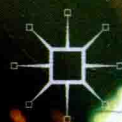


EDITED BY
KATE BEECHING
HELEN WOODFIELD

RESEARCHING
SOCIOPRAGMATIC
VARIABILITY

PERSPECTIVES FROM
VARIATIONAL, INTERLANGUAGE AND
CONTRASTIVE PRAGMATICS



Researching Sociopragmatic Variability

Perspectives from Variational,
Interlanguage and Contrastive Pragmatics

Edited by

Kate Beeching

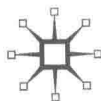
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Researching Sociopragmatic Variability

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1

Introduction

Kate Beeching and Helen Woodfield

1.1 Overview

We take as our starting point the notion of sociopragmatics as focusing 'primarily on the social rules of speaking, those expectations about interactional discourse held by members of a speech community as appropriate and "normal" behaviour' (Locastro 2012: 159). Sociopragmatics focuses on the 'relationship between linguistic action and social structure' (Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan 2010: 6) and is concerned with the influence of socio-contextual factors in language as social action. The concepts of 'context' and 'action' are seen as central to pragmatics (Locastro 2012: 19), while the notion of language as 'social action' may be viewed as the outcomes or 'action accomplished through language use' (Compernelle 2014: 42). Indeed recent models of pragmatics as mediated action (Compernelle 2014: 42) emphasize the 'primacy of the sociopragmatic domain in the mediated action framework', where the sociopragmatic domain mediates the pragmlingistic domain, which in turn mediates social action. The ways in which linguistic forms vary according to context and how these relate to social action are complex and highly variable across individuals as well as across larger populations. It is this complexity which motivated the choice of the term 'variability' rather than 'variation' in the title of the volume: the selection of particular linguistic forms in different situations is dynamic, not fixed and immutable. What is more, perhaps precisely because of the variability and dynamism inherent in the system, common practices relating to sociopragmatic competence are rarely amenable to intuition. It is thus difficult for language tutors to establish prescriptive

rules for learners in pedagogical settings to follow. As Kasper (1997) remarked:

Because native speaker intuition is a notoriously unreliable source of information about the communicative practices of their own community, it is vital that teaching materials on L2 pragmatics are research-based.

This volume thus aims to present research on sociopragmatic variability which can inform teaching and to bring together new findings from three key areas: variational pragmatics (Fink and Félix-Brasdefer; Lin; Ren; Zheng); interlanguage pragmatics (Woodfield; Beeching) and contrastive pragmatics (Aijmer; Barros García and Terkourafi). A secondary focus explores issues in sociopragmatic competence and the language classroom (Delahaie; Pullin).

The volume investigates sociopragmatic variability across a range of discourse contexts and cultures and through the prism of different research frameworks and methodologies, with a particular focus on (1) the implementation of particular speech acts: compliments and compliment responses, refusals and requests, and (2) the use of pragmatic markers.

Research methods employed in the empirical work illustrate a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches to the investigation of sociopragmatic variation: discourse completion tasks, role play, transcribed spoken data and research which draw on large corpora, such as the British National Corpus or parallel/bilingual corpora.

The data analysed illustrate phenomena from a range of languages, language varieties and genres, including Mainland and Taiwan Chinese, Malay, British and American English, French, Spanish and Swedish, in contexts as diverse as university classrooms, a travel agency and other workplace settings, everyday conversational and naturalistic settings, and in both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) contexts. The diversity of the research contexts and research approaches employed gives early researchers and postgraduate students scope to replicate such approaches in their own studies, looking at different speech acts or pragmatic markers in a variety of languages and contexts.

The volume not only showcases different research methods which might appropriately be adopted in variational pragmatics, but also presents new data on speech act implementation and the functions of pragmatic markers from a range of contexts of language use and from a

range of first language backgrounds and target language-learning contexts. A greater understanding of the way that linguistic forms vary according to circumstance is an essential prerequisite for the successful teaching and learning of sociopragmatic competence. This is one of the fundamental motivations behind the writing of this volume – to begin to provide some answers and to evaluate the tools other researchers can employ to continue these lines of investigation.

1.2 Variational pragmatics – theoretical framework

Variational pragmatics is a relatively new field, which builds on but, of necessity, has to adapt, classic Labovian variationist approaches developed in sociolinguistics. Classic variationist approaches focus on phonological features and posit two ‘variants’ of a variable (for example in British English, the ‘t’ variable has two variants, the ‘t’ variant and the glottal stop variant, either pronouncing the ‘t’ in the middle of the word ‘butter’, or using a glottal stop instead). A key aspect of the variationist approach is that the meaning (‘butter’) remains the same regardless of which of the variants is used. This approach is more difficult to apply to syntactic or pragmatic features, such as speech acts, as arguably there is meaning change when one makes a request by saying ‘Pass the butter, please’ versus ‘Could you pass the butter?’

Schneider and Barron (2008) and Barron and Schneider (2009), however, have developed a framework which can be used to study variation in pragmatics, and this is adopted in a number of the studies reported here. In line with classic sociolinguistic approaches, Schneider and Barron’s framework distinguishes five social factors that can influence communicative language use: social class, region, ethnicity, gender and age. In addition to the extralinguistic factors, Schneider and Barron (2008: 19) and Schneider (2010: 244–6) identify five levels of pragmatic analysis, the formal level, the actional level, the interactive level, the topic level and the organizational level. These levels are summarized below:

1. The formal level investigates the function of different linguistic forms in context. It is semasiological (form to function), in other words, it explores the senses of particular items and such analyses can be characterized as ‘form to function mappings’ (Schneider and Barron 2008: 20). Schneider points out (2010: 246) that this level serves to integrate work on discourse markers, such as *well*, *you know*, *I see*, etc.;

2. The actional level determines linguistic methods of accomplishing specific speech acts. It is onomasiological (function to form), in other words, the starting point is a particular speech act, such as request, promise or apology, and investigations aim to discover the linguistic realizations of such speech acts in different contexts/between different participants and in different languages;
3. The interactive level studies larger units of dialogue such as speech events and sequences, looking at speech act sequences, conversational openings and closings, but also relational work such as the negotiation of politeness and rudeness;
4. The topic level addresses topic selection and topic management; areas of interest include which topics are discussed with whom (superiors/inferiors/intimates, etc.) but also, for example, who compliments whom about what;
5. The organizational level focuses on conversational turn-taking, how the floor is distributed across different speakers.

The current volume focuses mainly on speech acts (the actional level) and on pragmatic markers (the formal level), and the state of the art in the literature of these fields is overviewed in sections 1.3 and 1.4 below. The chapters by Terkourafi and Barros García, and by Pullin, which focus on negotiation, relational work and politeness, break new ground by taking the interactive level into account.

1.3 Overview of the field – speech acts

The investigation of sociopragmatic variation in speech acts has formed an important part of the study of pragmatics in recent decades. Pragmatics has been defined as ‘the study of linguistic practices used to convey and interpret messages within a sociocultural context taking into account the bidirectional bond between producer intent and receiver interpretation’ (Devlin 2014: 32). Within Schneider and Barron’s (2008) pragmatic analysis framework, as noted above, speech acts belong to the ‘actional level’ where ‘the starting point for the analysis is the illocutionary act, i.e. the communicative function of an utterance reflecting the speaker’s intention’ (Schneider and Barron 2008: 20). At the level of macro-sociolinguistic analysis, pragmatic variation is concerned with the influence of factors such as gender and region on language in use. Among such studies, the former factor is illustrated in Félix-Brasdefer’s (2012) investigation of pragmatic variation at the actional level (request

type) by gender in market service encounters in southern Mexico: the study evidences variation in relation to frequency and forms used to realize a request for service (p. 27) and of the influence of gender of both vendor and customer on request strategies employed. Regarding the influence of region, Ren et al. (2013) have explored the extent to which regional variation influences Mainland and Taiwan Chinese undergraduate students' written production of compliments and refusals. The study revealed that concerns for interpersonal harmony in the use of positive politeness influenced the employment of implicit compliments in Taiwan Chinese participants. Concerns for the maintenance of in-group solidarity were evident to a greater extent in Mainland Chinese in dispreferred speech acts such as refusals.

At the level of micro-sociolinguistics, pragmatic variation is concerned with the influence of social power/status and social distance on the choice of forms employed. Kasper and Rose's (2002) review of learner development in sociopragmatics concludes that, on the basis of early investigations (Scarcella 1979, Ellis 1992, Hill 1997, Trosborg 1995, Rose 2000), 'adult learners appear to require a great deal of time to develop the ability to appropriately map L2 forms to social categories. This appears to be especially true in foreign language contexts' (p. 145). More recent research within the study abroad context finds evidence, for example, of the impact of levels of imposition on external modification in requests (Schauer 2007); of sociopragmatic variation in primarily foreign language learners (Devlin 2014); and of the impact of levels of social status on pragmatic use in advising situations, following a period of study abroad (Matsumura 2007).

Turning to instruction in pragmatics and discussions of teachability, Kasper and Rose's (2002) review concludes that there is 'ample support for the benefit of instruction in pragmatics' (p. 258). Pedagogical proposals for teaching pragmatics (see Locastro 2012 for review of the teachability of L2 pragmatics) have included, for example, Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan's (2006) '6 Rs' framework, underpinned by introducing learners to the distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics together with the impact of social variables on politeness; studies focusing on facilitating learners' negotiation of identities in giving/responding to compliments (Ishihara 2010); and the integration of film excerpts in the teaching of request modification devices (Martinez-Flor 2008). More recent discussions (Campennolle 2014) show how the principles of sociocultural theory may form the basis of pedagogical programmes on which instructional pragmatics may be based.

In the present volume, the chapters by Delahaie and Pullin address a number of issues relating to sociopragmatic variability and the language classroom.

1.4 Overview of the field – pragmatic markers

The terms ‘discourse marker’ and ‘pragmatic marker’ have emerged in the last quarter century to describe items such as *well, you know, I mean* and *like* in English, *alors, donc, hein, quoi* and *voilà* in French, *hao le* in Chinese or *dakara* and *dakedo* in Japanese. These are expressions which may have little obvious propositional meaning but which facilitate ordinary everyday conversational interaction. The debate over whether to call such terms discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987, Schourup 1999, Müller 2005) or pragmatic markers (Watts 1988, Redeker 1990, Brinton 1996, Andersen 1998, Erman 2001, Denke 2009, Aijmer 2013, Beeching forthcoming) has been heated and continuous over this period, reflecting a variety of approaches to their analysis.

Hansen (1998: 24) remarked that the items studied by Schiffrin (1987) in her seminal work *Discourse Markers* constitute ‘a rather heterogeneous group, including coordinating and subordinating conjunctions such as *and* and *because*, parenthetical clauses such as *you know* and *I mean*, temporal and conjunctive adverbs such as *now* and *so*, and (not so easily categorized) particles like *oh* and *well*’. Some further distinctions between such heterogeneous items would appear to be required. Fraser (1996) used the term ‘pragmatic marker’ to include both discourse markers and pragmatic markers, considering ‘discourse markers’ as a subtype of pragmatic markers, ‘signalling a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1’ (Fraser 1999: 931).

Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg (2006: 2) opt for the term ‘pragmatic marker’ rather than ‘discourse marker’ and make the following distinction between the two:

Discourse marker is the term which we use when we want to describe how a particular marker signals coherence relations. Pragmatic markers as we see them are not only associated with discourse and textual functions but are also signals in the communication situation guiding the addressee’s interpretation. The term as we are using it can also be defined negatively: if a word or a construction in an utterance does not contribute to the propositional, truth-functional content, then we consider it a pragmatic marker.