.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introductory remarks

In this chapter I look at some of the issues underlying the subject of language change. I first consider the question of Standard English, focusing on how this notion is interpreted by different authorities. For a language to be accepted as standard, it may be argued that formal grammar has to be part of the teaching curriculum for school pupils. I therefore look at the subject of formal grammar teaching in English schools, concentrating on the second half of the twentieth century, a period of significant upheaval in the British national curriculum with regard to English teaching. The reliance on usage guides as a source of correct grammar will then be discussed. The Internet is today such a significant medium of communication and its impact on language use so great that a discussion on contemporary language would not be complete without mention of digital media. Finally, since, wherever there is a discussion of formal English grammar, there is almost certainly a debate on declining standards, I therefore include a section on the complaint tradition relating to Standard English.

1.2 Standard English: what is it?

In order to consider language change, one has to determine what constitutes change, which then calls into question what the standard is from which change can be perceived. The issue of what Standard English is appears to be difficult to define in precise terms. According to Bex and Watts (1999), there is not necessarily any agreement about the definition of the term, but there is 'a common perception that standardisation is best seen as a process driven by spokespeople who have successfully articulated a particular set of social values' (1999:13). In the same volume, a standard language is defined by Trudgill as one 'whose varieties have undergone standardisation' (1999: 117). In his view, it is questionable whether one should talk about a 'standard language', standard English being in reality one variety of the many types of English spoken not only in

the United Kingdom, but throughout the world. According to Trudgill, '…as most British sociolinguists are agreed, [that] Standard English is a dialect' (1999: 123). Crystal, too, comments that 'SE is a variety of English – a distinctive combination of linguistic features with a particular role to play. Some linguists would call it a "dialect" of English' (1994: 24).

Crowley defines Standard English as 'a necessary theoretical invention, organised by the forces of centripetalisation, and one which produced a form of monoglossia at the level of writing' (1996: 161). Crowley's confining of monoglossia to the written language is echoed by other authors, including Crystal, who relates the importance of a standard particularly to written communication: 'There is a very close association between a standard language and writing …This is because the written language is something which can be controlled. It is not a natural medium of language as speech is' (2006a: 23). According to Milroy and Milroy, too, 'the writing system…is relatively easily standardised; but absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved' (1991: 22). The authors state in unambiguous terms that 'the only fully standardised language is a dead language' (1991: 22). Milroy and Milroy mention the issue of a value judgment attributed to the standard language, commenting that 'the standard is perceived by those who are socially mobile to be of more value than other varieties … It acquires *prestige'* (1991: 27). This prestige aspect may explain why 'correct' language use is so important among social climbers.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that Standard English is more readily defined in terms of the formal written language, and that there is greater variation in non-formal contexts, both written and spoken. In summary, one might say that Standard English is the version of English advocated for formal styles of communication, including writing. My expectation with regard to the present survey is therefore that written contexts, particularly formal written contexts, will exhibit closer adherence to formal grammatical rules than spoken contexts. Respondents are, therefore, less likely to have a tolerant attitude towards language use in these contexts than in informal contexts.

1.3 Grammar teaching in English state schools

Formal style in writing almost inevitably leads us to consider the education system: one of the ways a standard is learned and passed on is through teaching in schools. According to Bex and Watts, English was established as a new subject within the school curriculum following the Newbolt Report of 1921. The authors comment that the concepts contained in this report 'inevitably privilege the written mode and the lexicon and grammars associated with it' (1999: 92). They go on to say that '[O]ne consequence of these emphases is that grammar tended to be taught prescriptively as an aspect of "style" and particularly literary style' (1999: 92). Pupils were taught that there were 'right ways' of saying and writing things and that these judgments were to be found in the works of prescriptive grammarians. Beal, too, comments that 'prescriptive notions of "correct" usage were being introduced to children of all classes' (2004: 121). Indeed, as Paterson outlines, '[I]n the first period of grammar teaching, post Second World War to circa 1960, the main aim of grammar textbooks was to propose rules for "correct sentence construction in written standard English"' (2010: 474).

However, this prescriptive attitude is at odds with the tenets of descriptive linguistics, that aims to describe objectively how a language is used, free from any value judgments. The Lockwood Report of 1964 on behalf of the Secondary Schools Examination Council concluded that the prescriptive approach was harmful, and that it was 'based on traditionally prescribed rules of grammar which have been artificially imposed upon the language' (Crystal, 2006a: 202). This idea of 'harmfulness' was not universally endorsed. John Honey (1997), for instance, expressed the view that the teaching of grammar in schools had an empowering effect on school pupils, enabling them to learn and master the grammar rules of English. Pupils who do not acquire these rules as part of their upbringing at home would be subject to possible exclusion from some sections of social interaction, in particular the employment market.

Nonetheless, as Crystal explains, by the 1950s the grammar movement had run out of steam, and the Secondary Schools Examination Report of 1964, known as the Lockwood Report, was the 'kiss of death' that brought to an end the

teaching of formal grammar in the UK (2006: 202). For a while this seemed to be accepted as desirable, but within two decades concerns began to be raised about school pupils' competence in formal Standard English. According to Quirk and Stein (1990: 114), one of the concerns was that teachers, in reassuring children against feeling ashamed of their local language habits, were failing to impart to them an understanding of the value of the standard language for broader communication. More importantly, Quirk and Stein argue, pupils may not have been taught how to express themselves adequately in standard English. They may have picked up a passive understanding of differences between standard English and their own local dialect, but they were not acquiring the ability to actively employ standard English themselves (1990: 114). The disadvantages of this became apparent in subsequent decades.

According to Cameron, by the 1980s, general dissatisfaction with the standard of education had become widespread, leading to the introduction of the Education Reform Act of 1988 (1995:78). One of the then Conservative government's tenets underlying the party's policies was the need for a 'return to traditional values', which was embodied in the Act in the changed attitude to English language teaching. In Cameron's view, this call for a return to traditional grammar teaching 'was wrapped up in a moral discourse on good and bad, right and wrong; so much so, in fact, that its moral element often obscured the linguistic and educational questions that were supposedly being addressed' (Cameron 1995: 81). Following the recommendation of the Kingman report of 1988 that 'one of the schools' duties is to enable children to acquire Standard English, which is their right' (Quirk and Stein, 1990: 114), English grammar was reinstated as a standard subject in schools in England after this date, but with the emphasis more on the 'underlying structure of English' (Paterson, 2010: 475) rather than on notions of correctness. Crystal dates the demise of formal grammar teaching to the mid-sixties, and remarks that some significant effects of this became apparent after the mid-seventies, when students who had passed through the education system post-1965 and had had no grammar instruction began to enter universities. He cites an instance from his personal experience when it became apparent to him that over half the students in his lecture were unfamiliar with the concept of a

preposition. In reply to his invitation to explain the term, one student queried whether it might be 'something to do with getting on a horse' explaining her reasoning on the grounds that she 'was taught there was a pre-position before mounting' (2006a: 203).

The lack of formal grammar instruction in schools also had repercussions for teaching in later decades since some of those students of Crystal's went on to become teachers themselves. Paterson goes so far as to remark that the lack of compulsory grammar lessons in schools before the Education Reform Act of 1988 'has affected the level of grammatical competence possessed by the majority of today's UK teachers' (2010: 473). This view is endorsed by Keith Waterhouse, a member of the committee responsible for the original English Curriculum. Waterhouse quotes the instance of a student at a teacher training college in the 1990s asking '[W]hat's this syntax you all keep banging on about?' As Paterson comments, '[T]his clearly indicates that at least some trainees had a distinct lack of metalinguistic knowledge' (2010: 475; Waterhouse, 2008). In fact, the UK's Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 1998 acknowledged that 'younger teachers had generally not been taught grammar explicitly as part of their own education' (Paterson, 2010: 476; QCA, 1998: 26).

What is clear from this debate, of which the above is barely the tip of the iceberg, is that the issue of the role of education is a thorny one that cannot be definitively resolved. Whichever approach is taken, whether formal grammar rules are taught in schools or a purely descriptive approach is taken to language teaching, there are repercussions, which may not be anticipated and which may only become evident much later.

1.4 The usage guide

One of the repercussions of a lack of formal language teaching is linguistic insecurity on the part of users of the language. There are several options for resolving this uncertainty. The prescriptive approach to language and grammar relies on authoritative reference books of grammar that aim to preserve the standard language, whereas the descriptive approach treats all language as

equally valid, with the result that users may not be given a clear framework of what is acceptable in which context. Neither approach seems to be wholly effective. A third option is represented by usage guides that express a public need, on the one hand for guidance and on the other hand for guidance that is less authoritative. In this context, Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2010) typifies the usage guide as being a different phenomenon altogether from the grammar book 'in that rather than focusing on actual grammar it aims to point out and correct linguistic errors and – increasingly – to offer the public some entertainment in the process' (2010: 21). Lynne Truss's *Eats Shoots and Leaves* (2003) is a good example of this.

Although the usage guide seems to be a solution to a modern problem, it is by no means a new phenomenon. According to Tieken-Boon van Ostade, the first author to publish such a usage guide was Baker in 1770 (2010: 20). Baker himself was not a linguist; in fact, as Tieken explains, he was 'barely educated' but 'extremely well-read' (2010: 16). Several authors of popular present-day usage guides, including Bryson (2001; 2008) and Truss (2003), could be said to fall into the category of non-linguists. They are united by an interest in the language and a wish to inform the public about what they feel to be 'correct' usage, but in a manner that will entertain as well as instruct. Bryson gives advice on a range of language features that are the cause of concern, whereas Truss concentrates on correct punctuation, in a jocose but at times inflammatory style. Crystal refers to the 'corpses of usage manuals littering the battlefields of English' (2006a: 157), saying that they are neither a panacea, nor do they 'solve the underlying problem of obtaining systematic help about language' (2006a: 157). However, they do, in his view, have a value in that they 'help to alert us to the issues of change that worry the more conservatively minded members of society' (2006a: 157).

Crystal comments that: '[U]sage manuals presenting an idealized vision of standard English as a uniform, unchanging, and universal norm of correctness continue to be produced' (2006b: 411). He goes on to say that many people in senior positions in business, government, law, the media, education and medicine 'cannot rid themselves entirely of prescriptive thinking, because they are the last

generation to have experienced this approach in their schooling' (2006b: 411). These are the people who are likely to seek clear and authoritative manuals to guide them in their language use.

To illustrate this notion, I would like to mention one specific American usage guide that is indisputably authoritative and clear and that has not been written by a professional linguist: *The Elements of Style,* by William Strunk, Jr., a former Professor of English at Cornell University, that was first published in 1919. It was later reissued in 1959 in conjunction with one of Strunk's former students, E.B. White. Since 1959, some 10 million copies of this American usage guide have been sold. A new edition of the 1999 edition, remarkably for a work on grammar with illustrations (by Maira Kalman), was published in 2005, giving evidence for the continuing popularity of this publication, and its appeal to a primarily non-linguistic readership. According to Pullum, '[M]any college-educated Americans revere *Elements*, swear by it, carry it around with them' and when it was reissued in April 2009, it was greeted with 'a chorus of approval from famous American literary figures' (2010: 34). I have, indeed, found it on the bookshelves of colleagues from the Academic Language Centre of Leiden University, and at the University's Strategic Communication and Marketing department. This particular usage guide falls far outside Tieken-Boon van Ostade's idea of 'entertaining' the user. The style it which it is written is highly proscriptive, as White, a former pupil of Strunk, indicates in his introduction to the 1979 edition. According to White, the book contains 'rules of grammar phrased as direct orders', 'these rules and principles are in the form of sharp commands', and they are given by 'Sargeant Strunk snapping orders to his platoon'(1979: xii-xiii). He sums Strunk's approach up as follows: '[H]e felt it was worse to be irresolute than to be wrong' (1979: xvi). This may well explain the continuing appeal of the work to the general public. It is generally the linguistically insecure seeking clear and unambiguous rules to follow, who consult usage guides such as Strunk & White. This approach is, however, frowned upon by professional linguists. Pullum, for example, took the opportunity of the fifty-year anniversary of the publication of the first Strunk & White edition to produce a vitriolic critique of the publication as a 'toxic mix of purism, atavism, and personal eccentricity' (2009: 15). He is as clear

and unambiguous as Strunk himself in his assessment of the guide, commenting in a further article that the work ‘is riddled with inaccuracies, uninformed by evidence, and marred by bungled analysis’ (2010: 34). I use the example of this particular usage guide as a means of demonstrating that present-day users of English wishing to learn more about rules for correct usage are very willing to be informed, even by the linguistically uninformed. And even in a way that is far from entertaining.

What is evident is that non-linguists, like professional linguists, are interested in their language. Those language users who have not received formal grammar instruction tend to compensate for this by such means as consulting usage guides, whether serious or entertaining, to obtain guidance on the conventions pertaining to language use.

1.5 The complaint tradition

Milroy and Milroy suggest that standardisation has brought about ‘the promotion of a standard ideology, i.e. a public consciousness of the standard. People believe that there is a “right” way of using English’ (1991: 30). The authors propose that one way of charting the history of standardisation is by looking at the phenomenon of the complaint tradition, which has a long history that continues unabated to the present day. An extensive discussion of the history of the complaint tradition is outside the scope of this thesis, but I look briefly at the issue in a historical context and discuss this phenomenon in the context of the present day.

1.5.1 *Brief history*

Milroy and Milroy inform us that the earliest important complaint about the form of English was expressed by William Caxton, the father of English printing, who complained that ‘the language was too variable, and that people from different places could hardly understand one another’ (1991: 32). The authors go on to explain that complaints about specific aspects of English usage began to occur after 1700, ‘when the position of English as the official language…was virtually assured’ (1991: 33). The authors cite Swift’s ‘Proposal for Correcting, Improving

and Ascertaining the English Tongue' (1712) as the 'great classic of the complaint tradition' and comment that 'the contents of Swift's "Proposal" anticipate, in principle, almost every attitude expressed in modern complaint literature' (1991: 34).

According to Crystal, earlier, in 1664, the Royal Society had established a committee for improving the English language (2006a: 68). John Dryden and John Evelyn, who were members of the committee, were in favour of founding an Academy to safeguard the English language. However, other members were less enthusiastic and nothing came of the plans. Swift himself in the early 1700s advocated the establishment of an official body to standardise and maintain the English language, in the mode of the Académie Française, but again an English Academy did not materialise. Crystal cites Dr Johnson, who recognised the flaw in the belief that English Academy movement could fix the language: 'If the French were unable to do it with their absolutist government, what chance will an Academy have with the bolshy, democratic British temperament?' (2006a: 73). This may well go some way to explaining why an Academy never materialised in England.

The eighteenth century saw efforts towards codifying the English language, with such works as Dr Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) and grammar books by such authorities as Robert Lowth (1762) and Lindley Murray (1795). As Milroy and Milroy point out, the efforts to standardise and prescribe language usage had some success with the written language, but spoken English was more difficult to tame. They comment that '[S]tandardisation through prescription has clearly been most successful in the written channel: in the daily conversation of ordinary speakers, however, it has been less effective' (1991: 37). Indeed they go so far as to state that 'the norms of colloquial, as against formal, English have not been codified to any extent' (1991: 37).

1.5.2 *The complaint tradition today*

Milroy and Milroy comment that '[S]ince 1985 or so, there has been very frequent press comment on the use of English' (1991: 53), which can be related to the

debate on the teaching of English in schools in the UK. The authors distinguish two types of complaints, namely 'legalistic' complaints, that concern themselves with failures to observe and apply the established rules of language use, and 'moralistic' complaints that relate to misuses of the language that might lead to ambiguity or lack of clarity. This thesis is mainly concerned with 'legalistic' complaints, also referred to as correctness complaints. These complaints, as Milroy and Milroy indicate, are typified by the belief that one set of language rules is inherently superior to another.

Correctness complaints focus on specific examples of misuse of language, but are at the same time part of a pattern of expressions of concern about general linguistic decline, and carry with them the implication of a decline in moral and behavioural standards in society. James Milroy quotes Simon (1980) and Pinker (1994), 'who identify tolerance of variation with "permissiveness" and further identify "permissiveness" with moral permissiveness' (1999: 20). Correctness complaints continue to appear in the form of letters to the media, and in publications by such authors as Kingsley Amis (1997), John Humphrys (2004) and Lynne Truss (2007). Crystal welcomes one particular aspect of this genre of publications, namely their humour, which, in his view, is 'noticeably lacking in prescriptive writers' (2006: 161). This is reflected in Tieken-Boon van Ostade's comments mentioned previously about usage guides that aim to entertain as well as inform (2010: 22).

This interest in the English language has taken on such proportions that Cameron has coined the term 'verbal hygiene' to describe what Machan refers to as the 'urge to meddle in matters of language' (2009: 204). Cameron herself explains verbal hygiene as 'com[ing] into being whenever people reflect on language in a critical (in the sense of evaluative) way' (1995: 9). She appears to concur with Milroy & Milroy (1991), in proposing that everyone subscribes in some way or other to the idea that language is right or wrong, good or bad, more or less elegant or effective, and although it may be difficult to decide who or what constitutes an authority on language, 'it is rare to find anyone rejecting altogether the idea that there is some legitimate authority in language' (1995: 9). Interestingly,

in the light of the rejection of prescriptivist attitudes by contemporary linguists, Cameron puts forward the view that '[W]e are all of us closet prescriptivists' or, as she would term it, 'verbal hygienists' (1995: 9). Evidently, the descriptivist approach of the impartial professional linguist is not shared by the man in the street.

The concerns expressed by members of the general public as complaints in the media about the deterioration of the language are frequently broadened to imply a deterioration in moral standards. Burridge (2010) discusses complaints emanating from the attitudes and activities of ordinary people in letters to newspapers or via reactions to TV and radio programmes, commenting that '[I]n these contexts, language users act as self-appointed censors and take it upon themselves to condemn those words and constructions they feel do not measure up to the standard they feel should hold sway' (2010: 3). As a scholar and particularly through her participation in radio and television broadcasting, Burridge has personal experience of the virulence of listener complaints. She cites as a particularly interesting example an email she received in 2005 in response to her recommendation that the hyphen might be abandoned in certain circumstances. The sender, describing himself as a '25-year-old tattooed ex-con', wished to express 'the one thing that REALLY annoys me. People that want to take away from the English language' (2010: 5). Other complaints received by just this one scholar but that appear to be typical of their kind, include such inflammatory language as 'the rape of the English language', 'people are ignorant', 'the verbal discharge (diarrhoea) quoted in her article', and even the very extreme 'I hope you die'. Interestingly, at least one of these language-complainers, the 'ex-con', does not appear to fit the general stereotype of people who take the time to lodge language complaints.

I find the complaint tradition an interesting phenomenon and valid in the context of this thesis as an indication of the degree of interest in the English language, not only on the part of scholars, but also of lay people. The complainers are frequently those who themselves received formal grammar instruction in school and who cling on fiercely to the rules they learned and the importance of

these rules in maintaining the purity of the language. There may be various reasons for this. Honey (1997), previously Dean of Education at Leicester Polytechnic and a professor of English in Japan, and Humphrys (2005), a broadcaster for the BBC, both of whom are of the age where they would have received formal grammar training, would attribute it to the empowering nature of a good grounding in grammar, whereas present-day linguists such as Crystal (2006) and Cameron (1995) put forward the hypothesis that this may be due to the psychological effects of the proscriptive style of teaching that these individuals may have experienced.

1.6 Internet, or the e-effect

Crystal begins *Language and the Internet* (2006c: 1) with a quotation about the expected effect of Internet on language and languages: ‘A major risk for humanity.’ This statement was made in December 1996 by Jacques Chirac, former President of France, who was expressing his fear about the effect of the Internet particularly on the French language. And, according to Crystal, Chirac is not alone in this. Concerns are expressed by sociologists, economists and political commentators to name but a few, about such issues as privacy, security, libel, intellectual property rights and pornography. But there are equally widespread concerns about the effect of the Internet on language. Crystal advocates moderation in these anxieties, comparing them to such innovations as the advent of printing in the fifteenth century (‘widely perceived by the Church as the invention of Satan’ (2006c: 2)), and broadcasting in the early nineteen hundreds that also gave rise to anxieties about the possible effects of such inventions.

Netspeak, as Crystal calls it, can be viewed as ‘a novel medium combining spoken, written, and electronic properties’ (2006c: 52). He defines Netspeak as a ‘third medium’, essentially a third means other than the spoken or written word, in which one can express oneself. He points out that given the innovative nature of Internet communication, users are having to learn to address the enormous potential available to them through digital media. As yet there are no rules, or universally agreed modes of behaviour established by generations of usage. He

mentions the ‘clear contrast with the world of paper-based communication’ (2006c: 16), where letter-writing, for example, has traditionally been taught in schools and for which there is a multitude of manuals giving advice on language conventions. There is no such tradition for Internet communication. The result is a proliferation of idiosyncratic styles and conventions, each appropriate to a particular group of users. Specific groups of Internet users represent individual microcosms of language styles, comparable to different geographical communities or interest groups. Recent years have seen the publication of usage guides, dictionaries and manuals for linguistic aspects of Netspeak (see, for example, Aitchison and Lewis 2003; Enteen 2010; Crystal 2011). As such, this mirrors the codification and standardisation process of the English language in previous centuries.

Features of Netspeak appear to have an effect on other varieties of language, for example in the use of *e-* as a prefix for so many words currently in use. This, according to Crystal, ‘is a sure sign that a new variety has “arrived”’ (2006c: 20). Excessive use of derivatives of Netspeak has begun to spawn campaigns to somehow regulate its use. One example mentioned by Crystal is The Society for the Preservation of the Other 25 Letters of the Alphabet, established by Silicon Valley company Preservation Software, campaigning against the proliferation of e-words.

Crystal further mentions one immediate consequence of the advent of Internet, namely that ‘people learned to adapt their language to cope with the linguistic constraints and opportunities of the new technology’ (2003: 424). As he explains, electronic communication is influenced by such aspects as the size and shape of the screen, the layout of the page, and the area available for interaction. These constraints force users to adapt and encourage them to use their linguistic ingenuity to cope.

Synchronous and asynchronous chat groups, where users are in communication with other users and where there is always some delay in response, call for a means of compensating for the lack of such cues as facial expression or tone of voice. This has led to the development of a raft of measures, such as exaggerated use of spelling and punctuation, repeated punctuation marks

and emoticons, for example, to indicate to the recipient how the message is intended to be received. These types of communication are strongly typified by very short messages, or, as Crystal puts it, '[B]revity is the soul of chat' (2003: 432). It is this brevity that gives the medium its dynamism. Crystal goes on to explain that messages tend to consist of single sentences or sentence fragments and that word length is reduced through the use of abbreviations. He mentions that recent data, based on a sample of 100 direct-speech contributions, that showed that there were an average of four (4.23 to be precise) words per contribution, with 80% of the utterances being five words or less, and only four per cent of the words being more than two syllables (2006c: 162). By no means all digital communication is via chatrooms, but this description of the medium of Internet is an indication of the extreme differences between normal written communication and digital written communication. It also highlights the similarity between digital written communication and spoken communication. Crystal (2006c: 27) quotes Davis and Brewer (2005) as saying that '[E]lectronic discourse is writing that very often reads as if it were being spoken'.

Although both traditional writing and writing in digital media may in some instances be permanent, traditional writing tends to be static, whereas text transmitted via electronic media such as the Internet is strongly subject to modification and adaptation. Even in communication via e-mail and chatrooms, for instance, where it is unlikely that messages would be subsequently modified, these messages have in common with speech rather than traditional writing the fact that they are transitory. Such restrictions as available server space mean that many of these messages are deleted within a relatively short space of time. Their very transitoriness has an effect on the precision – or lack of precision – with which they may be written. Some users are happy to press the Send button for e-mails containing any number of errors – spelling, grammar, layout – knowing that the lifetime of the message will be so short that it does not warrant long attention in producing it.

According to Cameron (1995: 15), people's use of linguistic variables can be correlated with demographic characteristics: membership of particular classes,

races, genders, generations, local communities. The linguistic behaviour reflects the speaker's social location. These comments can also be taken to apply to digital communication, with 'local' referring not so much to geographical location as to virtual location: the 'friends' on Facebook, the members of a chatroom, the contacts on Linked In, for example. In these environments, too, language is used to mark social identity. Mugglestone explains this further: 'The nature of the social contact, together with the configurations of the speech communities, has a governing effect on the type of linguistic impact that will occur' (2006: 69).

Given the above, I expect language use in digital written communication to be more similar to spoken communication than to written communication. In the light of Mugglestone's comment, I am interested in seeing whether there is any correlation between those who use digital communication more frequently and their acceptance of 'non-standard' use of *like* in written communication. This is an area that forms part of my analysis of the responses to my questionnaire.

1.7 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have presented the background to some of the issues that affect English usage in the present day. I have discussed the difficulties involved in establishing what Standard English is – and indicated that without establishing a standard, it is difficult to determine to what extent and how a language has changed. I have looked at the situation with regard to the teaching of English in British state schools, and have considered present-day publications such as usage guides that are consulted by language users who, possibly as a result of the teaching, or lack of teaching, of English grammar in schools, feel insecure about their use of language. The complaint tradition relating to fears about declining standards in English use has been touched on, and finally in this chapter, arguably the greatest potential influence on the English language, the Internet, has been considered.

2. DISCUSSION OF EXISTING DATA

2.1 Introductory remarks

In this chapter I discuss the study reported on in 1970 by Mittins et al. that formed the model for this thesis. I then explain the design of the present questionnaire that was used to test language use in different contexts. In order to assess the variation in use, I first considered the norm from which variation could be measured. I decided to base this norm on the work of Fowler. The reasons for this are given in section 2.3. I then consider how *like* is treated in a number of usage guides.

2.2 Survey model

The Mittins et al. survey was published in 1970. Its purpose was to add to the stock of information about – then – current usage and attitudes to language, by making an objective assessment of the acceptability of a number of specific disputed usages. In discussing the purpose of the enquiry, the authors refer to the territory of English-teaching as having long been a battlefield, with attitudes being divided between taking a ‘prescriptive’ or ‘descriptive’ approach. They describe the prescriptive approach as a ‘normative, authoritarian attitude … supported by a long tradition of “rules”, a tradition especially strong since the eighteenth century’ (1970: 1). The researchers discuss a number of different influences on preferred use, including the Latin model (for example, in rejecting *under the circumstances* in favour of *in the circumstances)*, etymological arguments (for example, in limiting the reference of *between* to two items on the strength of its derivation from *bi-twain*), and grammatical accuracy (for example, in preferring *much pleased* to *very pleased*). The authors also discuss the more objective, descriptive approach, commenting that ‘[F]or the modern “linguistician”…”correctness” of usage is a misleading notion that should give way to concepts of acceptability and appropriateness’ (1970: 2).

The Mittins et al. survey comprised a broad exploration of different features of language use. The survey included two sample sentences involving *like,* as usage numbers 44 and 47. The sample sentences were:

44. *Nowadays Sunday is not observed like it used to be.*

47. *It looked like it would rain.*

With sentence 44, the intention of the researchers was to assess whether *like* was considered by the respondents to be an acceptable alternative to *as* in the conjunctive function of introducing a clause of comparison (1970: 94). Follett (1966) is cited as an authority who states that this usage was once acceptable but is no longer so. According to Mittins et al., he states that historically *like* was used as a conjunction in the formative stages of the language and this usage continued to be found down to the fourteenth century, but that thereafter it was not used habitually by any author. Mittins et al. state that although Follett 'admits that the usage is common today … but insists that "because in workmanlike modern writing there is no such conjunction", these are instances of *like* "masquerading as a conjunction"' (1970: 94). Mittins et al. discuss at some length the difference in American and British attitudes to this usage, whereby American attitudes appear to be more favourable than British attitudes. They conclude that their own survey (carried out in England) met with greater resistance than did a similar survey carried out in the United States by Leonard in 1932.

The above observations also apply to sentence 47, with the difference that the choice here is between *like* and *as if*. Again, Mittins et al. refer to the differences between American and British conventions. Krapp (1927) is cited as testifying to the comparative acceptability of this usage as a 'contracted colloquialism' (1970: 97). The respondents could be induced to believe the sentence to be in line with standard usage through the conjunction of *looked* and *like.* In a sentence such as *She looked like her mother*, in which case *like* is followed by a noun phrase this would be perfectly acceptable, but in the sample sentence given by Mittins et al., *like* is followed by a full clause: *it would rain.* In this example the choice is not between *like* and *as*, but between *like* and *as if*. The

authors give an extensive explanation of the responses received, quoting Leonard (1932) who termed the usage ‘if not “uncultivated”, “probably incorrect” ‘ (1970: 97) and Follett (1966) who states that ‘this use is, in his view, “even more repellent” than the simple use of *like* for *as*” ’ (1970:97). In terms of British usage, Mittins et al. cite Partridge (1975) and Gowers (1954) as condemning this usage, and the authors further quote West and Kimber (1957), Collins (1960) and Lieberman (1964) as ‘all “deploring” sentences of this pattern’ (1970: 97).

In all, the Mittins et al. respondents were not favourable to these usages of *like*, with a general acceptance level of only 24 and 12 per cent for sentences 44 and 47 respectively. In their survey, ‘[N]ot a single teacher, examiner or non-educationist voted favourably in either of the formal situations’ (1970: 97). The attitude towards this usage therefore seems to be fairly strict. This was further reason for me to concentrate on the use of *like* for my survey, to assess whether in the space of over forty years between the Mittins survey and my own more focussed survey noticeable differences in attitude could be perceived.

2.3 Fowler as an authority on usage

In order to determine any variation in the acceptability of the use of *like* and *as* in differing contexts, I intend first to investigate what is regarded as standard usage by a number of authorities. For the purposes of this survey I have based my assessment of standard usage primarily on Fowler as I was seeking as unambiguous a usage guide as possible to assess the responses to my questionnaire. Crystal, under a heading of ‘Look it up in Fowler’, states that ‘Fowler’s *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926) has long acted as a bible for those concerned with questions of disputed usage’ (2003: 196). He goes on to describe Fowler’s work as ‘the apotheosis of the prescriptive approach.’ However, as Crystal points out, Fowler differs from grammarians of the previous century by his method of underpinning his remarks ‘with an elegant blend of humour and common sense.’ In this, Fowler seems to reflect the style of present-day lay authors of usage guides, such as Amis (1997) and Bryson (2008; 2001).

Bex and Watts (1999) discuss at length the intent and assumptions behind Fowler's work. According to these authors, the primary concern of *Modern English Usage* (*MEU*) was style rather than grammatical description (1999: 94). They comment that Fowler aimed to eradicate particular faults from journalism and more elevated literary works, and that in this respect 'he is a direct inheritor of the eighteenth-century tradition of prescriptivism which instils anxiety in its followers' (1999: 94). Bex further cites Gowers, editor of the second edition of *Modern English Usage* (1965), who interprets Fowler's aim as 'in his own words, to tell the people not what they do and how they come to do it, but what he thinks they ought to do'. This indeed places Fowler firmly in the prescriptivist camp, but with no mention of Fowler's milder approach. Bex describes the position of *MEU*, saying that 'despite the present proliferation of usage guides, [n]one of these, however, has attained the level of authority achieved by Fowler and Partridge' (1999: 91). This assessment is endorsed by Beal who characterises *MEU* as 'the single most influential handbook of its period' (2004: 121).

Busse & Schröder comment that 'Fowler's most successful and best-known book came to be *MEU'* (2010: 47). According to these authors, Gowers in the second edition of *MEU* made no substantial alterations to Fowler's original work. Burchfield, editing the third edition of *MEU* (1996), distances himself from Fowler's original, describes the work as 'an enduring monument to all that was linguistically acceptable in the Standard English of the southern counties of England in the first quarter of the twentieth century' (1996: xi). He acknowledges the existence of many varieties of Standard English and therefore includes material gained from systematic reading of a broad range of newspapers and literature. He mentions on different occasions in the 1996 edition that usages differ according to country and to context (e.g. 1996: viii, x and 458). Given Burchfield's attitude to Fowler, I would interpret the very fact that Burchfield edited the work as an acknowledgement of the value of *MEU*. Furthermore, where Burchfield upholds or fails to reject Fowler's guidelines for usage, this can be interpreted as a modern-day endorsement by an eminent linguist of such usage.

Busse and Schröder's article investigates 'the success story of *MEU'* (2010: 45) by assessing the impact of Fowler on the academic field. The authors studied citations of Fowler in twelve English-language histories, discovering that he is only mentioned in seven of them. In the works in question, Fowler is either placed in his historical context or mentioned as an authority on usage. In one of the most recent of these publications, Brinton and Arnovick (2006), the authors refer to Fowler as a 'usage expert' (2006: 439). Busse and Schröder further cite Finegan's (1998) treatment of Fowler as 'the most detailed and single most positive treatment' (2010: 52), mentioning in particular Fowler's discussion of *like* as a conjunction, which Finegan says 'remain[s] troublesome at the end of the twentieth century' (1998: 577). In summary, the analysis of language histories carried out by Busse & Schröder 'has revealed that *MEU* still plays an important part in many recent histories of the English language, and that it is not only commented on as a document in its respective historical context but still quoted as an authority in questions of usage' (2010: 53).

Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2008) points out that Burchfield, who edited the 1996 third revision of *Modern English Usage,* refers to the work in his introduction as 'quixotic, schoolmasterly and idiosyncratic'. Largely on the basis of his prescriptive approach, Fowler is disparaged by some modern professional linguists. Tieken-Boon van Ostade attributes this to the fact that Fowler operated outside the mainstream of linguistic research; he was concerned with usage rather than linguistic structure. She goes on to conclude that *Modern English Usage*, like Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), was conceived as a guide to users of the English language who were uncertain about particular aspects of language usage. This need is still felt today, as is apparent from the continuing popularity of usage guides at varying levels of users, from guides for students of English to those aimed at a general readership. Given that there is no appointed authority to make a definitive pronouncement on what constitutes standard English, usage guides such as *MEU* fulfil a valuable function in guiding language users on aspects of usage about which they are uncertain.

Fowler's original work was published in 1926; it was edited by Ernest Gowers and republished in 1965, and a third edition was published in 1996, updated by Robert Burchfield. In the 1996 edition, as has already been discussed, Burchfield comes to the conclusion that although there is some movement towards the acceptance of *like* in a wider range of contexts where *as* would have been advocated by Fowler, this acceptance is not yet a fact. The evidence as I have interpreted it is, therefore, that Fowler's *Modern English Usage* is still a valid reference work on which to base ideas about the use of *like* and *as* in present-day English.

2.4 Usage guides on like and as

In this section I will discuss what a number of usage guides have to say about the use of *like* and *as*, with reference to the sentences included in the questionnaire. In this section I will compare these features as discussed by Fowler (1926), Gowers (1965) and Burchfield (1996), and will also include a number of other popular usage guides in order to give a comparison of their relative views on the usage of *like* and *as*. The usage guides I have selected are by Partridge (1975), Strunk & White (1979), Weiner & Delahunty (1994), Waite (1995), Amis (1997), Bryson (2001; 2008), Peters (2004), Swan (2005) and Lamb (2010). I chose these particular usage guides on the basis of their being relatively well-known guides and readily accessible.

I will divide the usages into the following groups:

i. Sentences in which *like* or *as* is used in a conditional context, where *as if* or *as though* are considered by some authorities to be preferable. This usage is tested in sentences 1, 5, 13, 1, 17 and 18.

ii. Sentences in which *like* or *as* is followed by a noun or pronoun, or a noun or pronoun phrase. This usage is tested in sentences 2, 3, 6, 8, 11 and 16.

iii. Sentences in which *like* or *as* is used as a conjunction. This usage is tested in sentences 4, 7, 9, 10 and 15.

iv. Sentences in which *like* or *as* is followed by a preposition or adverb. These usages are tested in sentences 12, 19 and 20.

I will discuss the recommendations of the different usages guides divided into the groups indicated above.

Group i: Sentences in which *like* or *as* is used in a conditional context, where *as if* or *as though* are considered by some authorities to be preferable. This usage is tested in sentences 1, 5, 13, 1, 17 and 18.

Fowler discusses *as if/as though* at some length, mainly with regard to the use of the conditional, but makes no mention of the use of *like* for *as if/as though* (1926: 32). This may possibly be interpreted as an indication that this usage was not common at the time and therefore was not a usage which needed to be commented on.

Gowers leaves intact Fowler's original entry that in American usage like is often treated as equivalent not only to *as* but also to *as if*, 'a practice that still grates on English ears' (1965: 335).

Partridge is unequivocal in his assessment, stating that *like* for *as if* is 'incorrect' and 'illiterate' (1975: 174).

Weiner & Delahunty state that *like* is 'often used informally to mean "as if"' but the authors remark that '[t]his use is very informal' (1994: 147).

Waite refers to *as if* as 'conjunction colloquial', stating that '[I]t is incorrect in standard English to use *like* as a conjunction' (1995: 377).

Burchfield's entry on this usage states that 'it is frequently used in good AmE and Aust. Sources (though much less commonly in BrE) to mean "as if, as though"' (1996: 458).

Bryson states that *as* and *as if* are always followed by a verb, and indicates his preference for *as if* rather than *like* in conditional sentences by correcting a sample sentence accordingly: '…it looks *like* [*as if*] all of the parties…' (2001: 118).

Swan comments that *like* is often used in the same way as *as if/as though*, especially in informal style, and that this used to be typically American English, but is now common in British English (2005: 76). In his view, *feel* can be followed by *like* or by *as if/as though* (2005: 201).

Group ii: Sentences in which *like* or *as* is followed by a noun or pronoun complement. This usage is tested in sentences 2, 3, 6, 8, 11 and 16.

Fowler comments that in sentences in which *like* is not followed by a verb, certain forms are unexceptionable (1926: 325). According to his view, sentences such as 2, 3, 6, 8, 11 and 16 would constitute unexceptionable use.

Gowers comments that '*[a]s* is never to be regarded as a preposition' (1965:38). With regard to *like*, he retains Fowler's original entries in full, adding a paragraph warning 'against going too far in anxiety to avoid all questionable uses of *l[ike]*' (1965:336).

Partridge (1975) makes no comment on the use of *like* before nouns, pronouns or noun complements; I therefore assume that he does not categorise this usage as 'abusage'.

Weiner & Delahunty endorse this usage, stating that *like* 'is normally used as an adjective followed by a noun, noun phrase or pronoun (in the objective case)' (1994: 147).

Waite's entry on *like* endorses its use as an 'adjective' ('similar to…, resembling; characteristic of') and as a preposition ('in manner of, to same degree as') (1995: 377).

According to Burchfield (1996), the use of *like* as a preposition, i.e. preceding a noun or pronoun complement, is unquestioned, indicating his agreement with Fowler's original assessment.

Bryson (2001; 2008) makes no explicit comment on this usage, indicating that this usage is not considered ‘troublesome’.

Peters states that ‘there are no strictly grammatical objections to using **like** as a preposition’ (2004: 323). She comments on the apparent distinction between *like* and *as* or *such as*, giving as examples ‘great artists like Rembrandt’ and ‘everyday chores like shopping and housework’ where, she remarks, some commentators would express a preference for *as* or *such as.* In her opinion, *like* would be preferable in both cases.

Swan, too, states that *like* can be a preposition. ‘We use *like*, not *as*, before a noun or pronoun to talk about similarity’ (2005: 326).

Group iii: Sentences in which *like* or *as* is used as a conjunction. This usage is tested in sentences 4, 7, 9, 10 and 15.

Fowler states that ‘[E]very illiterate person uses this construction daily; it is the established way of putting the thing among all who have not been taught to avoid it; the substitution of *as* for *like* in their sentences would sound artificial. But in good writing this particular *like* is very rare’ (1926: 325). The entry goes on to say that ‘[I]n good writing this particular *l[ike].* is rare, and even those writers with whom sound English is a matter of care and study rather than of right instinct, and to whom *l[ike]* was once the natural word, usually weed it out’ (1926: 325). Fowler quotes the judgement of the *OED*: ‘Now generally condemned as vulgar or slovenly.’ He also mentions that the *OED* cites this usage by a number of eminent authors, such as Shakespeare, Southey, Newman and Morris, saying that ‘[A] person who does wish to employ this construction knows that he will be able to defend himself if condemned’, but he adds an admonitory comment that such a user should also know that ’until he has done so, he will be condemned’ (1926: 325).

Gowers discusses *like* at length, referring only to ‘questionable constructions’ (1965: 334.) He refers to the conjunctional use of *like*, describing it as ‘if a misuse

at all, the most flagrant and easily recognizable misuse of *l[ike]'* (1965; 334). The citation quoted above is from Fowler's original work and is retained by Gowers in full.

Partridge states that '*like* for *as* is incorrect', referring to conjunctional use. He comments that 'it would appear to be going too far to call it an illiteracy; but it is at least a "loose colloquialism"' (1975: 174).

Weiner & Delahunty state that '[A]lthough this use of *like* as a conjunction is not uncommon in formal writing, it is often "condemned as vulgar or slovenly" (*OED*), and is best avoided except informally' (1994: 147).

Burchfield (1996) mentions that the conjunctional use of *like* remains a subject for debate in the twentieth century, and concludes that it is a feature of informal usage and mainly American English. 'The mood throughout the 20th century has been condemnatory,' he writes, and this usage has been dismissed as 'illiterate', 'vulgar' or 'sloppy' by modern grammarians (1996: 458). Burchfield conducted a survey among 'many recent writers of standing' and came to the conclusion that 'long-standing resistance to this omnipresent little word is beginning to crumble.' The use of *like* as a conjunction is 'struggling towards acceptable standard or neutral ground.' However, according to Burchfield at the time of writing, it is not there yet.

Amis is in no uncertainty about the use of *like*: 'All of us know that *like* is to be avoided in conjunctional use' (1997: 126). He discusses the issue of whether or not to hypercorrect: 'Two quite strong desires, not to seem mincingly donnish and not to be or look illiterate and philistine, pull in different directions' (1997: 127). His final advice is to continue to use *like* as a conjunction in speech, but to avoid it in writing.

Bryson (2001: 118; 2008: 251) is categorical in his advice, stating that *like* is never to be followed by a verb, except in a construction featuring *feel* and followed by a gerund.

Peters (2004) takes a liberal stance with regard to the use of *like* as a conjunction, comparing it to the use of *before*, *since* and *than*, which are all accepted today both as prepositions and conjunctions. Given Burchfield's comment that the conjunctional use of *like* is more acceptable in American English and Australian English than British English, as Peters is writing in an Australian context, this may explain her more liberal attitude. Peters states that the conjunctional use of *like* is gaining ground, saying that Fowler distanced himself from the condemnation expressed by more prescriptive objectors. She cites his invitation to those who have 'no instinctive objection to the construction to decide whether he shall consent to use it in talk, in print, in both or in neither' (2004: 324). However, as Fowler goes on to say, 'in good writing this particular *l[ike].* is rare, and even those writers with whom sound English is a matter of care and study rather than of right instinct... usually weed it out'. He gives a number of newspaper examples of this usage that he refers to as 'vulgar or slovenly' (1965: 334), my reading is that Fowler's attitude can be considered somewhat less permissive than Peters suggests. Indeed, Peters herself states that although this usage 'turns up in various kinds of Australian nonfiction as well as fiction…[it] is only conspicuous by its absence from academic and bureaucratic prose' (2004: 323).

Swan states that *as* is a conjunction: 'We use it before a clause, and before an expression beginning with a preposition' (2005: 326). He also states that '[i]n modern English *like* is often used as a conjunction instead of *as*. This is most common in informal style' (2005: 326).

Lamb is equally unequivocal, stating that 'it is best to use *like* before nouns and pronouns, and as a conjunction before phrases and clauses' (2010: 168), although, given the attitude of professional linguists such as Pullum, it may be construed as a matter of some concern that Strunk & White are the authorities to whom this author defers in this instance.

Group iv: Sentences where *like* or *as* are followed by a preposition, adverb or adverbial phrase. These usages are tested in sentences 12, 19 and 20.

This usage does not appear to be discussed at great length in many usage guides, indicating that it is less controversial.

Fowler regards this usage as questionable, reasoning that the limitation disregarded in this type of construction is that ‘the word governed by *l.* must be a noun, not an adverb or an adverbial phrase’ (1926: 326).

Gowers (1965) retains this entry in full.

Burchfield (1996) states that *as*, not *like*, should be used before adverbs and prepositions.

Swan’s (2005) comments on this usage are included in Group iii.

Waite (1995) only classifies the use of *like* as an adjective, preposition or adverb, which may be taken to indicate that he regards the use of *like* to qualify a preposition, adverb or adverb phrase as unacceptable.

The above classifications give an indication of those usages about which there is most debate. Where the situation is clear cut, little tends to be written, but where there is uncertainty about the item concerned, possibly because the usage is changing, one finds more discussion in the usage guides analysed. The above therefore can be seen as an indication that the conjunctional use of *like* is a feature that is currently undergoing a process of change.

2.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have discussed the survey carried out by Mittins et al. in 1970, mentioning their findings with regard to the use of *like*. I have outlined the structure of my own study, which is based on the Mittins et al. survey and reported on in 1970, but is expanded to include the additional context of the Internet. I have indicated my decision to use *Modern English Usage* as my authority for determining the standard usage rules for *like* and *as* in the context of the sentences included in the questionnaire, substantiating this decision with reference to a number of linguistic scholars who indicate their regard for *MEU* as a valuable authority. I have then categorised the sentences in my questionnaire

according to different types of usage, and have indicated the attitudes expressed in a selection of usage guides as to the acceptability of these usages in the sentences given.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT SURVEY

3.1 *Introductory remarks*

In this chapter I will discuss the design of the present survey, mentioning the design of the survey, the extra-linguistic aspects of the respondent cohort and the contents of the questionnaire on which the survey was based.

3.2 Design of the present survey

My intention with this study is to gain an impression of respondents' attitudes to the use of *like* in different contexts. In devising the study, I drew up a questionnaire based on the Mittins et al. survey reported on in 1970. The authors asked respondents not to record their own linguistic practice, but to indicate their acceptance or otherwise of the usages presented. As discussed, the four situations covered in the Mittins et al. study were Informal Speech, Informal Writing, Formal Speech and Formal Writing. In view of the present-day use of digital means of communication, I included Formal Digital and Informal Digital in my study as well, thereby expanding the number of different contexts of usage to six. My purpose in doing this was to discover whether the use of *like* in digital media, although in essence in written form, might be treated by users as closer to speech.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a brief instruction asking respondents to indicate which usages they considered acceptable in which contexts. The questionnaire was distributed among friends and colleagues, and was notified on the Forum of SENSE (The Society of English Native Speaking Editors). Unfortunately the rules of the society meant that the questionnaire itself could not be posted on the Forum, but that a notification could be posted asking those members who were interested in taking part in the survey to contact me for a copy of the questionnaire. This obviously represented a barrier to spontaneous response, but did mean that those members who actually requested a copy of the questionnaire and who completed it were particularly interested in the subject.

The questionnaire contains 20 sentences with 16 instances of the use of *like* and 4 of the use of *as*. I chose this distribution as my main interest was in attitudes to the use of *like*, while at the same time I wished to evoke an awareness in the respondents of the use of *as*. The questionnaire, which was anonymous, asked respondents to indicate their age, their education, their present job and their nationality. This last feature was important as some of the respondents were not native speakers of English, although those that were not had studied English to university level. I did not ask for people to indicate their gender as this factor was not included in the Mittins et al. survey. In retrospect, it may have been interesting to include gender in the survey in order to assess whether any differences in attitudes to language use could be discerned based on gender. In view of my interest in attitudes to language use in digital communication, I asked respondents to indicate the frequency with which they used particular digital media. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

Inspired by Mittins et al., I also asked respondents to indicate whether there were any particular words or expressions that they noticed were becoming more frequent, but that they felt were not wholly grammatically correct. An additional question was posed, relating to a sentence that occurs in Kingsley Amis's novel *Take a Girl Like You* (1971) as this sentence includes both the use of *like* and *as*, where the reader has to make an interpretation of the sentence based on the perceived difference implied by the use of *like* or *as*. The findings will be discussed later in this thesis.

I was interested to know the respondents' ages to see whether any correlation could be found between acceptance of usages of *like* and age, the common perception being that older people are more correct in their language usage. Occupation was of interest, in addition to education, as many of the respondents were likely to be editors, translators or teachers of English. I considered this to be an indication that respondents would be conversant with the grammatical rules governing the use of *like* and *as*. In the Mittins et al. study, 397 of the 457 respondents were from the teaching profession. The assumption of the authors was that as teachers they would be involved in the issues raised by the

prescriptive/descriptive opposition. The authors also concluded that it seemed ‘unlikely that many would take a completely descriptive line’ (1970: 3). It seems to me that this principle would apply equally to editors and translators as these people are professionals in rendering text, either by translating a text from a source language into English or by editing or correcting a text already produced in English, into English that reflects as closely as possible the prevailing standards of correct English. Given the professions and education of the respondents to this survey, it is likely that all would be familiar with standard grammar rules, but the descriptiveness or prescriptiveness of their approach would be difficult to gauge with any accuracy.

3.3 Method of analysis

For this purpose I made use of the SPSS17.0 statistical program, part of the IBM Software Group's Business Analytics Portfolio, to structure my data. The full statistical capabilities of this programme were not used in this analysis as the primary concern of the survey was to assess socio-linguistic phenomena. I first of all entered the personal data for each respondent (age, education, profession, native language, Internet use), and subsequently examined the responses given for each sentence in each context, determining whether or not the respondent considered the use of *like* or *as* acceptable. I calculated for each respondent a percentage score for each context indicating acceptability of the use of *like* or *as* in the sentences in that context. As an example, if a respondent considered 12 of the 20 sentences acceptable in the formal written context, this respondent would have a 60% acceptability score for that particular context.

3.4 Discussion of extra-linguistic factors

3.4.1 Group as a whole

The sample consisted of 61 respondents. The extra-linguistic features relating to the group will be discussed below.

3.4.2 Age

The spread of ages of the respondents can be seen in Table 3.2 (below), which shows that the respondents ranged in age from 23 to 80 years old, with the greatest concentration in the ages between 40 and 69. It is noticeable that the largest group of respondents were aged between 50 and 59. This in itself would be an interesting feature for future research, in order to investigate whether there is evidence to support the hypothesis suggested by this, namely that as people in this age group took the trouble to respond to the questionnaire this could be an indication of their greater interest in language change.

Table 3.2: Spread of respondents classified by age

Age group (years)	No. of respondents	Percentage of total
23-29	3	4.8
30-39	8	13.1
40-49	14	22.8
50-59	21	32.9
60-69	14	22.9
70-79	1	1.6
80	1	1.6
Total	61	100

3.4.3 Education

The educational level of the respondents was primarily university level, with three ‘A’-level, four ‘HBO’-level (Dutch higher professional education) and one ‘self-taught’ respondent.

The spread of education of the respondents can be seen in Table 3.3 (below). This shows that the overriding majority of the respondents have an

academic education (86.8%). It could be commented that as an effect of this the group as a whole is not representative of a general public.

Table 3.3: Respondents classified by their highest level of education received

Highest level of education	No. of respondents	% of total
University	53	86.8
Higher Professional (HBO)	4	6.5
'A' level	3	4.9
Self-taught	1	1.6

This bias came about as a result of the fact that the survey was conducted within a university community among respondents who were studying or had studied at university. In the study by Mittins et al. on which the present study is based, respondents were not asked to indicate their highest educational level, but the profession of the respondents (students, teachers, lecturers, examiners and a small group of non-educationalists) does indicate a relatively high level of education (1970: 6). The spread of educational level in the present study can therefore be regarded as similar to that of the Mittins et al. study on which it is modelled.

3.4.4 Profession

In terms of profession, the cohort was very diverse. For the purposes of analysis, I subdivided the group into Translator/Editor, Educational and Other Profession. The Translator/Editor group comprised individuals who work as translators, editors or copywriters; the Educational group comprised those respondents who work in education in the capacity of University Professor, School Teacher or Trainer, and Other Profession included a homeopathic practitioner and teacher, a financial administrator, a Personnel Adviser, a veterinary surgeon, a secretary, a

Civil Service Administration Officer, an Executive Coach, a Technical Director, two Policy Officers, a Web Editor, one person who was retired but did not specify a former profession, an ICT co-ordinator, an engineer, a book publisher, a company manager, a university liaison officer, a scientist, a registered nurse, a front office manager and an aromatherapist/reflexologist.

3.4.5 Native language

This survey was carried out within the Netherlands and this is reflected in the fact that a number of respondents are native speakers of Dutch rather than English. This could be regarded as a distorting factor in the responses as the survey concerns the English language and it is reasonable to expect that the most meaningful results will therefore be obtained by surveying native speakers of England. However, the respondents to this survey who are not native speakers of English either have studied or are currently studying English at academic level.

Table 3.4: Respondents classified by native language

Native language	No. of respondents	% of total
British English	43	70.5
Dutch	11	18.0
American English	3	4.9
Bilingual Dutch/English	3	4.9
Unspecified	1	1.6

The spread of native languages can be seen in Table 3.4 above. This table indicates that the majority of the respondents (70.5%) are native speakers of British English. In analysing the responses I decided to divide the respondents into two groups: native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English.

For the purposes of this survey, I included American English and Bilingual Dutch/English in the English group. The reasoning behind this is that for both these groups can be said to have as close an affinity or a closer affinity with English than with another language.

3.4.6 Frequency of use of digital media

The questionnaire asked respondents about their use of digital means of communication, including sms/texting, email, social media and blogs. Respondents were asked whether they used these media very frequently (daily), frequently (weekly), occasionally (monthly) or never.

Table 3.5: Number of users/frequency of use of digital media.

Frequency	Sms/texting	Email	Social Media	Blog
Very frequent (daily)	22 (36%)	57 (93.4%)	6 (9.8%)	2 (3.3%)
Frequent (weekly)	17 (27.9%)	4 (6.6%)	6 (9.8%)	2 (3.3%)
Occasional (monthly)	14 (22.9%)	0	18 (29.5%)	10 (16.4%)
Never	8 (13.1%)	0	31 (50.8%)	47 (77%)

Table 3.5 gives an indication of the means of digital communication included in the survey and the responses of the respondents. As would be expected in the present age of Internet, all correspondents were users of digital media.

3.5 Discussion of Kingsley Amis sentence

The questionnaire included a sentence from the Kingsley Amis novel *Take A Girl Like You* that contained both *like* and *as*, i.e.

"The girl, who was dressed like -- rather than as, I supposed -- a Victorian governess, kept her face lowered."

Respondents were asked to make an interpretation of the sentence based on the perceived difference implied by the use of *like* or *as*.

3.6 Other non-standard features mentioned by respondents

Respondents were asked whether there are particular words or expressions in English that they notice are becoming more frequent, but that they feel are not wholly correct grammatically. They were asked to restrict themselves to a maximum of five examples per respondent.

3.7 Concluding remarks

In this chapter the methodology for the present survey has been outlined. The design of the study and the method of analysis have been explained and the extra-linguistic factors relating to the respondents have been discussed. Two additional aspects of the questionnaire have been indicated: respondents were asked first to comment on a model sentence taken from Kingsley Amis and also to indicate non-standard features of English that are they perceive are becoming increasingly commonly used.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF SURVEY FINDINGS

4.1 *Introductory remarks*

In this chapter I will present and discuss the data gathered from the responses to the survey. I correlated the questionnaire responses by age, profession, education, native language and frequency of usage of digital media. My aim was to determine how the level of acceptance demonstrated by respondents varies for the different contexts tested. I will comment on the responses to my question regarding the respondents' interpretation of the sentence from Kingsley Amis as mentioned in the section on Methodology. Finally, I will discuss the responses to the question regarding any current language uses that respondents find particularly vexing.

4.2 Respondents by extra-linguistic group

I will first consider the cohort of respondents as a whole and will then discuss the responses of the respondents divided by extra-linguistic group.

4.2.1 Respondent group as a whole

I first consider the total group of respondents, looking at the level of acceptability of the sample sentences as a whole. It can be seen from 4.1 (below) that the acceptance of the sample sentences by the group of respondents as a whole ranged from 46.7% in formal written contexts to 83.5% for informal speech. A clear difference can be seen in the acceptance levels for formal and informal contexts, with the scores for the three informal categories showing greater tolerance of the language use in the sample sentences than the formal categories.

Table 4.1: Overall acceptance level (%) of survey sentences
for the total respondent group

Context	Mean %	Std. deviation
Formal writing	46.7	17.2
Formal speech	59.9	19.0
Formal digital	53.4	17.9
Informal writing	75.7	15.6
Informal speech	83.5	11.4
Informal digital	80.2	12.5

From Table 4.1 it can be seen that respondents are least tolerant of non-standard language in formal written contexts (46.7%), and most tolerant of non-standard language usage in informal spoken contexts (83.5%). The standard deviation for the different usage contexts ranges from 11.4% (informal speech) to 19% (formal speech). It is important to consider the standard deviation since this gives an indication of the degree of spread of the responses. Where the spread is greater, this is an indication of wider divergence in the responses and one therefore has to be more conservative in assigning significance to the results. The results show that there is greater divergence for all formal contexts and less divergence for all informal contexts. The formal speech category is the context where there is the greatest spread in the responses and the informal speech category is the context where there is least spread in the responses. The group of respondents therefore appear to demonstrate greatest cohesion in their acceptance of the use of *like* in the sample sentences in the informal spoken context and least cohesion in the formal spoken context. In other words, their attitude to language usage is most similar in informal speech, and least similar in formal speech.

4.2.2 Age

In analysing the responses I was interested in examining whether there were any significant differences between older and younger respondents. One of the reasons for this, apart from the interest in comparing attitudes for different age groups, is the question of whether there is any noticeable difference between those respondents who would have received formal grammar training in secondary school and those who went through secondary school after the 1960s when formal training in English grammar was no longer part of the school curriculum in England. Respondents aged 55 or older would have completed their secondary education (from age 11 to 16 in the UK) by 1970. I therefore divided the group into those who were aged up to 54 and those who were aged 55 and above, and examined their responses to the different contexts of language usage.

Table 4.2: Respondents classified by age

Context	54 or younger (38 respondents)		55 and older (23 respondents)	
	Mean %	Std. Deviation	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Formal writing	48.3	15.6	44.1	19.6
Formal speech	61.8	18.2	56.7	20.4
Formal digital	53.6	16.9	53.0	20.1
Informal writing	77.3	14.7	73.3	17.1
Informal speech	83.7	17.8	83.3	11.0
Informal digital	79.5	13.7	81.3	10.4

The findings can be seen in Table 4.2. It should, however, be borne in mind in terms of the possible effect of lack of formal grammar training that this age effect can only be said to apply to 70% of the respondents (43 individuals). The

remaining respondents, who do not have English as their native language, would not have been educated in English secondary schools, but would have been taught English grammar in school as foreign learners. The findings therefore apply in terms of attitudes to language usage within the age group indicated, but they cannot be considered wholly as an effect of formal grammar training in school.

It can be seen from the data presented above that the group of respondents aged 54 or younger consists of 38 persons, and the group of respondents aged 55 and above consists of 23 persons. The responses show that for all formal categories the mean score for the <54 group is higher than for the >55 group. This indicates that the younger age group finds a greater percentage of the sentences in the questionnaire acceptable for each category. I would deduce from this that the younger age group is more tolerant of the non-standard use of *like* and *as* in each of the six usage contexts. There are a number of possible interpretations of this finding. One explanation is that tolerance of non-standard language decreases with age. A future survey with a larger group of respondents would be needed to test this hypothesis more accurately. A further interpretation – that, as has been said, does not apply to all members of the younger group – could be that this is related to these respondents not having been taught formal grammar rules as part of their school curriculum and therefore being less aware of these rules. A follow-up study including only respondents who were educated in England could be organised to test this hypothesis.

There are a number of further interesting points to note. It can be seen that both age groups exhibit greater tolerance of non-standard forms in all informal contexts than in all formal contexts. It can also be seen that for both formal and informal contexts, the category of written usage achieves the lowest score, followed by digital usage and lastly spoken usage. It can be deduced from the above that respondents appear to demonstrate greatest tolerance in spoken contexts, followed by digital and lastly written contexts. This appears to show that digital use is regarded by respondents as being between written and spoken use, and marginally closer to written than spoken use.

A further interesting point to note is that the standard deviation for the <54 age group in all contexts except informal speech and informal digital is lower than

that of the >55 age group, even though the <54 age group is much larger. One would expect that the larger the sample group, the greater the standard deviation is likely to be. This would appear to indicate that the <54 age group exhibits greater internal agreement in terms of their responses for the three formal contexts and for informal writing. Informal speech is the context where respondents clearly show the most tolerant attitude to language use, at 83.7% for the respondents aged <54 years and 83.3% for the respondents aged >55 years. This correlates with the comments expressed in usage guides that non-standard usage is a more frequent feature of informal speech (Weiner & Delahunty, 1994; Amis, 1997; Swan, 2005).

4.2.3 Education

Given the spread of education of the respondents as outlined in chapter 3.2.3, for the purposes of analysis on the basis of education, I divided the respondents into university and non-university educated. From Table 4.5 (below) it can be seen that there is a mismatch in the size of the two groups, with the university-educated group comprising 53 individuals and the non-university group comprising 8 individuals.

Table 4.5: Respondents classified by education

Context	University (53 respondents)		Non-university (8 respondents)	
	Mean %	Std. Deviation	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Formal writing	48.5	17.1	35.0	13.1
Formal speech	61.7	19.4	48.1	11.6
Formal digital	55.0	17.8	43.1	16.9
Informal writing	77.3	15.0	65.6	16.8
Informal speech	83.6	11.5	83.1	11.3
Informal digital	80.3	12.9	79.4	10.2

With this distribution, it is difficult to draw any significant conclusions relating to a comparison between the two groups on the basis of the data collected, and in a future study it would be advisable to have a more even spread of educational level among the respondents. Having said this, the results from the present study show that the highest degree of acceptance of language usage for both groups is for informal spoken use (83.6% and 83.1%). The lowest level of acceptance shown is by the non-university educated group (35%) for the formal written context.

It is interesting to note that the respondents who did not have an academic education show a lower acceptance level across all contexts than the university-educated group. This would appear to indicate a more prescriptive attitude to language use among the non-university educated group. It is generally for those seeking a prescriptive guide to language usage that usage guides were and are written. As Tieken-Boon van Ostade comments, usage guides were intended to cater 'for a market of socially ambitious people who were in need of linguistic guidance' (2010: 21).

4.2.5 Profession

As has been indicated in section 3.2.1, the spread of professions of the respondents is rather broad. For the purposes of this survey, it would not be meaningful to detail the responses for each profession; I have therefore divided the respondents into two groups: translators/editors and other professions. There are three reasons for this, firstly that the group of translators/editors was the largest group (32 respondents), secondly that translators/editors form a homogeneous group as they are professionally involved with language at a very detailed level, and thirdly that, as a professional translator/editor myself, this group was of particular personal interest to me because I wanted to know whether their attitudes to language use were more or less tolerant than other respondent groups.

Table 4.6: Respondents classified by profession

Context	Translators/editors (32 respondents)		Education/other (29 respondents)	
	Mean %	Std. Deviation	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Formal writing	46.1	18.1	47.4	15.4
Formal speech	59.5	20.9	60.3	18.2
Formal digital	53.3	20.9	53.6	14.4
Informal writing	75.2	16.2	76.4	15.2
Informal speech	83.9	10.8	83.1	12.2
Informal digital	79.8	12.4	80.5	12.8

Table 4.6 shows that the two groups are reasonably well-matched in terms of size (32 and 29 individuals). The translator/editor group represents a more cohesive group in terms of their profession, whereas the education/other group covers a very diverse range of professions. It can be seen from the above table that the respondents in both groups demonstrate a higher level of tolerance of language use in all informal contexts than in all formal contexts. The lowest degree of acceptance of the language used in the sample sentences for both groups is for formal written use (46.1% and 47.4%) and the highest level is for informal spoken use (83.9% and 83.1%). The responses do show a slightly lower tolerance towards language usage on the part of translators/editors across all six contexts; however the difference in the scores of the two groups is very small and can therefore not be considered statistically significant. It is interesting to note that for each category, except for informal speech and informal digital, the standard deviation for the translators/editors group is greater than that for the other professions. The difference is not large enough to be considered significant, but the fact that this applies across all contexts is interesting. It would seem to indicate that there is generally less agreement on what is acceptable among the

group of translators/editors than among the group of other professions. However, it should be borne in mind that this difference, although visible, is not highly significant in statistical terms. It would be interesting in a subsequent survey to include a wider range of professions with more respondents per professional group to see whether a more differentiated image might appear.

4.2.6 Native language

For the purposes of comparison on the basis of native language, I divided the respondents into native speakers of English and non-native speakers, as can be seen from Table 4.7 (below).

Table 4.7: Respondents classified by native language

Context	Native English (32 respondents)		Non-native English (29 respondents)	
	Mean %	Std. Deviation	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Formal writing	46.3	17.6	48.0	16.2
Formal speech	58.8	19.0	64.4	19.4
Formal digital	52.4	18.1	57.9	17.6
Informal writing	75.4	15.5	77.2	16.7
Informal speech	83.9	10.2	82.1	16.0
Informal digital	80.6	11.5	78.3	16.4

Table 4.7 shows that the two groups of native English and non-native English speakers are not well matched in terms of size (49 and 12). As has been seen with other extra-linguistic factors, such as education and age, this will have a bearing on the significance that can be attached to the findings derived from

comparison of the two groups. Both groups of respondents demonstrate the highest level of tolerance towards language usage in informal speech contexts (83.9% and 82.1%) and the lowest level of tolerance in formal written contexts (46.3% and 48.0%). In all contexts the standard deviation is relatively high, across all contexts is greater for native English speakers than for non-native speakers of English. This can be attributed to the fact that the group of native speakers is much larger, which is likely to lead to greater variation in the responses. It may also reflect the fact that native speakers' command of the language is greater, making them more susceptible to nuances of language use.

The non-native speakers demonstrate a greater tolerance of non-standard language across all contexts than do the native-English respondents. This may well be a reflection of the fact that English is not the native language of these respondents, and that they may therefore have less awareness of the nuances of the language. However, this can also be said of native speakers participating in the survey whose education or profession cannot be taken as a guarantee of a particularly detailed knowledge of English grammar. As has been discussed above, the non-native speakers are highly competent users of English. The difference in their use of English in formal and informal contexts is closely aligned with that of native speakers and demonstrates that their command of English is such that they exhibit a different level of tolerance of language use in different contexts. The results for the non-native group can therefore be regarded as valid evidence for the differentiation in language usage between formal and informal contexts. In a future study I would consider eliminating this factor by limiting respondents to native speakers of English.

4.2.7 Use of digital media

I was interested to find out how digital use was regarded by respondents even though this usage had not been part of the Mittins et al. study. Table 4.1 shows that in both formal and informal contexts the scores for digital use are approximately halfway between those for written and spoken language. This would appear to correlate with the comments made by Crystal (2006c: 52), who, as has been said

above (section 1.2), defines Netspeak as a 'third medium', other than the spoken or written word. The comment by Davis and Brewer (2005), as cited by Crystal, that 'electronic discourse is writing that very often reads as if it were being spoken' also appears to be endorsed by the findings of Table 4.1.

It can be seen from chapter 3.2.6 and Table 3.5 that almost all the respondents fitted into the category of very frequent users of email (93.4%). The use of sms/texting was also widespread, although far fewer respondents used this form of communication on a daily basis (36%). For the majority of respondents, their primary use of digital media was email, including the 80-year-old respondent who used email on a daily basis.

For the purposes of analysis I decided to divide the respondents into two groups. The first group, that I have categorised as very frequent users, comprises those respondents who use email on a daily basis and who also use social media (such as Facebook or blogs) on a daily or weekly basis. The remaining respondents are categorised as frequent users. The reasoning behind this division is that email and social media offer the opportunity for full sentences to be written and are also internet-based forms of communication, whereas sms/texting is a more abbreviated form of writing, in part due to the constraints of screen size.

The two groups comprised 16 respondents in the very frequent users group and 45 respondents in the frequent users group. As in the previous analyses, it can be seen that both groups of users exhibit higher levels of acceptance in all informal contexts than in all formal contexts.

It can be seen from Table 4.8 (below) that once again, the digital contexts, both formal and informal, score between the written and spoken contexts, which indicates that respondents regard the digital contexts as part-way between written and spoken language. Further, the two groups' scores are very closely aligned in formal written contexts (46.9% and 46.7%) and in informal digital contexts (79.4% and 80.4%), indicating that the frequency of use of digital media appears to have least effect on the attitude towards language use of the respondents in these contexts.

Table 4.8: Respondents classified by frequency of use of digital media

Context	Very frequent use (16 respondents)		Frequent use (45 respondents)	
	Mean %	Std. Deviation	Mean %	Std. Deviation
Formal writing	46.9	10.6	46.7	19.1
Formal speech	65.6	20.2	57.9	18.4
Formal digital	56.9	17.0	52.2	18.4
Informal writing	77.5	24.6	75.1	16.1
Informal speech	85.6	9.6	82.8	12.0
Informal digital	79.4	13.6	80.4	12.2

This table shows that the scores for both groups are highest and the standard differential for both groups is lowest in the informal speech context. That the scores are highest in this context reflects the fact that the informants are generally most tolerant of non-standard language in informal speech. The fact that the standard differential is lowest for both groups in this context can be seen as an indication that this is the context in which there is the greatest degree of homogeneity in the attitude to respondents of the use of *like* and *as*.

4.3 Discussion of Kingsley Amis sentence

Many respondents commented that this caused them to think hard about the nuances of difference that Amis was apparently endeavouring to convey. One respondent stated that he or she perceived no difference in meaning, but read this sentence as a comment on prescriptive grammatical rules.

There was some overlap in the responses, which can be summarised as follows. Thirty-six of the respondents associated the use of *as* with greater precision or authenticity, i.e. the girl being 'dressed as' a governess would be

more likely to mean that she actually is a governess. These respondents commented that the use of *like* was associated with a lack of conviction, i.e. if the girl was 'dressed like' a governess, she was not actually a governess. This is an interesting comment on the association of *like* and *as*. In the discussion on the grammar of *like* and *as* (section 2), *as* has been shown to be associated with more precise grammatical correctness, whereas more tolerant usage is frequently related to the use of *like* in different, largely more informal, contexts. For eleven respondents , the use of *like* indicated an intentional action on the part of the girl to dress in the way a Victorian governess would dress, but the respondents deduced that she was not successful in this. In general, the use of *as* was felt to be more definite or precise; the girl actually was a Victorian governess. As one respondent put it, '*like* is not quite as convincing as *as'*. One respondent commented that he or she considered the sentence more as a comment by Amis on the grammar of *like* and *as* than as a semantic issue. This would certainly seem to tie in with Amis's interest in language and grammar.

4.4 Other non-standard features

Respondents were asked to indicate any non-standard features that they noticed were becoming used more frequently. A full list of the features is included as Appendix 2. The reason for this question was to determine whether the respondents felt strongly about the use of non-standard features, and is so, which features were more frequently cited.

It can be seen from Table 4.9 (below) that the most frequently mentioned feature was the use of *like* as focuser, which was mentioned by 11 of the respondents. This may have been prompted by the fact that this survey concerned the use of *like*, albeit as a different feature. This particular feature is also the subject of studies by, for example, Macaulay (2001) and Dailey-o'Cain (2000). Four of the features mentioned are well known and appear in Crystal's Grammatical Top Ten (2003: 194). These are the use of double negatives, split infinitives, the use of *different to* rather than *from*, and the use of the nominative pronoun for the accusative.

Table 4.9: Non-standard features most frequently mentioned by respondents

Feature	No. of times mentioned
Use of *like* as a filler, at the end of a sentence or in place of a word.	11
Use of *got* rather than *has.* ('Jane's got a book.')	3
Misuse of the apostrophe.	3
Double negatives	3
Use of nominative form of personal pronoun when the accusative form should be used. ('She told Stephen and me.')	2
Use of *different to* rather than *different from*.	2
Starting a sentence with *so*, for no apparent reason.	2
Split infinitives.	2

Of the respondents, 14 did not answer this question. On the other hand, there were also such responses as: 'This little box could not contain them all' and 'Don't get me started!', which indicates that this issue evokes strong feelings in a number of the respondents.

4.5 Concluding remarks

It can be seen from the findings of the survey that there is a difference in the level of acceptance of language use between formal and informal contexts for the group as a whole and for each of the categories of respondents within the total cohort. For each category of respondents there was a clear indication of least tolerance of non-standard language in formal written contexts, and greatest tolerance in informal spoken contexts. Respondents clearly show a different level

of tolerance in digital contexts from the levels that they show in written and spoken contexts, both formal and informal. This reflects the opinion expressed by Crystal that Netspeak is a third medium, separate from spoken and written language. The evidence from this survey does give an indication that respondents who use digital means of communication very frequently, including social media, have a slightly more tolerant attitude towards the use of *like* and *as* in formal written contexts. It should be borne in mind, however, that the difference is small, and that there is a discrepancy in the size of the two groups.

In terms of age, a clear indication was seen of a less tolerant attitude to non-standard language usage in the group of respondents aged 55 years and above, for all six usage contexts. This would appear to indicate that tolerance of non-standard features decreases with age. As mentioned previously, it is interesting to note that the largest age group of respondents is the 50 – 59 group, at 32.9% of the total respondent group. This could be an indication of this age group's interest in the debate on language use, a hypothesis that may be borne out by the proliferation of books on language use written by authors in or above this age category (Bryson (2001), Truss (2003), Hymphrys (2004), Lamb (2010)). This would be in interesting topic for further research.

As regards education, the response to this survey was not sufficiently diverse to draw any meaningful conclusions. Of the respondents, 53 had an academic education as opposed to eight who did not. In a future survey it would be preferable to recruit a cohort of respondents with a more equal spread of educational level.

A number of minor differences were perceived in the attitudes of the respondents according to profession. The group of translators/editors showed a slightly lower level of tolerance of non-standard use of *like* and *as* than did the group of other professions, again across all six contexts. It would be interesting in a future survey to include a broader range of professions, some of which should be language-based and some not, and also to have a more even distribution of respondents across the professions. The present cohort of respondents did show considerable diversity in the range of professions, but the group of translators/

editors and the group of educators predominated. It is interesting to note the level of tolerance in the attitude to non-standard language of the group as a whole, but for comparative purposes on the basis of profession a more equal distribution of professions would be needed.

With one exception, the respondents to this survey were British English, Dutch, American-English and bilingual where one of the two languages was English. The results of the survey showed that native speakers of English demonstrated lower tolerance of non-standard language than did the group of non-native speakers across all six contexts. However, it should be borne in mind that the two groups were not equally matched in numerical terms (49 native speakers of English as opposed to 12 non-native speakers). A valid comparison of responses is therefore difficult to achieve in this survey.

As far as users of digital media are concerned, all respondents to this survey were either very frequent or frequent users of digital media. No great difference in their responses would therefore be expected, although in all contexts frequent users demonstrated a slightly lower level of acceptance of non-standard language than very frequent users. The two groups are, however, not evenly matched, which means that the findings cannot be taken as statistically significant.

I would like to mention three primary findings from the analysis of the survey responses. The first is that all respondents appear to demonstrate a clear difference in attitudes to language usage between formal and informal contexts, demonstrating greater tolerance towards language use in informal contexts than in formal contexts. The second is related to this, namely not only do respondents demonstrate greatest acceptance of language use in the informal contexts, particularly informal speech, this latter context is also the one where respondents exhibit the lowest standard deviation in their responses. The informal speech context is therefore the context where there is greatest homogeneity in the responses of respondents to the use of the feature of *like* tested in this survey. This is an interesting observation as formal written language has historically been regarded as the context on which the standard language is based. It may well be the case that grammatical and usage rules are most explicit and comprehensive

in this context, but the findings from the present survey would appear to indicate that the usage context where respondents exhibit greatest agreement in their language use is the informal spoken context. This could be taken as an indication that an implicit standard is at work here among the respondents. There appears to be greatest implicit standardisation of language use within the context of formal spoken use than in other contexts. The question that then arises here is whether the informal speech context might be regarded as the context that most closely approaches a standard in terms of actual language use.

The third finding is that it can also be deduced that respondents' tolerance of language use in digital contexts appears to be different from that of language use in written and spoken contexts. Their attitudes to language use in digital contexts show greater tolerance than in written contexts and lower tolerance than in spoken contexts, suggesting that a different norm is applied for language use in digital contexts than that applied in written and spoken contexts. There is no clear evidence that digital use is regarded as being closer to either written or spoken use.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Introductory remarks

In this concluding chapter I will look at the general findings from the survey and will compare my findings with those of Mittins et al. In doing so I will not consider the findings with regard to the use of digital media, which did not form part of the Mittins et al. study, and any discernible effect on the language use of the respondents. I will then consider the survey as a whole and make some recommendations for modifications for any future study.

5.2 Comparison of findings of present survey with findings from model survey

In general, the Mittins et al. survey showed that for all features the majority of acceptances occurred in 'the least stringent of the four settings – Informal Speech' (1970: 2), indicating that this is the context where respondents demonstrate the most tolerant attitude towards language use. As can be seen in Table 5.2 (below), this finding is reflected in the present study, with the responses for Informal Speech (83.5%) showing the highest degree of acceptance for the cohort as a whole and for each of the extra-linguistic variables into which the cohort was divided. The overall responses from the Mittins et al. study are given in Table 5.1 (below).

Table 5.1: Pattern of responses to survey by Mittins et al. (1970: 11)

	Total %	Informal Speech %	Informal Writing %	Formal Speech %	Formal Writing %
Accept	41	61	46	31	24
Reject	58	38	53	68	75
Doubtful	1	1	1	1	1

Table 5.2 above gives an indication of the overall level of acceptance of the 50 main features in the Mittins et al. survey. It should be pointed out that although the survey contained 55 items, five of these were not considered as likely to occur naturally in all four of the contexts and were therefore not included in the overall analysis. As the authors say, the results 'show a general tendency of the order of nearly 3 to 2 (58 to 41 per cent), towards rejection rather than acceptance' (1970: 11). If the same data are presented for the present survey, the result would be as follows (omitting the 'Doubtful' category which did not form part of the present survey):

Table 5.2: Pattern of responses to questions in the present survey

	Total %	Informal Speech %	Informal Writing %	Formal Speech %	Formal Writing %
Accept	43	56	50	36	28
Reject	57	44	50	64	72

Table 5.2 relates to the overall level of acceptance by respondents of twenty sentences relating to the use of *like* and *as.* The findings would appear to indicate a very slight increase in the level of tolerance towards language use in the forty or so years since the Mittins et al. survey was conducted. However, it should be borne in mind that the present survey covered a much more limited number of features than the Mittins et al. survey.

The Mittins et al. study only provides a breakdown into the four contexts (formal speech, informal speech, formal writing, informal writing) of the top and bottom five features surveyed (1970: 14). Unfortunately the two sentences that relate to the present study were not included in the breakdown, so no direct comparison can be made of the present survey with that of Mittins et al. by

contextual group. The researchers did establish a general acceptance rate for the 50 features, averaged across the four contexts, from which it can be seen that the use of *like* as a conjunction in place of *as* (sentence No. 44) had a general acceptance level of 24%, and for the use of *like* in place of *as if* (sentence 47), this level was 12%. These two sentences were part of the group categorised by Mittins et al. as grammatical items, for which the acceptance level for the category as a whole was 37% (1970: 15). The acceptance level of both usages of *like* in the Mittins et al. survey can therefore be seen to be considerably lower than the average for the grammatical category as a whole.

In order to give as direct a comparison as possible, I selected the feature of *like* in place of *as* (Mittins et al. sentence No. 44) and looked at the responses to the five questions in the present survey that related to the use of *like* as a conjunction where *as* would be preferred according to the usage guides consulted. These were questions 4, 7, 9, 10 and 15 (see Appendix 1). I then calculated the acceptance levels exhibited by the respondents with regard to these five questions. The results are given in Table 5.3 (below). I have for this calculation ignored the two digital contexts, as these were not included in the Mittins et al. survey. In addition, the present respondents, unlike those in the Mittins et al. survey, were not offered the option of indicating a ‘doubtful’ response, so this option does not appear in Table 5.3 (below).

Table 5.3: Acceptance by respondents of the five sentences in the present survey containing the conjunctional use of *like*

	Total		Informal Speech		Informal Writing		Formal Speech		Formal Writing	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Accept	764	63	277	91	232	77	151	49	104	34
Reject	456	37	28	9	73	23	154	51	201	66
Total	1220	100	305	100	305	100	305	100	305	100

As mentioned above, the overall acceptance level for this feature in the Mittins et al. survey reported on in 1970 was 24%. The present study shows an acceptance level for this feature of 63% overall, with the lowest level of acceptance being found in the formal writing context (34%) and the highest level of acceptance being found in the informal speech context (91%). These findings appear to indicate that the acceptance level of this particular aspect of the conjunctional use of *like* has risen considerably, more than doubling since the time of Mittins et al. survey.

Some of this difference may be explained by the time that has elapsed since the Mittins et al. study: attitudes to language can change considerably in forty years. It also has to be borne in mind that the present survey included digital media. It might be expected that digital media, which is a less formal medium, would raise the general level of acceptance of non-standard language. According to the data from Table 4.8, there appears to be slight evidence to support this as the group of very frequent users of digital media demonstrated greater tolerance of language use across almost all categories than the group of frequent users of digital media. Further, it should be borne in mind that the present study was based on a larger number of sample sentences (20 as opposed to 2) and related to one particular feature, namely the use of *like* and *as*, rather than to 50 different features. This means that the Mittins et al. survey was much broader in scope than the present study, and the findings of that study are likely to be more diverse than the findings of the present survey.

In summary, although the present study was based on the Mittins et al. survey, because of the differences in the structure of the two surveys and the difference in their scope, a direct comparison is not possible. However, the indications from the present survey do appear to point to an increased acceptance of non-standard usage of *like* since the survey carried out by Mittins et al.

5.2 *Effects of use of digital media*

The Mittins et al. survey, having been carried out prior to 1970 before the advent of Internet, naturally contains no mention of digital media. In the belief that any present-day study of language use cannot ignore the context of digital media, I included this feature in the present study. This survey asked respondents to indicate their level of use of digital media, ranging from sms/texting, email, social media and blogs. The reason for posing this question was the current concern (see, for example, Crystal 2006c) that Internet is regarded as a different medium and the question of whether this had an effect on language use. The respondents to the present survey proved to be very frequent or frequent users of digital media, including social media.

All respondents show a different level of tolerance towards language use in digital contexts from the levels that they show in written and spoken categories, both in formal and informal contexts, reflecting the opinion expressed by Crystal that Netspeak is a third medium, separate from spoken and written language. The evidence from this survey also indicates that respondents who use digital means of communication very frequently have a slightly more tolerant attitude towards the use of *like* and *as* in formal written contexts. It should be borne in mind, however, that the difference is small, and that there is a discrepancy in the size of the two groups.

5.3 Summary of findings

Although the Mittins et al. survey and the present survey are not identical in structure or analysis, there is some evidence to indicate that, in the forty years since the 1970 study, attitudes to the usage of *like* appear to have become more tolerant.

It has been shown that native speakers of English demonstrate less tolerance of non-standard language than non-native speakers. Respondents who are very frequent users of digital media demonstrate greater tolerance of non-standard language than frequent uses of digital media. Translators/editors generally exhibit lower tolerance of non-standard language than other professions.

Older respondents (<54 years of age) appear to be less accepting of non-standard language than younger respondents (>55 years of age).

One of my aims with this survey was to demonstrate whether attitudes to language usage across the contexts tested have altered since the survey by Mittins et al. was carried out. The analyses of the findings indicate that the acceptance of non-standard usage has increased across all contexts. All the analyses made appear to indicate a difference in acceptance of non-standard language use between formal and informal contexts, with a greater degree of tolerance of non-standard language in informal contexts, particularly informal speech. The general acceptance levels of respondents have been shown to have increased since the Mittins et al. survey.

Milroy and Milroy comment that '[T]here is much greater variability in speech than there is in written language' (1985: 55) and that in terms of the standard language only the written form can be considered relevant (1985: 22). They go on to say that '[W]hen…we refer to 'standard' spoken English, we have to admit that a good deal of variety is tolerated in practice, and scholars have often had to loosen their definition of a 'standard' in dealing with speech (1985:22). The findings of the present study indicate that speech, and particularly informal speech, is the context in which all respondents are most accepting of deviations from the standard, which would endorse the Milroys' proposition. This is an important indicator of language change, since, as Milroy & Milroy comment, '[T]he seeds of change are always present in spoken languages' (1985: 69).

5.4 Concluding remarks

The present study is a small-scale initial survey that, in view of the limitations of the size of the cohort, cannot be said to generate significant statistical data. However, the survey sets the parameters for a possible larger-scale study that could be designed to test the same extra-linguistic variables (age, native language, education, profession, use of digital media) or to include additional or alternative criteria. A number of recommendations have been made for a future study, mainly relating to achieving greater balance in the extra-linguistic factors to be tested.

Given the limitations mentioned above, the present study has indicated some evidence of varying attitudes to the acceptability of non-standard language in informal contexts, particularly informal spoken contexts, and has shown a sliding scale of acceptability ranging from formal written (minimum acceptability) to informal spoken contexts (maximum acceptability). Evidence has been presented of an increased level of tolerance towards language use in the forty years since the Mittins et al. survey was published. The issue of digital media has been introduced in the present study. The findings indicate that respondents demonstrate a different attitude towards the use of language in digital contexts: their level of tolerance has been shown to be being part-way between written and spoken contexts.

The present survey has shown that the attitude of the respondents is most tolerant in speech contexts, in particular informal speech contexts, and that this is the context where respondents demonstrate the greatest degree of homogeneity in their attitudes to language use. This reflects the comments made by Mair that '[T]he most basic manifestation of language is informal face-to-face conversation' (2006: 183). Mair introduces the term 'colloquialisation' that describes the significant shift in twentieth-century English 'away from a written norm which cultivates formality towards a norm which is tolerant of informality' (2006: 187). The present survey, in particular the comments made in the penultimate paragraph of Section 4.5, appear to confirm Mair's point.

In conclusion, the present study has provided an update on the survey carried out by Mittins et al., broadened to include digital media. The range of the present study was limited to two of the features investigated in the 1970 survey. Based on these features, it has been possible to perceive a trend of increasing tolerance towards the use of these features, particularly in informal contexts, and to observe that attitudes to language use in digital media occupy a position part-way between spoken and written contexts.

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APPENDIX 1

Survey for Master's Thesis

I am conducting a survey of attitudes to the usage of *like* and *as* in various contexts in order to assess sociolinguistic responses to language change. For this reason, I would like to ask you to complete the questionnaire below. Completing this questionnaire will take no more than 10 minutes. **You are kindly requested to return the completed questionnaire to the email address given below, if possible within one week of receipt.**

In view of the increasing usage of digital communication media (email, blog, twitter, texting/sms), digital media are included in both the formal and the informal categories. Formal digital would include, for example, a job application by email or a contact by email with an official organisation. Informal communication via digital media would include, for example, emails between friends, communication via blogs, Facebook, etc.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The information you have provided will, of course, be treated confidentially. If you are interested, I would be happy to send you a summary of the results of my analysis in due course.

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November, 2010

Questionnaire

Please indicate with '+' in the relevant box whether in your opinion the sentence given is acceptable in the context indicated, with reference to the italicised word. If you feel the italicised word is unacceptable, please indicate with '-' .

		FORMAL			INFORMAL		
		Speech	Writing	Digital	Speech	Writing	Digital
1.	It looks *like* it's going to rain.						
2.	She looks just *like* her mother.						
3.	You, *like* me, are disappointed.						
4.	*Like* I said, it's an important issue.						
5.	He acts *like* he owns the place.						
6.	Advertising agencies may appear *as* homespun enterprises to the American people.						
7.	Nobody loves you *like* I do.						
8.	The new measure proved to be popular, *like* the old one.						
9.	They studied the rules of the game *like* a lawyer would study an imperfectly drawn up will.						
10.	Everything went wrong, *like* it does in dreams.						
11.	The wine tasted *like* vinegar.						
12.	The shops stay open all night, just *as* in the States.						
13.	You look *like* you need a drink.						
14.	He hit the ball *like* he meant it.						
15.	The dish smells good, *like* a gourmet meal should.						
16.	*As* most people, I have been fortunate to have many mentors in my life.						
17.	I felt *like* taking a walk.						
18.	I felt *like* I had been kicked by a camel.						
19.	*As* in previous years, we are organising a dinner for guests						
20.	He went to the office by bicycle, *like* normal.						

■ In addition, I would like to have your opinion on the following:

The Kingsley Amis novel *Take a Girl Like You* (1971) contains the following sentence:

"The girl, who was dressed like -- rather than as, I supposed -- a Victorian governess, kept her face lowered."

Do you perceive a difference between Amis' use of *like* and *as* here, and, if so, what meaning do you think he was intending to convey? How would you explain this ?

■ If there are particular words or expressions in English that you notice are becoming more frequent, but that you feel are not wholly correct grammatically, please indicate them, with examples, below (max 5).

■ Please indicate your highest level of education achieved:…..…………………………………………………………………………………

■ Please indicate your age: …… ……

■ Please indicate your occupation: ……………………….…………………………………………………………………………………………………

■ Please indicate your native language: ….……..

■ Please indicate whether you use the following means of communication, and how frequently:

	Very frequently (daily)	Frequently (weekly)	Occasionally (monthly)	Never
Sms/texting				
Email				
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)				
Blog				

APPENDIX 2

Words or expressions that respondents mention as becoming more frequent, but that they feel are not wholly correct grammatically.

1. Use of *like* as a filler, at the end of a sentence or in place of a word.
2. Use of *got* rather than *has* ('Jane's got a book.')
3. Misuse of the apostrophe.
4. Double negatives.
5. Use of nominative form of personal pronoun when the objective form should be used (she told Stephen and me.)
6. Use of *different to* rather than *different from*.
7. Starting a sentence with *so*, for no apparent reason.
8. Split infinitives.
9. Use of *that* to refer to persons, rather than *who*.
10. Use of *indicate* in a vague sense to mean *say* or *state*.
11. Use of long adverbial phrases between verb and subject.
12. Over-use of *on* ('analysis on, committee on, data on, etc.')
13. Use of *likely* ('It's likely she came by train.')
14. *Would of* instead of *would have*.
15. *Bought* instead of *brought*.
16. Use of *like* instead of *as if*.
17. BBC journalists increasingly using US expressions such as 'Right now…'
18. Use of *I was sat* instead of *I was sitting*.
19. *It's a big ask* instead of *It's a big question*.
20. Use of *ahead of* rather than before ('Ahead of tomorrow's match.')
21. Use of *this* instead of *that*.
22. Use of nouns as verbs ('That will negatively impact the economy.')
23. Use of transitive verbs as intransitive verbs ('This activity does not complete.')
24. Use of plural verb after compound noun, where singular is due.
25. *Compare with* rather than *compare to*.
26. Treatment of *media* as a singular noun.
27. Use of *key* as a predicate adjective ('These issues are key.')
28. Use of adjectives where adverbs are due ('You did that perfect.')
29. Incorrect positioning of *only* (as in 'It's only got three wheels' rather than 'It's got only three wheels.')
30. Use of *with regards to* when *with regard to* is meant.
31. Use of *in light of* instead of *in the light of*.
32. Excessive use of *absolutely* to mean *yes.*
33. Use of *the thing is that*. (The worst case reported by this respondent was 'The thing being is, is that…')
34. More phonetic than grammatical, but the spread of the glottal stop.
35. Use of *lay* when the speaker means *lie*.
36. Use of *too* or *also* when the speaker means *either.* ('He also didn't like it.')

37. Use of *who* where *whom* is correct.
38. The almost complete disappearance of the subjunctive.
39. Misuse of, of failure to use correct semi-colons and colons.
40. Confusion of *compare with* and *compare to*.
41. Use of *begging the question* when the speaker means *raising the question.*
42. English expressions such as 'moving forward', particularly used by politicians.
43. Use of *their* for singular. ('Someone may have lost their bag here.')
44. Addition of *you know* on the end of sentences.
45. American spelling, i.e. loss of 'u' from such words as *colour, behaviour*, and also programme/programme.
46. Overly informal greetings in business emails or letters. (For example, starting an email with *Hiya* or ending it with *Cheers*.')
47. The word *ongoing* rather than *continuing*.
48. Overuse of the word *basically*, especially when giving a lengthy explanation for something.
49. Use of *learn* when the speaker means *teach*.
50. Omission of the word *past* when giving the time. ('I will call you at half eight.')
51. Use of *myself* instead of *I*.
52. Punctuating conversation with *You know what I mean*.
53. Use of *went* when the speaker means *said*.
54. Use of *off* when the speaker means *from*. ('He got a loan off his father.')
55. Use of the superlative when the speaker should use the comparative. ('Of the two the apple tart was best.')