

Anne Barron

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# 10

## Synchronic and Diachronic Pragmatic Variability

Anne Barron\*

### 10.1 Introduction

Pragmatic variability refers to the fact that language users have a wide range of options available to create and understand meaning (Verschueren 1999). It is present in all aspects of language use, from discourse markers, to routine formulae to implicatures to speech acts to turn-taking and beyond. To take an example from the speech act of greeting in an English-speaking context: greetings can be realized using a routine realization, such as 'good day', 'hello', 'hi', 'good morning', 'G'day', 'how are you?', 'how's the craic?', 'howreya?', 'Dear X', 'wes hal', 'deo gratias' or conceivably via a non-routine form, such as 'I didn't see you there'. Non-verbally, the handshake, high five or fist bump represent means of greeting.

The range of possible choices for language users is unstable and continuously changing. Such change can be seen on a diachronic axis, with options changing over time. The form 'wes hal', for instance, is no longer employed in present-day English, but 'wes hal' with syntactic variants was a common form in Old English. Similarly, 'deo gratias' was a common form in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Britain not employed today (Jucker 2011). Nearer our century, 'good morning' and 'how are you?' were the most frequent greetings in nineteenth-century American English, whereas 'hi' and 'hello' dominate today (Jucker 2017). Such change is continuously taking place, and the causes of change are many and varied. Change may occur, for instance, if a speaker borrows a form from another language or creates a new idiosyncratic form or gesture to meet a particular communicative demand. Such innovative forms potentially become options in their own right in the process of language change. Take the fist bump: some trace its origins as a greeting to the context of a

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boxing match in which opponents touch gloves prior to a match. Others trace them to its use by star basketballer Fred Campbell of the Baltimore Bullets in the 1970s. The use of this communication form has spread since, also due to its use by later President Barrack Obama in the context of the 2008 US election (Hamilton 2018). Currently, the fist bump is starting to replace the handshake as a greeting in colder seasons in Canada, also due to its status among medical researchers as a more hygienic alternative to the handshake (Mela and Whitworth 2014; Hamilton 2018). In sum, the pragmatic options available to speakers are unstable and dynamic. Newer options emerge over time and previous options disappear for a variety of reasons.

The variable options at our disposal in using language at any one time are constrained by their context of use. A particular choice in language use can serve to exclude other options or create new options (Verschueren 1999). An initial 'hi' as an informal greeting is more likely to trigger a reciprocal 'hi' over a more formal greeting such as 'good day'. Not only does 'hi' in this context keep the level of formality constant, but the repetition of the same form represents what is termed 'format trying', whereby parts of a previous utterance may be re-used for a variety of reasons, such as to support conversation flow or show solidarity (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). Genre conventions also create a constraining context. 'Dear X' is more likely in the written context of email or letter-writing than in spoken communication. Similarly, the interactants within a particular context, whether familiars or strangers, whether status equals or unequals, will shape our choices (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). Thus, the variability of language use highlights the importance of context in pragmatic analyses.

Closely related to variability is a further feature of language use, namely its 'negotiability' (Verschueren 2008). There is no one-to-one relationship between an individual form and its function. Rather, meaning generation in language use is always highly dynamic and functions only due to the adaptability of the human mind (feature of 'adaptability') (Verschueren 1999, 2008). Meaning is negotiated in context. The same form may have a different meaning in a different context. The form 'Hello', for instance, may function not as a greeting (as above), but as an attention-getter in a particular context. Finally, a change of form can trigger a change of context (Verschueren 2008), as when, for example, an informal form, such as 'hi', offered in an initial greeting, is followed not by an informal greeting, as expected, but by a more formal 'good day'. If the interactants involved are an employee and employer, the choice of a more formal greeting by the employer may consciously construct a change from an informal to a formal context. If, on the other hand, the more formal greeting is produced by a parent to a child, the use may be ironic and an attempt to add humour to the interaction. Here too, it becomes clear that studying language use always means studying language use in context and appealing to contextual clues and pragmatic principles.

Thus far, we have taken a pragmatic perspective on variability. Sociolinguists, on the other hand, relate variation in language to stylistic constraints and to underlying socio-demographic parameters. Variationist sociolinguists conceptualize a particular language choice using the concept of the variable which has different linguistic realizations (variants) (Labov 1972). They see variability as patterned and orderly and explainable via matters of style or such socio-demographic factors as region, gender, age, socioeconomic class and ethnicity. On a pragmatic level, sociolinguists have usually analysed variation in single linguistic items, such as discourse markers or general extenders. Tagliamonte (2012), for instance, found general extenders to have multiple pragmatic functions, including the creation of shared knowledge. Individual general extenders have been found to correlate with specific social classes. Thus, the general extender 'and that' correlates with working class speech, while other forms, such as 'and stuff' and 'and things' correlate rather with middle-class speech (Cheshire 2007).

When studying language change, sociolinguists attempt to understand the path of change, for instance, whether a change represents a spread of vernacular forms or a spread from a higher social class to lower social classes. Language change always involves variability. Vice versa, however, variability in language does not necessarily mean change, with variable features also remaining stable over time. Thus, part of the challenge of such research is to identify when variation in language represents a change in progress and when it represents a stable, but variable, state of language whose use is regulated by a range of parameters (D'Arcy 2013).

Although some research on pragmatic or discourse variation has been available since approximately the late 1970s, the sociolinguistic study of variation has traditionally focused on the language system, with comparatively limited research on pragmatic or discourse variation. Terkourafi (2011: 344) sees the comparatively small amount of research in this area to date as the result of the 'limiting influence [of Labov's (1972) conception of the linguistic variable] on the study of variation at other levels, especially in syntax and discourse'. We return to this point in Section 10.3, in the discussion of the pragmatic variable.

Similar to sociolinguistics, the study of pragmatic variation within pragmatics was relatively slow in emerging. Discussion was long focused on issues of universality, including the universality of theoretical frameworks and the universality of speech acts and speech act strategies. Wierzbicka's (1985) research, highlighting language-specific and culture-specific pragmatics, as well as later research conducted within the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) investigating language use across cultures and across native speakers and learners, triggered a movement away from issues of universality and towards synchronic research focused on pragmatic variation across cultures (cross-cultural pragmatics), between native speakers and learners (interlanguage pragmatics), and across time (historical pragmatics).

Interest in pragmatic variability and change from a historical perspective was inaugurated in 1995 with the publication of Jucker (1995), an edited volume entitled *Historical Pragmatics*. Historical pragmatics is both synchronic and diachronic in focus, examining pragmatic norms within a particular period and pragmatic variability over time. This area of research and the related newly proposed area of historical (socio)pragmatics (Culpeper 2009) recognize that the choice of a particular option at any particular time in history will depend on and also influence the particular context of use. Given the broad view of pragmatics adopted within historical pragmatics, researchers also investigate the influence of social variation on language use, further blurring the differentiation with historical sociolinguistics (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2015).

Research on intralingual synchronic pragmatic variation across varieties or across macro-social factors, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status or ethnic identity, was slowest to emerge. Early studies focused on individual factors, such as gender (e.g. Holmes 1995), social variation (e.g. Deutschmann 2003) or region on a national level (e.g. Márquez Reiter 2003 on pragmatic variation across national varieties of Spanish). It was against the background of such initial sociolinguistic and pragmatic research on intralingual regional and social variation that variational pragmatics emerged as a field of research (Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009). Variational pragmatics is concerned with the systematic analysis of synchronic present-day pragmatic variation according to regional and social factors. It combines both the sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective on variability and investigates the influence of macro-social factors (region, gender, age, socioeconomic class and ethnic identity) on language use and interaction as they interact with micro-social factors relating to situational uses. To return to the greeting example above, the influence of regional factors might be seen in the preferred use of 'G'day' in an Australian context (Harting 2005) and in the use of 'How's the craic?' or 'Howreya?' in an Irish context (Regan 2008). On the other hand, the influence of age and gender is evident in the use of 'G'day' in an Australian context, where it is favoured as a greeting by males and those over 30 regardless of addressee (Harting 2005).

The present chapter examines synchronic and diachronic pragmatic variability by focusing on situational, regional and social variation from a synchronic and diachronic perspective. Following an overview of synchronic and diachronic approaches to variation, with a particular focus on the fields of variational pragmatics and historical pragmatics (Section 10.2), a case study focusing on offers across the regional varieties of Irish and British English is briefly presented (Section 10.3). Key methodological and theoretical issues arising from this study, and shared by researchers working on pragmatic variation in a contrastive manner irrespective of their theoretical background, are discussed in this section. We examine how a pragmatic variable might be defined using multiple criteria, we

address the influence of method on definitions of the variable as well as the potential for interdisciplinary research between diachronic and synchronic researchers. The chapter closes with a brief summary and suggestions for future research (Section 10.4).

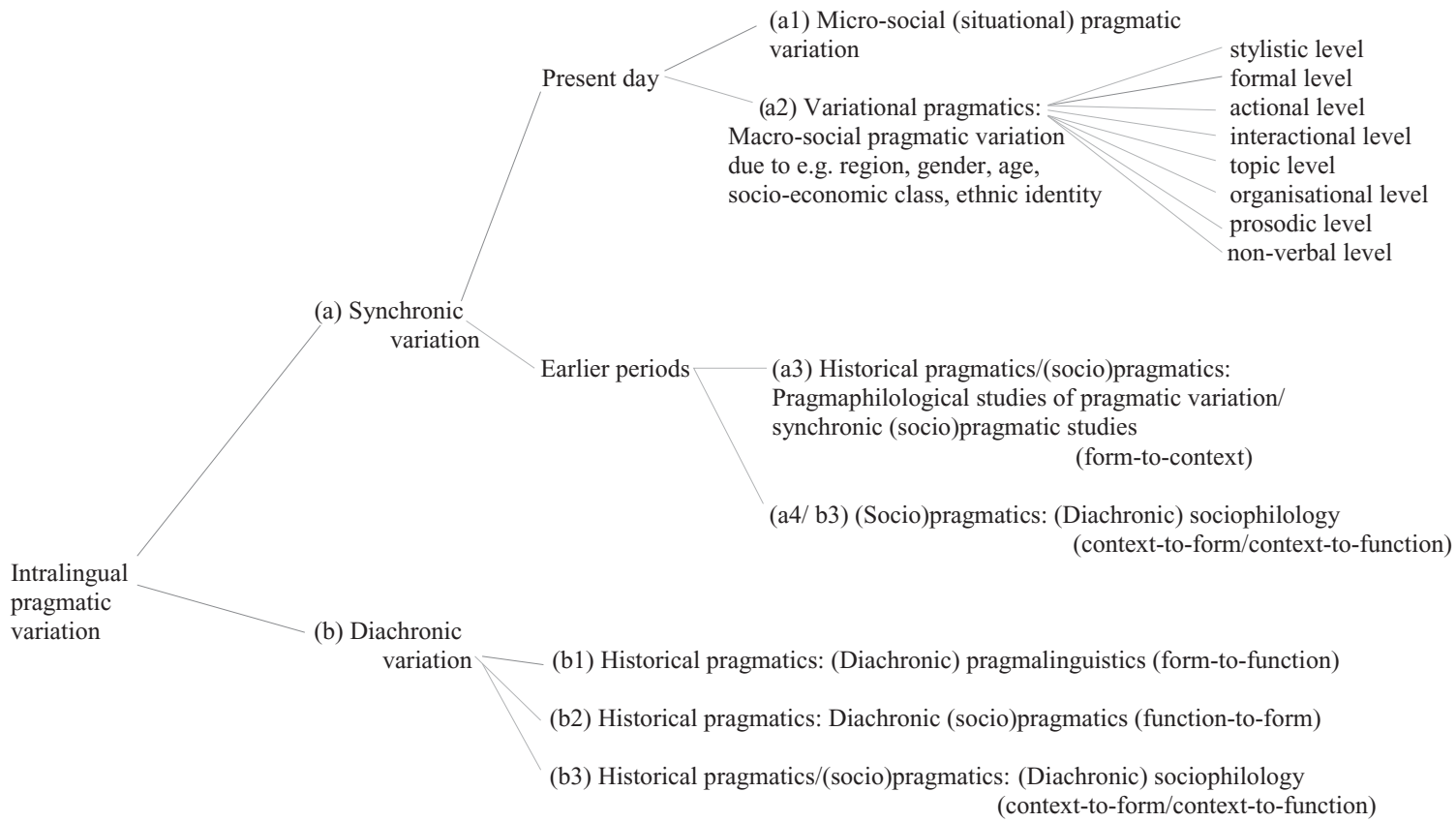
## 10.2 Key Theoretical Approaches

Research on intralingual pragmatic variation may take a synchronic and/or diachronic perspective. This section details and contrasts approaches within these perspectives. Figure 10.1 provides an overview and is referred to throughout this section.

### 10.2.1 Intralingual Synchronic Pragmatic Variation

Intralingual synchronic pragmatic variation involves pragmatic variation within a particular language at a particular point in time. Studies of present-day synchronic variation focus on two types of variation, intralingual micro-social pragmatic variation ((a1) in Figure 10.1) and intralingual macro-social pragmatic variation ((a2) in Figure 10.1) (Barron 2005a). Micro-social pragmatic variation (a1) involves situational variation in language use and is frequently examined as a function of the factors of social distance (SD), power (P) and degree of imposition (R) as identified in Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory. To these one may add conversational setting, ranging from formal settings with transactional roles to the fore to informal settings in which the focus is primarily on interactional roles (Holmes 1995). For instance, Ogiermann (2009) finds high social distance (interactions between strangers) to be associated with a strong preference for explicit apologies and intensifiers and a low use of downgrading accounts. Apologies to familiars or friends (medium/ low social distance), on the other hand, were rather characterized by a tendency to hide the offence where possible. Similarly, Deutschmann (2003), in an analysis of apologies in the British National Corpus (BNC) corpus, found that the lexeme *apologize* is typically employed in formal interactions only.

Intralingual macro-social pragmatic variation ((a2) in Figure 10.1) is concerned with synchronic variation in language use due to such macro-social factors as region, gender, age, socioeconomic class and ethnic identity. It operates on the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic levels, the former relating to social structure (e.g. varying assessment of social factors), the latter relating to the language used (e.g. strategies, linguistic realizations). To stay with apologies, such research might look at how an apology in a particular language (e.g. English) might be employed or formulated in a particular situation according to whether it was produced in, for instance, Jamaica, Ireland, America (region) or by a younger or an older speaker (age) or a speaker of a higher or lower socioeconomic class (socioeconomic class)



**Figure 10.1** Focus of research on intralingual pragmatic variation.

in a particular situation. Barron (in press b), for instance, finds a higher use of vocatives in apologies in Irish English relative to English English (e.g. 'I'm sorry I didn't mean to offend you in any way *Lisa!*'), pointing to higher levels of relational orientation in the Irish English data.

Variational pragmatics is devoted to the investigation of synchronic intralingual macro-social pragmatic variation ((a2) in Figure 10.1), i.e. to the analysis of variation in language use and interaction according to the macro-social factors of region, age, gender, socioeconomic status and ethnic identity (Barron 2014, 2015, 2017b; Schneider 2010, 2014; Chapter 31). It is broadly situated within the perspective approach (see also Chapter 2), with analyses referencing the social and cultural context of use, in particular the linguistic context (e.g. co-text of the spoken or written text, the genre), the cognitive context (e.g. assumptions and expectations of how to use language in a particular context), the social context (e.g. physical surroundings, participant roles, interpersonal situational factors, social parameters of interactants) and the sociocultural context (Fetzer 2010; cf. also De Saint-Georges 2013; Staley 2018; Barron 2019). Variational pragmatic research aims to identify a 'pragmatic core' (Schneider 2017: 320) of language patterns shared across regional and social varieties and also to systematically describe pragmatic variation across these varieties. Three principles are important in variational pragmatic research: empiricity, comparability and contrastivity – the latter two highlighting that only in contrasting language use is it possible to see what is variety-specific, variety-preferred or shared across varieties.

Variational pragmatics distinguishes eight local levels of analysis ((a2) in Figure 10.1): the stylistic (e.g. variation in T/V address forms), the formal (e.g. variation in discourse-pragmatic markers, pragmatic routines), the actional (e.g. variation in speech acts), the interactional (e.g. variation in sequential patterns), the topic (e.g. variation in content and topic management), the organizational (e.g. variation in turn-taking), the prosodic (e.g. variation in intonation, pitch) and a non-verbal level (e.g. gaze, posture) (Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Félix-Brasdefer 2015). Empirical analyses often combine these local levels of analysis and also investigate how particular macro-social factors interact with micro-social factors (e.g. degree of imposition), also taking genre and co-text into account. Thus, continuing with apologies, Deutschmann (2003), in his analysis of apologies in the BNC, finds the 'taking on responsibility' apology strategy to be employed to a higher extent by older speakers in informal texts and to be used to a lower extent by older speakers in formal texts. The opposite effect was recorded for younger speakers, who employed more 'taking on responsibility' strategies in formal contexts and less in informal contexts. Deutschmann (2003) explains this variation with reference to a different ranking of imposition by different age groups. Thus, here we see how macro-social pragmatic variation (here age variation) and micro-social pragmatic variation (formality level – imposition) interact.



Research explicitly conducted within variational pragmatics has increased significantly in the last number of years. In addition, there has been an increase in research on pragmatic variation within the study of pluricentric languages and, adhering to Labovian principles and frequently on the formal level, within variationist sociolinguists. The borders between these disciplines and variational pragmatics are frequently blurred and many studies positioned in one field might also have been situated within the other. Often, the positioning of a study in one discipline or another depends on research traditions, on the extent to which the social and cultural context of use is taken into account, on data types or methodologies traditionally associated with one discipline or another, on researcher aims beyond synchronic variation (e.g. for variationist sociolinguistics, the analysis of variation and change frequently go hand in hand), but also on the publication context, researcher identity issues and levels of familiarity with the differing fields. For instance, researchers traditionally engaged with pluricentric languages now work largely within a variational pragmatic framework (e.g. Norrby et al. 2015). Similarly, Dinkin (2018), a sociolinguist, has situated her work on responses to thanks in variational pragmatics using a sociolinguistic methodology. Irrespective of their preferred 'home', researchers interested in synchronic macro-social pragmatic variation, have much in common. One such shared issue is how comparability is ensured. This is the focus of the case study in Section 10.3.

Thus far this section has focused on synchronic intralingual micro-social and macro-social pragmatic variation for present-day language use. Studies of synchronic pragmatic variation in earlier periods focus on similar factors, including the relationship of language use and situational variation, genre, and social variation (e.g. social status, age). Studies of regional variation in earlier times, on the other hand, represent a research desideratum. (See Jucker and Landert 2017 for an overview.)

Studies of synchronic variation in language use in past times are carried out within historical pragmatics, most specifically within pragmaphilology ((a3) Figure 10.1). Pragmaphilologists study communicative language use in historical texts of a past period (Jucker 2010). Analyses may be focused on the works of one author (e.g. Chaucer) or on data spanning a short time period. Although pragmaphilology does not specifically focus on synchronic pragmatic variation, pragmatic variation is also analysed (e.g. Jucker and Landert 2017). Research in pragmaphilology is form-to-context oriented (cf. Figure 10.1) and combines both pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic perspectives (Archer and Culpeper 2009). Thus, it examines utterances in their particular context of use and investigates how a particular linguistic form (pragmalinguistic side) is used in its particular context of use (sociopragmatic side). Analysts also investigate the contextual aspects of texts of a past time, noting the relationships between interactants and the situational context at hand (micro-social factors) as well as the social

characteristics of the informants present (macro-social factors). In addition, pragmaphilology requires a detailed analysis of the background sociocultural context, given especially the fact that the analyst does not share the same sociocultural context as the interactants. Information is needed on sociocultural structures, such as the laws and ideologies prevailing in the context at hand, genre knowledge and knowledge of participant roles (Jacobs and Jucker 1995). In recent years, a field of research termed (historical) (socio)pragmatics has emerged with a particular interest in context (Culpeper 2009). Closely related to interactional sociolinguistics, (socio)pragmatics focuses on how pragmatic meaning is constructed in interaction. As a secondary consideration, it also relates social features to pragmatic features. From the perspective of the historical pragmatics tradition, however, which is embedded in the Continental European view of pragmatics, the term (socio)pragmatics may appear redundant given the focus of perspective pragmatics on the sociocultural context anyway (hence the brackets around socio). Hence, studies of pragmatic variation within pragmaphilology with a form-to-context focus may also be termed synchronic (socio)pragmatic studies ((a3) Figure 10.1; Włodarczyk 2016).

Synchronic variation of times past may finally be studied with a context-to-form or context-to-function focus ((a4) in Figure 10.1). Such research is carried out in sociophilology, an area belonging to the recently emerged field of (socio)pragmatics (Culpeper 2009; Archer 2017). Sociophilology – in contrast to pragmaphilology (which is synchronic) – may be either synchronic or diachronic in focus ((a4), (b3) in Figure 10.1) and takes context as the starting point, while at the same time realizing that language use may also shape context. Such studies examine how the cultural background, genre, social situation and co-text shape communicative forms and functions. The approach taken to analysing social context is more systematic than in pragmaphilology, as corpus linguistic methods are employed and the local conditions of language use coded. Archer and Culpeper (2009) is an example of sociophilology in action. Starting from a corpus of comedy plays and trial proceedings, the authors develop annotations for genre and for the social characteristics of the interactants in a systematic manner. They thus annotate for social features, such as gender, status, age and role (activity role, e.g. defendant), kinship role (e.g. wife), social role (e.g. friend), and drama role (e.g. villain). This annotation is then used to electronically retrieve data produced by speakers of particular social categories. Using keyword analysis, it is also possible to establish pragmatic norms specific to the particular local contexts examined. Findings show that male servants were addressed by both their masters and mistresses using imperative verbs and were not addressed using thou-forms. Taking the socio-historical context into account, this pattern is suggested to reflect their low status and to highlight their subordinate role vis-à-vis the protagonists in the play. In contrast, female servants were generally addressed by their mistresses using thou-forms, a convention suggested to reflect the more intimate

relationship between mistresses and their maids in that socio-historical context. The intimate relationship also served as a means of communicating details of the plot and intimate details to the audience.

### 10.2.2 Intralingual Diachronic Pragmatic Variation

Historical pragmatics deals with pragmatic features of times past, including pragmatic features subject to variation and/ or change. In addition, it investigates intralingual diachronic pragmatic variation. As such, it tracks historical developments of communicative language use and aims to establish the general principles underlying these developments (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010; Jucker and Landert 2017; Chapter 32).

Three types of diachronic pragmatic variation are identified. Diachronic form-to-function mappings ((b1) in Figure 10.1) and diachronic function-to-form mappings ((b2) in Figure 10.1) were identified first (Jucker 2010), while recently a further type, context-to-form/function mappings ((b3) in Figure 10.1), has been put forward (Archer and Culpeper 2009). The differences between these different types of diachronic studies lie in their starting point. Form-to-function mappings start out from forms and examine changes in their function over time. For instance, Culpeper and Demmen (2011) examine the use of ‘can you’ and ‘could you’ in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts. They conclude that today’s conventional use of such ability-oriented enquiries to realize a request is a recent development. Due to the focus on individual forms, such as deixis, discourse markers or interjections, this strand of research is primarily pragmalinguistic in focus and has thus been termed (diachronic) pragmalinguistics. Within this area of research fall also studies which trace the grammaticalization of a particular form (Tagliamonte 2012; D’Arcy 2013).

Function-to-form mappings, also termed diachronic (socio)pragmatic studies within the historical (socio)pragmatic framework, take function as their starting point and examine changes in the forms realizing a particular communicative function in a particular context over time (Jucker 2010). Analyses of realizations of a particular speech act over time represent examples of such analyses. Finally, a third focus of diachronic pragmatics recently put forward are the context-to-form/ function mappings discussed above within the context of sociophilology (cf. synchronic pragmatic variation (earlier periods)). Such research has investigated how contextual factors, such as the genre or the activity type, participant goals, the language used and the period at hand, influenced the questioning function and its formal realizations in previous times (Archer 2017).

Despite these three distinct frameworks within diachronic pragmatics, empirical research in the area frequently straddles subcategories, with diachronic pragmalinguistic studies, for instance, also taking account of context despite their focus on the pragmalinguistic level of language. As Archer and Culpeper (2009: 287) point out, ‘many papers, whilst they might

emphasize one approach, also do something in relation to the other'. Part of the reason for this is the blurred division between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics (Włodarczyk 2016). In addition, overlaps emanate from the origins of historical pragmatics in the broad European perspective view of pragmatics (Taavitsainen 2015; Jucker and Landert 2017), given that this broad understanding of pragmatics itself deals with the social.

### 10.3 Critical Overview of Research through Case Study

This section examines a range of theoretical and methodological issues encountered by researchers in synchronic and diachronic investigations of intralingual pragmatic variation irrespective of their specific research tradition, using a recent project on pragmatic variation in offering according to region. The first study is a synchronic study set at the actional level within variational pragmatics. It focuses on regional pragmatic variation in the speech act of offers. Specifically, it contrasts offers in British English and Irish English using comparable corpus data, specifically, the face-to-face conversation text type of the British and Irish components of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB and ICE-IRE) (Barron 2017a). The analysis of the Irish component is limited to data from the Republic of Ireland excluding Northern Ireland (ICE-IRE(R)). The investigation builds on a second study on offers in British English (specifically English English) and Irish English which used a production questionnaire (Barron 2005b).

The focus of both studies was on initiative offers, i.e. on offers constituting the first move in an offer sequence. In the corpus study, the initiative offers were retrieved via search strings of conventionalized offer realizations. The analysis centred on the offer strategies and forms in the corpora. Findings revealed a higher use of hospitable offers in ICE-IRE(R) relative to ICE-GB. The analysis also showed an effect of offer type on offer strategy realization. Specifically, hospitable offers in the ICE-GB and ICE-IRE(R) were found to be prototypically realized using the broad category of conventionalized preference strategies, that is, hearer-oriented strategies focused on the hearer's potential desire that the act offered is carried out (e.g. 'Do you want NP/ VP?', 'Would you like NP/ VP?', 'Need NP?'). These contrast with speaker-oriented executive strategies, focusing on the commissive nature of offers such as 'I want to VP', 'Shall I VP?', and with directive offers focusing on the directive nature of offers such as 'Close the door', e.g. 'Why don't you VP?'. The corpus analysis supported the production questionnaire findings that showed preference strategies to also be prototypical across both varieties of English in hospitable offers. In addition, both analyses revealed a variety-specific realization of one particular strategy, the 'question future act of speaker' strategy. In both British English and Irish English, this strategy was found to be realized by the conventionalized pattern 'AUX I + agentive verb?' However, pragmalinguistic variation was

noted in that the modal verb employed across the varieties differed: while ‘shall’ is exclusively used in British English offers of this kind (e.g. ‘Shall I pour out your water?’), ‘will’ is employed in its place in Irish English.

Research into pragmatic variation, whether synchronic or diachronic in nature, is empirical. In the following, theoretical and methodological considerations and difficulties discussed in the case study above serve to illustrate some of the challenges of empirical studies of pragmatic variation.

### 10.3.1 Pragmatic Variable – What Is Equivalence?

One of the first questions when beginning a study of pragmatic variation is the question of a *tertium comparationis* or ‘common platform of reference’ (Krzyszowski 1990: 15), which will allow different pragmatic choices to be compared. Sociolinguistic analyses of variation have traditionally adopted the Labovian concepts of variable and variant as a tool for investigating linguistic variation. Labovian sociolinguistics conceives of the variable as a linguistic feature which can be realized in two or more different ways (variants). The variants themselves represent semantic, or truth-conditional, equivalents, and thus ‘say “the same thing” in several different ways’ (Labov 1972: 271). They are employed by the same speaker in different situations (stylistic variation) or by different speakers in a particular situation. In the latter case, sociolinguists typically attempt to correlate variants of a particular variable with the independent variables of region, social class, gender, age and ethnicity by investigating uses and frequencies of each variant across each macro-social category (regional/ social variation). Analyses obey the principle of accountability, whereby all variants of a particular variable are isolated and all occurrences of a variant out of all possible contexts of occurrence calculated (Labov 1972; Tagliamonte 2012).

As Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012: 303) note, research on pragmatic variation within variational pragmatics and historical pragmatics ‘does not usually invoke the notion of pragmatic variables at all’. However, recent years have seen numerous discussions concerning the applicability of the Labovian concepts to analyses of pragmatic variation (Pichler 2010, 2013; Schneider 2010, 2014; Terkourafi 2011, 2012; Tagliamonte 2012; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012; Beeching and Woodfield 2015; Barron 2017b, in press a). The difficulty with applying the Labovian concept of the variable to pragmatic research is the criterion of semantic equivalence since pragmatic variants are not straightforwardly alternative ways of saying the same thing. Discourse markers, for instance, are by definition semantically bleached, having instead acquired pragmatic meaning. Thus, given that they are lacking in semantic meaning, two variant forms of a discourse marker cannot be claimed to share semantic equivalence (Pichler 2010, 2013). Similarly, different strategies in requesting or offering (e.g. the offers ‘Shall I pour you some tea you?’ vs ‘Would you like some tea?’) cannot be said to be semantically equivalent (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012). Also, any

form, even a simple 'Hello', can convey different meanings in different contexts ('Hello' as a greeting vs 'Hello!' as an admonishment).

Nonetheless, the concept of a pragmatic variable has a number of methodological advantages from which research on pragmatic variation would potentially benefit. Firstly, the use of the variable forces researchers to consider how contrastivity and comparability across data sets may be achieved in a more systematic manner than is currently the practice (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012). Secondly, a focus on the concept of the variable and in particular on the principle of accountability makes researchers more aware that discourse-pragmatic features do not operate in a systemic vacuum. Rather, all variants of a variable are to be seen as related and analysed together rather than as frequently done, comparing frequencies of individual discourse-pragmatic features in isolation (Pichler 2013).

Given the difficulties surrounding the application of the variable/variant concept to pragmatic variation but also its potential benefits, a range of modifications of the concept have been put forward to allow its application to discourse-pragmatic variation. Functional equivalence between the variants of a pragmatic variable as a defining criterion to replace semantic equivalence is one suggestion (Lavandera 1978; Dines 1980; Schneider 2010; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012; Cameron and Schwenker 2013; Barron 2017b). Terkourafi (2011) offers a procedural definition of the pragmatic variable drawing on the Relevance Theoretic concept of procedural meaning. This approach proposes that forms, such as 'hello', 'hi' and 'good day', have encoded instructions which guide H's inferences in a similar way. The process of inference remains stable (pragmatic variable) while the forms alternate (variants). Irrespective of the concept adopted, operationally, differing dynamics of communication across varieties means that total functional equivalence will rather be the exception, and partial equivalence the norm, as indeed long recognized in the neighbouring field of contrastive genre analysis (Eckkrämmer 2002).

The concept of functional equivalence has been used to study speech acts (actional level) in both variational pragmatics and historical pragmatics (Schneider 2010). Firstly, the illocution under investigation may be seen as the variable and the speech act strategies realizing this illocution seen as variants of this variable, all representing maximum illocutionary equivalence. Similarly, the individual speech act strategy may be viewed as a variable and the linguistic realizations of this the variants realizing this functional variable. In the case study detailed above (Barron 2017a), the variable is defined via maximum illocutionary equivalence and the variants understood as the whole range of offer strategies available to realize an offer. In addition, on a sub-ordinate level, the individual offer strategies may be viewed as the variable and the variants as all realizations of this variable in the corpus. So, for instance, the variable 'question future act of speaker' strategy in Barron (2017a) was realized via the pattern 'AUX I + agentive verb?', with the auxiliary (AUX) taking the form of the modal verb

'will' or 'shall'. The analysis found the variant 'Shall I + agentive verb?' to be used exclusively in British English, and the variant 'Will I + agentive verb?' to be exclusive to Irish English.

The challenge confronting researchers is how to establish maximum illocutionary equivalence. Given the negotiability of pragmatic meaning, and thus the fact that there is no one-to-one relationship between a particular form and illocution, form cannot be taken as an indicator of illocutionary force (Terkourafi 2012; Barron 2017b). For instance, the conventionalized offer forms 'can I VP' ('can I lend you a hand?') and 'would you like to VP' ('would you like to have some tea?') may realize offers but these same forms are also used in request formulae ('can I ask you to help me?', 'would you like to help me?'). This means that illocutionary equivalence must be established within a particular context. In the rest of this section, I show with reference to the questionnaire study and the corpus study of offers that the challenges of defining the variable also depend on the data employed. In both studies, the challenge was to ensure that the forms searched for actually represented offers in both corpora. In both studies, it proved essential to define the variable on multiple levels.

Barron (2005b) studied offers in British English (specifically English English) and Irish English using a production questionnaire. Production questionnaires require informants to imagine themselves in a particular situation and complete the ensuing dialogue. A situational description common to all informants provides information concerning the micro-social and macro-social factors of relevance. The dialogue itself may already be initiated. In the classic production questionnaire (see Kasper 2000 for variations), this is followed by a gap which informants are to complete and the dialogue generally closes with a hearer response, signalling uptake (i.e. proof that the illocutionary force is recognized by H). Uptake thus generally aids in defining the variable. However, even in the absence of a hearer response, situations are designed to elicit a single speech act, for instance via implicit or explicit clues relating to the illocution or perlocution in the situational description. In Barron (2005b), a hearer response was not included in the production questionnaire items; instead an explicit direction to offer was included in the situational description (e.g. 'you offer to help'). This helped guarantee the equivalence of the illocution, as indeed also did the description of propositional content (information on that which was to be offered) in each situation. Additionally, position helped define the variable with only initiative offers included in the analysis. In sum, the propositional content related to the commissive-directive nature of offers, the position of the speech act, and explicit metapragmatic information on function (direction to offer) in the situational description ensured the establishment of illocutionary equivalence and also comparability across varieties and cultures.

When analysing naturally occurring data, as in corpus research, a number of criteria need to be employed in defining the variable. Here, however, attaining equivalence is more difficult to achieve than with

controlled data. In the corpus analysis in Barron (2017a), form served as a starting point in accessing utterances functioning as offers. However, as already mentioned, form cannot be taken as an indicator of illocutionary force given the negotiability of pragmatic meaning. Thus, there was a need to differentiate offers from neighbouring speech acts, such as invitations, promises and requests among the hits returned. From the perspective of illocutionary point, offers are commissive-directives: they commit the speaker (S) to a future action A which may be implicitly or explicitly mentioned and is assumed to be beneficial to the hearer (H) (Copestake and Terkourafi 2010). In the present context, hits were examined to ascertain which forms potentially realized an offer according to this description.

In addition to illocutionary point, other supplementary criteria included position, hearer uptake, and offer type (Sidnell 2009; Copestake and Terkourafi 2010; Barron 2017a; Terkourafi 2012). As regards position, only initiative offers were considered, excluding, for instance, pre-offers and reoffers. The criterion of hearer uptake takes H's response as proof that the illocutionary force is recognized by H (Terkourafi 2002). In example (1), the uptake 'yeah yeah please' shows that A's utterance has been interpreted as an offer.

- (1) A> <#> Granny do you want tea  
 C> <#> Yeah yeah please  
 D> <#> I'll have a cup too thanks (ICE-IRE(R), s1a-067)

Given the conditional nature of offers, uptake, whether verbal or non-verbal (evidenced in the verbal data), was taken as an obligatory criterion in the study at hand (Sidnell 2009; but see Barron 2017b for discussion of the obligatory status). The analysis thus captured the effect of a particular utterance on the dialogue rather than focusing exclusively on a speaker's intention. This combination of criteria was chosen to facilitate the definition of the pragmatic variable of offering so as to allow offers to be contrasted across varieties. The initial criteria employed included commissive-directive illocutionary point, position and uptake. However, an initial round of analysis showed it was necessary to redefine the pragmatic variable adding a further criterion of topic. The initial analysis revealed a range of statistically significant differences between the offers used in ICE-GB and ICE-IRE(R), pointing to a higher use of preference strategies ('Would you like X?') in ICE-IRE(R) and a higher use of execution strategies ('Shall I get X?') in ICE-GB. However, an in-depth qualitative analysis of offer topic revealed these differences to relate to offer type. The analysis showed a higher frequency of hospitable offers in ICE-IRE(R) relative to ICE-GB. These hospitable offers – as also hospitable offers in ICE-GB – were realized preferentially using preference strategies. Indeed, hospitable offers in ICE-GB and ICE-IRE(R) were prototypically realized using conventionalized preference strategies. Thus, the analysis showed



that the criterion of offer type was also required to guarantee comparability, and to avoid making misleading claims. To summarize, Barron (2017a) defined the pragmatic variable on the actional level using multiple criteria, namely illocutionary point, position, uptake and offer type. Redefinition of the variable was necessary during the analytical process as it was found that cross-varietal comparisons of offers that did not focus on similar offer topics did not compare like with like. This trend in defining pragmatic variables using multiple criteria is evident in other recent studies. In a recent monograph on present-day socioeconomic variation in offers, thanks responses and address terms in Los Angeles, Staley (2018) also characterizes her pragmatic variables on multiple levels, including sequential location in communicative activity (e.g. pre-offer, offer, re-offer), function as commissive-directives and offer type. (See also Barron 2019 on responses to thanks.)

### 10.3.2 Methodologies: Data Type

The case study described above employed corpus data, focusing in particular on spoken data. In contrast, historical pragmatics focuses frequently on written data, often out of necessity. Originally, this written data was viewed as poor data given that pragmatics traditionally favoured naturally occurring spoken data. Efforts were made to access data which would approximate authentic language use as closely as possible (cf. Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010). Currently, however, there is an appreciation that written texts themselves are communicative acts. Analysing written texts as genres is one current approach (Taavitsainen 2016; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010). Włodarczyk (2017) is a recent (socio)pragmatic study of petitions investigating the influence of education level on how contact is initiated in this genre.

Spoken analyses in variational pragmatics take genre into account as a contextual influence. Additionally, a small number of top-down studies of spoken synchronic pragmatic variation take genre as an analytical starting point (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2015 on service encounters; Staley 2018 on restaurant service encounters; see also Schneider 2020). Genre-based studies of pragmatic variation in written discourse are limited (cf. Barron 2012). In her study of the written genre of death announcements in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, Burmeister (2013) focused on region as a macro-social variable showing that genre conventions do vary across region. Yajun and Chenggang (2006) is an interesting article in this regard. They address the question of how contrastive genre analysis can be successfully combined with the study of World Englishes (regional variation in the present context), given that in the study of World Englishes 'the involvement of discursive and rhetorical analyses are exceptions rather than regular practice'. The question whether genre conventions differ across regional and social parameters is also pertinent for variational pragmatics,

not only in the area of regional variation but also in relation to gender, age, socioeconomic and ethnic variation.

Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012) suggest that genres may also function as pragmatic variables. Włodarczyk (2017), in her analysis of the genre of petitions, focused on function and position within the genre. Specifically, she examined the initiation type employed and correlated these findings with educational level. Given that Włodarczyk's (2017) texts were all written in the same socio-historical context and in response to the same government call for applications, comparability of genre is given. However, in potential analyses of genre across time or region, researchers will need to first establish genre equivalence. Not only do genre purposes differ across cultures (e.g. Eckkrammer 2002 on package inserts for medical products and obituaries across cultures), but genre labels do not necessarily reflect modern communicative purposes (e.g. job announcement vs job advertisement), and even expert members may not recognize the communicative purpose of a genre (Askehave and Swales 2001; Swales 2004). In light of such difficulties, particular effort needs to be made in the process of comparative research to establishing communicative purpose and degrees of equivalence. An openness to 'repurposing' genres after some analysis (similar to the redefining of the variable discussed above) (Askehave and Swales 2001) is vital to ensure maximum equivalence across varieties (Barron 2012).

### 10.3.3 Interaction of Diachronic and Synchronic Perspectives

Since its inception, there has been a strong regional focus in variational pragmatics, while in historical pragmatic research, the study of intralingual regional variation represents a research desideratum. An increase in interdisciplinary work would trigger several developments in the field. The case study of offers across two varieties of English and particularly the analysis of the variable 'question future act of speaker' strategy illustrates potential interactions between present-day synchronic and diachronic studies. As mentioned above, the analysis of this variable and its variants shed light on the use of 'will' rather than 'shall' in 'AUX I + agentive verb?' offer patterns in Irish English. Interestingly, historical linguistic work by McCafferty and Amador Moreno (2014) has revealed a major shift from 'I shall' to 'I will' in Irish English (and in other varieties of English) between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries due, they propose, to an increase in literary skills among the less educated. At the same time, McCafferty and Amador Moreno (2014) find that 'shall' persisted in interrogative constructions ('shall I?') in their diachronic analysis of Irish English correspondence from 1760 to 1890, an intriguing pattern 'given that present-day Irish English generally does not use 'shall' in this clause type: the shift from 'shall' to 'will' has been total in this context, and it would be interesting to try to trace this change'. Combining present-day synchronic pragmatics with historical pragmatics, an interesting question

might be when 'will I' began to be used in the 'AUX I + agentive verb?' pattern in the speech act of offers. Further research might investigate the diachronic development of 'will' and 'shall' in offers in British English but also across the varieties of English. This is just one particular example of how present-day and historical studies might work hand in hand.

## 10.4 Summary and Future Directions

Sociolinguists studying linguistic variation have not traditionally paid much attention to pragmatic units. Similarly, pragmaticists have not traditionally analysed correlations of socio-demographic variables with pragmatic units of language use systematically. Rather, focus in pragmatics has been on micro-social variation at the situational level, and in particular on variation due to such factors as social dominance, social distance and degree of imposition. The systematic analysis of synchronic present-day pragmatic variation according to regional and social factors has recently gained momentum with the emergence of variational pragmatics, a field of research which can be traced back to Schneider and Barron (2008) and Barron and Schneider (2009).

In addition, the historical dimension of pragmatic variation remained long neglected within historical linguistics. Interest in historical pragmatic variation can be traced back to Jucker (1995), an edited volume on historical pragmatics. The influence of macro-social variables on conventions of language use in past times and across time is also a relatively new undertaking in historical pragmatics. As Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012: 303) point out, 'this lack of interaction between studies on linguistic variation and pragmatics is even more pronounced in historical linguistics [than in pragmatics]'.

The fields of both historical pragmatics and variational pragmatics have expanded considerably since their inception and research in both is vibrant. Recent years have also seen the emergence of historical (socio)pragmatics, a field focused on the social side of language use in historical contexts. Pragmatic variation is also the focus of research in related fields, such as in studies on pluricentric languages, in variationist sociolinguistics and indeed within the broader field of contrastive pragmatics. Researchers in variational pragmatics and in historical pragmatics have much in common despite a focus on different time-frames and despite different methodological challenges in accessing data, historical linguistics being confined to texts of previous times. These common theoretical and methodological issues have been the focus of the present chapter. They include a focus on pragmatic variation according to micro-social and macro-social factors. In addition, corpus data is employed in both contexts, presenting researchers with the challenge of contextualizing decontextualized data. Similarly, the suitability of the concept of the pragmatic variable from variationist sociolinguistics for pragmatic research on variation has been debated in both

variational pragmatics and in historical pragmatics, with both fields enjoying the synergies of these commonalities.

The present chapter has also put forward some areas ripe for further development and cross-fertilization of approaches. Firstly, the detailed discussion of the pragmatic variable made clear that the application and adaptation of this concept to the study of pragmatic variation is challenging and continuously developing. Recent developments on the formal and functional levels suggest defining the variable using multiple criteria. These discussions are welcomed given that, as Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012: 303–4) note, they force ‘more rigorous definitions of the elements under investigation and their variants, and an even clearer understanding of how they correlate with the socio-demographic features of the users of the language’. For sociolinguists, Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012) see these discussions as leading to a greater understanding and interest in pragmatic variables, long neglected in sociolinguistic research. In the present context, we illustrated the challenge of defining the pragmatic variable on the actional level in particular and showed that in both the production questionnaire and corpus data investigated, a range of criteria, such as illocutionary point, position, uptake (or explicit naming of the illocution) and also offer type were necessary concepts. Furthermore, the case study presented above illustrated how it may be necessary to further define a pragmatic variable in the course of the analytical process.

A second possible development concerns the data used in analyses of pragmatic variation. To date, historical pragmatics focuses primarily on written data as communicative units. In contrast, variational pragmatics has to date focused almost exclusively on spoken language use and only taken genre as a starting point to a limited extent. It was suggested that further research in variational pragmatics might take written genre as an additional pragmatic variable. Such a development would involve extending the variational pragmatic framework which is currently oriented towards spoken data. The analysis of genre across varieties necessarily also poses the same challenge of achieving genre equivalence as discussed above for illocutionary equivalence. Cross-varietal genre analyses necessitate equivalence of communicative function, given that communicative function enjoys a privileged role, determining genre structure and the choice of linguistic features. Similar to the variable revision needed in the offer case study above, it may be necessary to ‘repurpose’ the communicative purpose of a particular genre after some analysis.

Thirdly, I have argued for further integration of present day with past perspectives on the level of the individual study. Much of current scholarship in variational pragmatics pays little heed to historical research. However, historical research can throw light on the existence of, or preferences for, pragmatic variants which can lead to additional insights on pragmatic variation, perhaps holding explanatory potential. Interdisciplinary research

between variational pragmaticists and historical pragmaticists from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives therefore represents a research desideratum. An increase in interdisciplinary work would trigger several developments in both fields. We look forward to continued cross-fertilization between the fields of historical pragmatics and variational pragmatics.

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