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Variational Pragmatics[1]

Anne Barron

Introduction

Variational pragmatics is a field of study that aims to systematically describe synchronic variation in the patterns of human interaction within one language due to such factors as region, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnic identity and age. It is situated at the interface of pragmatics and modern dialectology.

Variational pragmatics, like cross-cultural pragmatics, historical pragmatics, intercultural pragmatics, interlanguage pragmatics and post-colonial pragmatics, is a branch of pragmatics (cf. Barron and Schneider 2009: 425; Schneider 2010a for an overview of the relationships between these fields). As a research area, it is a relatively recent arrival, having been proposed as a systematic approach to synchronic intra-lingual pragmatic variation in the early years of this century (cf. Barron 2005a, 2014, 2015; Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010a, 2014; cf. Barron and Schneider 2009: 432-434; Schneider 2010a: 254-256 on the development of variational pragmatics). This is not to say that studies on intralingual pragmatic variation according to macro-social factors did not exist before this time. Overall, however, prior to the emergence of this field, systematic research into synchronic intralingual pragmatic variation according to macro-social factors was a research desideratum both in the areas of pragmatics and modern dialectology. In pragmatics research, languages had been implicitly viewed as homogeneous wholes with macro-social variation largely abstracted away. Hence, the norms of interaction in British English, for example, had been implicitly assumed to be the same as those in, for instance, Irish English or Australian English. A similar dearth of research on intralingual

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pragmatic variation existed in modern dialectology. There, research had focused on synchronic phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical variation. Intralingual pragmatic variation had, however, remained largely undescribed. This had been noted in the 1970s by Schlieben-Lange and Weydt (1978) and in the early years of this century, the situation had not changed significantly (cf. Clyne et al. 2003: 96; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Pichler 2010: 582; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012; cf. also Barron 2005a: 522-523; Schneider and Barron 2008: 2-3 for an overview).

It was in this context that variational pragmatics emerged. Its appearance has put intralingual pragmatic variation on the research agenda. Indeed, Terkourafi (2012: 315) in a recent article on variational pragmatics (and on variationist sociolinguistic approaches to pragmatic variation) writes: '… variation in the pragmatic plane has finally made it to the forefront'. In the following, the approach taken in this 'budding field' of variational pragmatics is outlined (Aijmer and Andersen 2011: 4).

Macro-social factors

In variational pragmatics, as in modern dialectology, five macro-social factors are distinguished as having a systematic influence on the conventions of language use. These are region, social class, ethnicity, gender, and age, although further factors, such as education and religion, may also represent possible extensions to the list (cf. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Coupland 1983; cf. also Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010a; Placencia 2011). Variational pragmatics aims in the first instance at determining the influence of each of the five macro-social factors on language use in interaction. So, a variational pragmatic study might investigate how requests are realised in Irish English and British English or how a particular

discourse marker is used by 20-30 year olds and by 40-50 year olds. Additionally, the question arises as to the nature of the interplay of these factors and also as to the nature of the interaction between macro-social and micro-social factors.

Both quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted on the relationship between the macro-social factors and conventions of language use.[2] To date, quantitative studies outnumber qualitative studies. As a result, macro-social factors are generally operationalised via geographical, biological and social facts in line with Cheshire's (2002) workable approach to gender. She writes:

> speaker sex is intended to be a purposely broad, unrefined social variable that can be easily taken into account at the data-collection stage of research. If all researchers categorize speakers in the same, albeit simplistic way, we can ensure replicability and can draw useful comparisons between studies carried out in a range of communities.
>
> (Cheshire 2002: 424-425)

In other words, to date the focus in variational pragmatic research is generally on sex rather than on gender as a social category and on geographical domicile rather than on regional identity (cf. also Barron 2005a; Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010a on identity construction).

Levels of analysis

Variational pragmatics distinguishes five levels of analysis, namely the formal level, the actional level, the interactional level, the topic level and the organisational level (cf. Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010a, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Barron 2014), without

wanting to exclude alternative levels of analysis (cf. Jucker 2008; Schneider 2010a; Placencia 2011; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012). Empirical analyses may combine a number of levels.

Analyses on the formal level focus on the communicative function of individual forms, such as mitigators or discourse markers. This level may be equated with Jucker and Taavitsainen's (2012) expression level and represents the smallest unit of analysis. Pichler's (2009) investigation of localised and non-localised full and reduced variants of the discourse markers I DON'T KNOW and I DON'T THINK is an example. Foolen (2011: 221-225) presents an overview of studies of pragmatic markers from a variational perspective which shows clearly that a single form may realise different functions across varieties and vice versa that a single function may be realised using different forms across varieties.

The actional level deals with speech act analyses. It is equivalent to Jucker and Taavitsainen's (2012: 299-300) utterance level. Here, the question is posed as to how particular speech acts, e.g. requests, offers, refusals, are realised in different intra-lingual varieties. Specifically, analyses centre on pragmalinguistic questions relating to the strategies (conventions of means) and linguistic realisations of strategies realising the individual speech acts (conventions of form) (cf. Clark 1979; cf. also Barron 2005a: 526-529). Analyses are combined with sociopragmatic questions, such as when and where which speech act and speech act strategy is used. In offering, for instance, one might choose between a "question desire" strategy, a "state willingness" strategy and a range of other offer strategies in a particular situation (cf. Barron 2005b). The choice of strategy and its linguistic realisation may vary across intralingual varieties in a particular context according to the macro-social factors. In other words, there may be particular strategies or realisations of offer strategies preferred in or indeed exclusive to one variety relative to another variety although

exclusivity is frequently restricted to the conventions of form. On the level of the conventions of form, for instance, the form (*what) do you fancy* realises a "question desire" hospitable offer strategy in British English, as for example in the realisation of the question desire offer strategy *what do you fancy for your lunch?* in the BNCweb in the initial line of (1).

(1)   SP:PS0JJ: Oh yes, what do you fancy for your lunch? (pause) What do you fancy for your lunch?

            SP:PS0JL: Food. (pause) Bit of bread and butter.

            SP:PS0JJ: Bread and butter? (pause) Drop of bread and dripping.

(BNC: KD3 S_conv)

Indeed, a search for *do you fancy* in the spoken component of the British National Corpus, encompassing approximately 10 million words, yielded nine instances of hospitable offers of food or drink. The same form does not seem to be common in American English. A search for the same form in the spoken component of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), encompassing some 90 million words, only yielded one hit ('Do you fancy yourself a good mother? Ms-ANDREWS: I hope I'm a good enough mom'), a form which did not realise an offer but rather a request of judgement (cf. *Variation and the pragmatic variable* on the identification of function). Similarly, *I'm good* may be used as a refusal of an offer strategy in American English, as in the following example taken from the COCA:

(2)   # The waitress turned to Charlotte again. " Are you sure I can't get you anything? Maybe an appetizer or a salad? " # " No, I 'm good. Really. "

(COCA: FIC Bk: LoveHonorBetray)

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In contrast, the form *I'm good* does not realise a refusal of offer in the BNC.

Apart from such head act realisations, modification is also a focus of analysis at the actional level (cf. Barron 2005a: 529). So, for instance, alerters, such as *dear* might be used, as in 'What do you fancy dear?' (BNC: KBW S_conv was) or indeed grounders (i.e. reasons/ explanations/ justifications), as in the *You must be hungry* in the sample utterance 'You must be hungry. What do you fancy?' (cf. also Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). The preferred choice of modification in a particular situation may differ across varieties.

The focus at the interactional level extends beyond the individual speech act to deal with sequential patterns. This level is partly equivalent to Jucker and Taavitsainen's (2012: 301-302) conversation level, a level of analysis which includes both the interactional and organisational level in the present scheme. Questions posed relate to how speech acts combine into larger units of discourse, such as adjacency pairs, interchanges, interactional exchanges or phases. Haugh and Carbaugh (2015), for example, contrast self-disclosure patterns across initial interactions among speakers of American English and among speakers of Australian English. They find American participants to use unprompted self-disclosures, particularly sequence-medial unprompted self-disclosures, more often than Australian participants. In addition, they show both cultures to reveal an orientation to reciprocity in so far as a high level of one particular type of self-disclosing prompts the other participant to self-disclose in the same way more frequently, and vice-versa.

The topic level is concerned with discourse content, i.e. with the propositions of individual utterances as well as with macro-propositions. It addresses, in particular, issues of topic selection and topic management. Schneider (2008), for instance, examines the topics for which information

is requested in party talk in England, Ireland and the U.S.A. Further questions in this context on the level of topic management which might be addressed include, for instance, how much small talk is necessary in different varieties before getting to the heart of the interaction. However, variational research is still limited on this level.

Finally, the organisational level combines ethnomethodological analysis and conversation analysis. The focus is on turn-taking. Analyses include comparisons of interrupting behaviour across varieties, analyses of overlap, of minimal responses, of back-channels and of inter-turn silence across varieties. Tottie (1991), for instance, compares backchannels in British and American English, while McCarthy (2002) examines non-minimal response tokens in British and American spoken conversations.

Variation and the pragmatic variable

Variational pragmatics is influenced by – although by no means limited to – the Labovian approach to variation (cf. also Schneider 2010a: 251, 2014: 361-362 for a more in-depth discussion). Traditionally, the concepts of variable and variant are important concepts in variationist sociolinguistics and it is not surprising, therefore, that the advent of variational pragmatics has recently sparked debate about the applicability of these concepts to pragmatic analyses (cf. Terkourafi 2011: 344, 358). In particular the criterion of semantic, or truth-conditional, equivalence, one of the defining criterion of Labov's (1966) variable, and its application to the pragmatic context has been a subject of debate not least due to, as Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012: 296) put it, 'the difficulty of arguing that two different pragmatic units constitute different ways of saying the same thing' (cf. Pichler 2010: 587-591; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012: 295-297; Terkourafi 2011, 2012). Pichler (2010: 588) highlights this problem in the case of discourse

markers, arguing that semantic sameness as a defining criterion is inappropriate as discourse markers by their very nature are semantically bleached. Similarly, Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012: 301) argue that different request strategies, such as a direct performatives (*I ask you to …*), impersonal constructions, the use of *let's* + infinitive, or the use of conventionally indirect requests, such as *could you* + infinitive…, 'cannot be said to be different ways of saying the same thing'.

Such difficulties suggest the necessity of modifying the original concept of the variable and indeed current research recognises the necessity of some adaptation. A number of solutions have been put forward to facilitate the application of the concept to discourse-pragmatic features. Dines (1980) and Lavandera (1978), for instance, propose functional comparability between the variants of a pragmatic variable as a defining criterion to replace semantic sameness (cf. also Cameron and Schwenter 2013). Terkourafi (2011) takes a relevance theoretical approach to defining how functional equivalence might be interpreted in variational pragmatics. She proposes a procedural definition of the pragmatic variable, conceiving the process of inference as that which remains constant while the forms associated with it vary. As she writes, 'a single procedural meaning [may be] encoded by different forms … and a single form encod[ed] by different procedural meanings' (Terkourafi 2011: 366). On the other hand, Pichler (2010: 590), writing on discourse markers (formal level), proposes the criterion of underlying structural similarity as an option while at the same time admitting that 'some discourse variables might be better conceptualised based on functional comparability between variants (e.g., intensifiers), others based on structural commonality (e.g., general extenders)' (2010: 591). On the interactional level, Schneider (2014), proposes a specific selection of initial speech acts (e.g., a greeting, a question identity or a disclose identity) as an example of a pragmatic variable.

Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012: 296), also addressing the problem that 'pragmatic variables rarely – if ever – provide clear cases of saying the same thing in several ways', put forward the idea of pragmatic variables (dependent variables) and pragmatic context variables (independent variables). Pragmatic variables are those that can be realised and include, for instance, discourse markers on the formal level (level of expression in Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012) or individual speech acts on the actional level (their utterance level). Pragmatic context variables, on the other hand, influence the realisation of the linguistic items. They relate to the context and include factors, such as the presence or absence of particular individuals in an interaction, i.e. aspects which influence the realisation of the pragmatic variables. Jucker and Taavitsainen (2012: 301) suggest that on the actional level, 'strategies share a core of functional equivalence even if they cannot be said to be different ways of saying the same thing'. Indeed, this definition is reminiscent of Schneider's (2010a) suggestion that the variable on the actional level of analysis is the illocution. In other words, the focus is on individual illocutions and their variants – more precisely on the conventions of means and conventions of form (cf. Clark 1979) and how these vary according to contextual and macro-social factors (cf. also Schneider 2014: 370). Terkourafi (2012: 314), however, criticises this definition of illocutionary identity, claiming that the approach adopted to date in variational pragmatics:

> relies on the assumption that the analysts can define what constitutes, for instance, a request *outside of particular contexts*, so that they may then use that definition as a "yardstick" to identify actual occurrences of requests in the data (original emphasis).
>
> (Terkourafi 2012: 302)

Terkourafi goes on to say that 'illocutionary sameness is *not* available to the analysts *before* they begin analysis of the data but must be empirically established each time within particular discourses and communities of practice (emphasis in original: 302)'. This claim she supports with reference to the fact that there is no one-to-one relationship between a particular form and illocution.

However, in this criticism of variational pragmatic analyses, Terkourafi overlooks the care taken in variational pragmatics to overcome the challenge of identifying function. Firstly, variational pragmatics makes extensive use of elicited data which provides researchers with contextualised data via, for example, hearer uptake, explicit situational descriptions and explicit communication of illocutionary force. Secondly, variational pragmatic analyses of naturally-occurring data do not take form as an indicator of illocutionary force. Rather, the recommendation is to systematically employ speech act identification criteria, such as those of uptake, propositional content and further context put forward by Terkourafi (2012), in the identification of illocutionary sameness (cf. Barron 2011, forthcoming; Flöck 2015).[3] Both approaches are discussed in *Methodological issues*, the section to which we now turn.

Methodological issues

Given its interest in language use rather than in the language system per se, analyses in variational pragmatics are not based on intuitive, fabricated data but are rather empirical analyses involving both naturally-occurring and elicited data. A basic division may be made in this regard, with naturally-occurring data yielding information on the actual use of language in context and experimental data yielding information of prototypical, canonical modes of behavior, also termed "cultural models" (Schneider 2012b) (cf. below).

Variational pragmatic analyses follow the contrastivity principle according to which linguistic features can only be considered variety-specific or variety-particular if the variety under study is contrasted with at least one other variety of the same type and language. In other words, just because a feature or pattern is used in one variety does not allow for generalised cross-varietal statements (cf. Barron and Schneider 2009: 429-430; Schneider 2012b: 363-364; cf. also McCarthy 2002: 69). Related to the principle of contrastivity is the principle of comparability which necessitates that comparable data sets are employed in variational analyses (cf. Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010a: 252, 2012b: 364). That is, an analysis of requests among female middle class speakers of British English should be contrasted with requests by female middle class speakers in American English of the same age group. Thus, a focus on the influence of one particular independent variable (e.g. region) on the dependent variable (e.g., request) means that all other variables (e.g., social class, ethnicity, gender, age) need, in as far as is possible, to be kept constant.

The empirical data analysed in variational pragmatics ranges from naturally-occurring data gathered using field methods through corpus data to experimental data (cf. also Schneider 2010a: 253-254). As with all research, it is recognised that there is no "best method per se" in variational pragmatics. Instead, the best method is that which best fits the particular research question at hand (cf. Jucker 2009; Schneider 2012a: 1034-1035). In the following, the strengths and weaknesses of the possible data sources are highlighted.

Within variational pragmatics naturally-occurring data has been collected using a range of methods. Bieswanger (2015), for instance, in a study of responses to thanks across several regional varieties of English, used field notes in an innovative Labovian-style methodology involving

asking strangers for directions (cf. also Rüegg 2014). This data type is ideal for examining what interactants actually do in reactive speech acts, such as response to thanks, and any problems of determining functional sameness would seem to be trivial. Control of the macro-social factors is somewhat more difficult, much being left to the judgment of the researchers themselves. It is also a time-consuming method and one which may be constrained by the limits of short-term memory.

A further method of recording naturally-occurring data is non-participative observation. This method is employed by Placencia (2008) is an analysis of requests in the context of service encounters. Such recordings provide an ideal source of contextualised data when comparability of contexts (e.g., size of shop, size of town in this example), often a challenge, is guaranteed. Besides comparability issues, a further problem of naturally-occurring data is the potential difficulty of eliciting sufficient pragmatic features for quantitative analyses, particularly if the focus is on initiative speech acts, such as offers, or indeed dispreferred speech acts, such as refusals.

Electronic corpora are a further source of naturally-occurring data which are employed, not exclusively, but particularly in analyses at the formal level given the ease of electronic searches. Comparative corpora are particularly suitable for variational pragmatic research. The International Corpus of English (ICE), encompassing several regional varieties of English, most of them freely available, is ideal, for instance, for analyses on the regional level (cf. e.g., Barron et al. 2015). In addition, corpora, such as the demographic component of the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MiCASE), allow analyses focusing on a range of further macro-social factors. Also, the larger corpora include a variety of discourse contexts and so provide detailed insights into the occurrences and contexts of the pragmatic feature under consideration (cf. Schauer and Adolphs 2006: 130-131). Apart from such and other options (cf. David Lee's overview of corpora at http://www.uow.edu.au/~dlee/CBLLinks.htm), a further

possibility is the construction of small-scale corpora as advocated by Clancy (2011). In general, small-scale corpora have the advantage of being an easily accessible source of data which is representative of a particular genre or variety.

One current difficulty of corpus research is that electronic searches of corpora remain largely restricted to form due to a lack of pragmatic annotation (cf. Weisser this volume). Hence, analysts are faced with the problems of precision and recall (cf. e.g., Jucker 2009). Difficulties of recall relate to the fact that relevant data may go unrecorded. In speech act analyses, for instance, non-conventionally indirect speech acts (e.g. hints, implicit compliments) are not retrievable via form-based searches. Also, less formulaic speech acts, such as realisations of disagreements, for example, are difficult to search for. Difficulties of precision, on the other hand, relate to the fact that searches generate many more concordances than those of interest to the researcher. As such, close attention is demanded in identifying illocutionary force, particularly given the close relationships between speech acts, the lack of prosodic annotation in corpora[4] and the fact that the background context, the identity of the speakers in corpora and their relationship towards each other are frequently unknown.

Uptake, propositional content and background context are the criteria recommended in establishing illocutionary sameness in such analyses of naturally-occurring data (cf. also *Variation and the pragmatic variable*). In the following, we illustrate each of these criteria in turn using the case of offers and with reference to an analysis of offers in the British and Irish components of the ICE corpus (ICE-GB and ICE-IRE respectively) (cf. Barron forthcoming).

A) Uptake

Hearer uptake is taken as evidence that the speaker's (S) communicative intention is recognised by the hearer (H) (essential condition) (cf. Copestake and Terkourafi 2010). So for instance, in (3),

A's response to B's utterance *Do you want a cup* reveals that A recognises B's utterance as an offer by B to get A a cup (commissive aspect of offers) and also as an utterance demanding a response (conditional aspect of offers).

(3)   B> <#> <[> Look I'm sorry </[> </{> about my political ignorance <#> Do you want a cup cos it's bigger
        A> <#> No that's fine <#> A glass is fine

                                                                (ICE-IRE: s1a-084)

Uptake may be verbal or non-verbal. The latter can be recognised in corpus data if there is some evidence of non-verbal uptake in the data.

Uptake is sometimes taken as an obligatory criterion, as indeed recommended by Terkourafi (2012). In such cases, focus is on the pragmatic effect of a particular utterance on the dialogue rather than on a speaker's intention exclusively. Under this procedure, infelicitous offers in which the illocutionary force is not recognised by H are not included in the analysis. In addition, it is necessary to be aware that such a convention has an influence on the speech act realisations analysed. In the case of offers, for instance, using uptake as an obligatory condition may mean that less forceful offers are not analysed. Davidson (1984: 103-104), for instance, notes that the presence of silence directly after an offer may be a signal of a(n) (upcoming) rejection. Given this potential/actual rejection, S may examine the initial formulation for any inadequacies that may be adversely affecting its acceptability, and then repeat or reformulate the offer in such a way as to deal with the possibility of rejection. Hence, offers which do not yield a verbal uptake may possibly be less forceful and less explicit than such subsequently issued initiative offers. Indeed, this would seem to be the case in (4). If uptake is taken as an obligatory criterion, then A's utterance *Tea* in line 1 will not be identified as an offer realisation as there is no uptake following it. Later in the

interaction, towards the end of (4), A makes a further attempt to issue the offer of tea – this time using the form *Granny do you want tea*. Uptake *yeah yeah please* follows. Thus, if uptake is taken as an obligatory criterion only this latter offer, *Granny do you want tea*, is coded.

(4)   A> <#> <[> Tea </[> </{>

D> <#> But sure if Daddy and Grandad could put <{> <[> it up <#> It can't be too hard to do </[>

C> <#> <[> <unclear> several sylls </unclear> </[>

A> <#> <[> What </[> </{> <#> Oh <,> when was that put up

B> <#> Last week

A> <#> You've two teabags in this cup on purpose

D> <#> What was put up there

B> <#> <unclear> 4 sylls </unclear>

A> <#> Granny do you want tea

C> <#> Yeah yeah please

D> <#> I'll have a cup too thanks

(ICE-IRE: s1a-067)

B) Propositional content

Propositional content is a further important criterion in identifying illocutionary force (cf. also Copestake and Terkourafi 2010). Offers, for instance, concern a future action A to be carried out by S which requires some effort on the part of S and which is assumed to be beneficial to H. It is clear in the utterance *Granny do you want tea* in (4) that the tea is potentially beneficial for the H and that S will be responsible for providing the tea should H wish it.

C) Further context

Clues available in the co-text also aid in identifying illocutionary force. In the case of offers, for instance, references to addressee trouble, pre-offers or offer negotiations can signal the presence of an offer. The utterance *shall I lock him up* in ICE-GB (s1a-052), for instance, is preceded by the utterance by the H of the form *Sorry I'm not a great lover of dogs*, an utterance informing the offerer that the future act A, to lock up the dog, would be welcome (cf. also Curl 2006; Sidnell 2009: 218; cf. also, e.g. Jucker et al. 2008: 282-283 on the presence of references to addressee trouble).

These examples show the pattern of identifying illocutionary identity in analyses of naturally-occurring data. Here, uptake, propositional content and the context (cotext and background knowledge) of the utterance aid the analyst in establishing illocutionary force and in differentiating speech acts from each other. However, on occasion, as mentioned above, a lack of contextual data may make it impossible to establish the illocution at hand. An utterance, such as ... *what do you fancy doing today then?* (BNC) in line 5 of (5), may, for instance, be a request for information or an offer as, unlike (4), it is unclear from the context in (5) whether the act at hand is beneficial to the speaker or hearer and consequently whether the felicity conditions for a request or offer avail. Such unclear cases must then be omitted from the analysis.

(5)   SP:PS0E8: Go up and get the uhum Index catalogue and see if that's got any more in it. SP:PS0EA: Any more?

SP:PS0E8: (unclear)2.

SP:PS0EA: What they (unclear)2.

SP:PS0E8: (unclear)2. (unclear). What do you fancy doing today then?

SP:PS6ST: Uhum, I don't know. Just a break (unclear)2.

SP:PS0E8: I wonder whether we go (unclear)2. (unclear)2.

SP:PS6ST: No. (unclear)2.

SP:PS0E8: No, that's what they want. Just get that in Tunbridge Wells.

SP:PS6ST: (unclear)2.

(BNC: KCD S_conv)

Apart from naturally occurring data, variational pragmatic research (particularly in the investigation of the actional level) frequently employs elicited data using production questionnaires or roleplays which ensure comparable data and functional identity.

Discourse completion tasks – also termed production questionnaires (Kasper 2000, 2008; cf. also Félix-Brasdefer and Hasler-Barker, this volume) – demand informants to put themselves in a particular situation and to complete the ensuing dialogue. The situational description provides information concerning the macro-social factors of relevance. The dialogue itself may already be initiated. In the classic DCT form (cf. Kasper 2000 for variations), this is followed by a gap which informants are to complete and the dialogue generally closes with a hearer response, signaling uptake. However, even in the absence of a hearer response, situations are designed to elicit a single speech act whether via uptake or via implicit or explicit clues given in the situational description. In this way, identity of illocution is guaranteed. Similar clues – some more, some less explicit – are given to informants in a roleplay situation to the same effect (cf. Barron 2003). The identification of the elicited speech act – and thus the establishment of illocutionary sameness – is, thus, unproblematic (cf. also Grainger and Harris 2007: 2-3). At the same time, it is possible to give informants the option of opting out of a particular speech act (cf. Kasper 2000, 2008).

Other advantages of such elicited data relate to the fact that a carefully designed and tested questionnaire or roleplay (ideally developed using ethnographic data) can give access to large quantities of the speech act or pragmatic feature of interest. Such elicited data is particularly valuable for analyses of speech acts, such as apologies, which are difficult to gather ethnographically (cf. Grainger and Harris 2007: 2-3). A further advantage is that the situational description given in both production questionnaires and roleplays enables the researcher to control for or to vary individual factors as required (cf. Jucker 2009: 1618; Schauer and Adolphs 2006: 120). This facilitates focus on the effect of individual factors and combinations of factors. Furthermore, although the development of the instruments themselves is time-consuming, data elicitation is fast, unproblematic and the data are comparable across cultures – providing that assessment tests have been carried out in advance to ensure the comparability of the situational constellations (cf. Blum-Kulka and House 1989; Barron 2003).

Compared to naturally-occurring spoken data, the data elicited using instruments of elicitation has been shown to be a valid representation of spoken data (cf. Barron 2003; Jucker 2009; Kasper 2008). However, some differences in occurrences have also been recorded in the uses of particular strategies (cf. Kasper 2008: 293-294 for an overview). Also, turns are shorter and many features of interactional discourse, such as laughter, pauses, hesitations and repetitions, are lacking (cf. Schauer and Adolphs 2006: 130). In addition, the contexts of occurrence of the pragmatic feature under investigation are fewer as the number of situations investigated is limited. Having said this, it is important to point out that although such elicited data approach naturally-occurring spoken data, the data elicited is clearly off-line data (cf. Kasper 2008). As such, it is important to be aware that these instruments elicit stereotypical interactions in the mind of the respondents and so portray

the socially accepted use of language in a particular culture (cf. Barron 2005b). As Schneider (2012a: 1034), writing in the context of variational pragmatics, claims, such data is ideal for identifying 'what counts as appropriate verbal behavior in a given situation.' He points out that:

> If the question is not to examine what interactants actually do which may be appropriate or inappropriate, but what they believe one should do, which is considered appropriate, then the best method is an experimental method, … Written production questionnaires … are particularly suitable as they provide informants with time to analyse the situation described in the instructions and thus reduce the accidentialities of spontaneous speech and interaction. Production questionnaires elicit 'the prototype of the variants occurring in the individual's actual speech.' (Hill et al., 1986: 353)
>
> (Schneider 2012a: 1034)

Schneider (2012a) goes on to claim that these behavioural prototypes elicited using production questionnaires are similar to Watts' (2003: 256-257) concept of 'first order politeness' or 'politic behavior,' i.e. appropriate expected behaviour in interaction (cf. also Schneider 2012b and Schneider 2010b: 85 on behavioural scripts). In other words, experimental data allow us to concentrate on what interactants perceive as polite norms. In addition, as Schneider (2014: 370), states, with elicited data '… it is possible to empirically establish different kinds of pragmatic variables and their respective variants ….'.

In sum then, as mentioned above, each method has its strengths and weaknesses. The choice of data thus depends on which data type suits the research question best.

Conclusion

Previous research has suggested a number of areas in which further study would be particularly interesting (cf. Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010a; Barron 2014). Such writings highlight a need for research on a regional level to focus in particular on languages other than English and Spanish. Also, pragmatic variation according to ethnic identity, age and socio-economic class continue to remain largely desiderata, as also is research relating to the interplay of these and other factors. As regards the levels of analysis, the formal and actional levels of pragmatic analysis have enjoyed most research interest. The remaining levels remain ripe for further research.

Further research desiderata relates to the fact that the majority of studies in variational pragmatics to date have focused on everyday conversation. Written genres and variation of these according to macro-social factors has been largely disregarded (cf. also Barron 2012: 287-288) – possibly also due to the absence of this level from the variational pragmatic framework. However, the realisation of these purposes may vary – and often does vary – across cultures (cf. Barron 2012; Günthner 2007). Indeed, Yajun and Chenggang (2006) is an interesting article in this regard. They address the question as to how contrastive genre analysis can be successfully combined with the study of World Englishes (regional variation in the present context) given that '… the involvement of discoursal and rhetorical analyses are exceptions rather than regular practice' in the study of World Englishes. This question is, thus, also a question for variational pragmatics particularly since such discoursal analyses on the level of genre are the exception not only for regional variation, but also for ethnic, gender, age and socio-economic variation. The variational pragmatic framework needs thus to be extended to include a level of analysis akin to Jucker and Taavitsainen's (2012: 302) discourse domain level, defined as 'the entire repertoire of texts and genres at the disposal of a discourse community'. The *tertium comparationis*, i.e. the 'common platform of reference'

(Krzeszowski 1989: 60, 1990: 15), in such analyses would be the genre itself (cf. Lüger 2005: 170-171), operationalised in practice as similarity of communicative function, supplemented with a comparable context of use (cf. Barron 2012: 10-16, 26-28 for a synthesis on the process of establishing [identity of] communicative purpose). With identity of communicative function as the variable, variational pragmatic research might investigate whether and, if so, to what extent the macro-social factors influence intralingual genre conventions. Investigations could focus on the level of move structure, i.e. on the global organisational patterns through which a particular overriding communicative purpose is realised, and also on move register, i.e. on how these moves, i.e. organisational units, are realised in language. We look forward to further developments in this area.

Suggestions for further reading

Barron, A. and Schneider, K. P. (eds) (2009) *Special Issue on Variational Pragmatics*, (Intercultural Pragmatics, vol. 4). Berlin/New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

This special issue on variational pragmatics provides an introduction to the field of variational pragmatics and illustrates the types of questions and issues addressed in the area. The empirical analyses in the volume address pragmatic variation across region in the first instance. The levels of pragmatic analysis included encompass the formal, actional levels and interactional levels.

Barron, A. (ed.) (2015) *Special Issue: A Variational Pragmatic Approach to Regional Variation in Language: Celebrating the Work of Klaus P. Schneider*, (Multilingua, vol. 34). Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

This special issue is a celebratory volume to the work of one of the founders of variational pragmatics, Klaus P. Schneider. The volume further develops variational pragmatics as a field of

research and focuses on the influence of region on language use. The levels of analysis investigated are broad, including the formal level and the actional level, but also the less frequently analysed interactional and topic level.

Jautz, S. (2013) *Thanking Formulae in English. Explorations across Varieties and Genres*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 230). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.

This monograph contrasts the forms and functions of thanking formulae in New Zealand English and British English. The empirical analysis focuses on the one-million-word Wellington Spoken Corpus of New Zealand English and a selection of comparable texts taken from the British National Corpus.

Márquez-Reiter, R. and Placencia, M. E. (2005) *Spanish Pragmatics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

This is a textbook on pragmatics focusing on Spanish. It is innovative in placing particular emphasis on the pluricentrality of the Spanish language, with many examples included from across the different varieties of Spanish. It also includes a valuable chapter on sociopragmatic variation.

Schneider, K. P. and Barron, A. (eds) (2008) *Variational Pragmatics: A Focus on Regional Varieties in Pluricentric Languages*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 178). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.

This seminal volume established variational pragmatics as a field of research. The introductory chapter establishes the rationale for studying variational pragmatics as a separate field of inquiry, systematically sketches the broader approach and presents a framework for further analysis. The

papers which follow present empirical variational pragmatic research focusing on regional varieties of pluricentric languages.

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[2] The bibliography on variational pragmatics hosted by the University of Bonn (http://www.linguistics.uni-bonn.de/research/variational-pragmatics/variational-pragmatics-bibliography/) and the bibliography on regional pragmatic variation hosted at the University of London (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/spanish/our-staff/maria-elena-placencia/bibliography-on-regional-pragmatic-variation) provide an overview.

[3] Cf. also Félix-Brasdefer (2014) on the role of the felicity conditions and on the role of the hearer's interpretation of a particular utterance (securing uptake, inviting response) in the pragmatic interpretation of a particular utterance.

[4] It should be noted that the general availability of audio files appears to be increasing in recent years. The British component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB) is now available aligned with 300 audio recordings. Similarly, sound files are also available for the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English.