

Heike Pichler (ed.) *Discourse-pragmatic variation and change in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016, xviii + 304 pp. (ISBN 978 1 107 05576 6)

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This volume brings together several core scholars in the field of discourse-pragmatic variation and change in English. In many ways, it shows the strong impact of the editor, Heike Pichler, who has obviously hand-picked the contributors and worked to bring about a cohesive collection of studies. One of the strengths of the volume is the clear explanation of chosen terminology and how it relates to earlier work in the field (p. 3–4). A consistent use of terminology has been included in all contributions, which will be particularly helpful for those beginning their journey in the field. Overall, the volume (or its editor) shows a high level of ambition, as there has been a thorough attempt to make all contributions consistent in, for example, suggesting further research in the field. Similarly, the methods used in each contribution are described with a great deal of detail, with the aim of making them more approachable and applicable in future studies. All contributions also show a consistent use of cross-references to other papers in the volume, which is another sign of the consistent quality of the editorial process.

The volume is divided into four parts, Methods, Innovations, Change and Variation, and is bookended by an introduction and an epilogue. The ten research articles are divided unevenly into these parts, as the first two, Methods and Innovations only have two papers each while the other two parts have three papers each. The introduction by the editor presents an authoritative summing up of the current status of the field. In it, the main objective of the volume is identified as introducing new methods for the study of discourse-pragmatic variation and change (p. 2). Given this explicitly stated methodological focus of the volume, it seems slightly odd that only one of the parts is singled out as dealing with methods. The methodological focus would also have given room for exploring other languages besides English, but that would perhaps have eroded the cohesive nature of the volume. The secondary object of the volume, however, is providing “new empirical and theoretical insights into the sociolinguistic dimensions of discourse-pragmatic variation and change in contemporary varieties of English” (p. 2). As this shows us, the focus of the book is quite tight, narrowing e.g. change into what is seen in the past few decades. The volume wishes to reach both newcomers to the field and established scholars, but balancing the needs of this dual audience is sometimes a difficult task. The “central claim made by this collection [...] that a **diversity of conceptual and methodological approaches are required** to offer a maximally comprehensive view” (p. 17; emphasis original) is hardly news, but it is perhaps useful to point these things out, particularly in a volume that aims to provide a starting point to new scholars in the field.

Part I of the volume, “Methods”, consists of two papers. Gisle Andersen provides an introduction to the corpus-driven method and shows with the help of a case study how rising discourse-pragmatic features can be identified with the help of N-grams, i.e. strings of words that appear frequently together in a corpus, and that appear more often in one dataset than another. Many of the things Andersen explains would be taken for granted by a corpus linguist, as the idea of corpus-driven research goes back to the ideas of Sinclair (1991) even though he did not coin the term. The use of N-grams is a modern technique, however, and in the multidisciplinary context of the volume Andersen provides a useful and enlightening introduction to the topic. The analysis of the identified group of rising features (e.g. *duh*, *rah*, *bruh*, and *at the end of the day*) does not go into any great depth, as the author himself points out, but certainly provides a solid starting point for further research. The second paper in the Methods section is by Cathleen Waters, who attempts to describe strategies for elucidating discourse-pragmatic variation. She tackles the questions of equivalence (semantic, functional and formal) as well as accountability (including possible locations for the variable studied as well as realised instances). These two central questions are of course fundamental in any attempt to produce reliable frequency data. As a case study, she recounts the results of Waters (2011), her unpublished PhD thesis, concerning *actually* as an example of a case where one orthographic form can have multiple functions.

Part II, named “Innovations”, starts with a paper by Heike Pichler, discussing the ways in which discourse-pragmatic innovations can be uncovered. Unlike Andersen, who sought to identify new forms, Pichler is seeking new uses of established features. She reminds the reader that re-examining our criteria for a linguistic phenomenon may give us insights into changes in progress, and her analysis highlights the importance of analysing spoken language data through auditory analysis, not only via transcripts, as this can be decisive in determining the classification of a variant. On the whole, it is through in-depth analysis of the data that Pichler identifies innovations in the use of *inmit*, which is an interesting finding as such, but does not perhaps have quite the clearly explained methodological focus the volume promises in its introduction.

The second paper in the Innovations section, by Derek Denis and Sali A. Tagliamonte, deals with the role of grammaticalisation and lexical replacement. They look at utterance-final tags as a sociolinguistic variable and are able to identify patterns of change. The methodological focus of the paper also means that the authors document their analysis and methods as explicitly as possible, thus making the results replicable in other contexts. They reject using pragmatic functions based on contextual cues in their analysis because of the subjective nature of interpreting them, and rely instead on discourse contexts (statement of opinion, request for repetition, etc.). They also use Poisson regression as a statistical tool to tease out results from their analysis, and in keeping with the express goals of the volume provide all R code so that other

scholars can follow in their footsteps. It turns out that there is no support for the changes in utterance-final tags being associated with grammaticalisation, and the authors conclude this must be a case of lexical replacement. They speculate that this may be “a more general mechanism of discourse pragmatic change” (p. 111), which is certainly an interesting idea deserving more study with different datasets.

If the second part of the volume dealt with a particular stage of change, the third deals with change in more general terms. This part begins with a paper by Sali A. Tagliamonte, who has based the chapter on parts of and ideas from an earlier book (Tagliamonte 2013). This is in keeping with the general nature of the volume, as it is clearly attempting to bring together central thoughts in the field, even if there is some repetition of previously published discussion. This paper presents an attempt to catch linguistic change of general extenders through the study of relic dialects, which can be expected to reflect earlier forms of the language. The study shows that the generally accepted idea of longer forms being an earlier stage of development, later shortened in use, does not find support in this data. Again, it seems this is a question of lexical replacement rather than grammaticalisation. The results suggest that the paths of development for discourse-pragmatic features may not follow those of other elements of language.

The second paper dealing with change is by Celeste Rodríguez Louro, and her study traces quotatives across time in West Australian English. She takes a dual approach to change, wishing to find out what the quotative system was like before the entrance of *be like* and looking for possible connections between *be like* and the “increase in self-revelation” that seems to be evident across varieties of English (p. 140). The datasets she uses come from two time periods, but she deals with them as one big dataset divided into age cohorts according to year of birth. This seems somewhat risky, as the approach does not take into account the possibility of communal change (cf. Labov 1994, Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2007), but the results do not seem to indicate anything in that direction. Showing a careful consideration of her data, Rodríguez Louro takes the necessary step of checking transcriptions against the actual recordings, which is particularly useful, when – as in the case of the oral history recordings that form part of her dataset – the transcriptions have not been carried out with linguistic study in mind. Her results show interesting correspondences in the rise of internal thought being reported in the narratives and the increase of *be like*.

The third paper expressly focusing on change is by Stephen Levey. He takes on the extremely interesting and understudied question of the acquisition of discourse-pragmatic features, considering the question of the age at which children start acquiring linguistic constraints on the one hand and social and pragmatic ones on the other. He very sensibly uses narrowly defined age ranges, as these can – and do – reveal the kinds of differences that the rapid processes

of language acquisition in children show. Levey has the opportunity to observe change in apparent time, as his data includes adults and children recorded in the same time period, but he can also approach change in real time, as his data includes a sample of comparable child language from an earlier point in time. Levey's paper is one of several in the volume to make use of multivariate analysis and Goldvarb, but he is perhaps the one to explain the analysis in greatest detail. As one of the objectives of the volume is to provide a starting point for scholars new to the field, this kind of description is useful not only for the transparency of research but for transmitting good practices.

The fourth part of the volume contains three papers under the heading "Variation". As it can be argued that the whole volume deals with variation, this grouping is again somewhat contrived. There are, however, certain similarities in the types of variation presented in this part of the book. The first paper, by Robert Fuchs and Ulrike Gut, uses sub-corpora of the International Corpus of English (ICE) corpus family. Their focus is on comparing register variation of intensifiers across three varieties of Asian English. Fuchs and Gut bring the methodological innovation objective of the volume into focus, as they illustrate the usability of cluster analysis and visualisation techniques (in this case in the form of a phenogram) in the analysis of variation. They make the techniques used accessible through a clear explanation of what was done, and probably provide enough information for scholars to attempt applying these methods on other datasets. It is particularly useful that the visualisations are explained clearly and in sufficient detail to make their content lucid. My only small complaints concern the fact that the absolute number of instances studied is not mentioned explicitly and that the frequencies presented have been normalised to a million words, even though individual registers in any variety are at the most 200,000 words in size. But all in all, these methods show their usefulness for the analysis of discourse-pragmatic features, and will be, as the authors mention, helpful in identifying loci for further research.

The second paper dealing with variation, by Suzanne Evans Wagner, Ashley Hesson and Heidi M. Little, is also concerned with registers, more specifically talk between familiars on the one hand and talk between strangers on the other. They describe their coding scheme for instances of general extenders into set-extending and non-set-extending with the help of a clear flow chart that was used to train the coders of the data. The datasets they use are somewhat different in nature, but they pay careful attention to the comparability and the effects this might have for interpreting the results gained. They also discuss the question of outliers and take the steps to identify and discard one such case on the basis of Dixon's Q-Test. As the two registers studied do not show differences in how speakers use general extenders, the authors extend their study to style, and attempt to identify moments of more personal style in both datasets, using clear

linguistic criteria for identification. Again, based on their study, it seems style does not have a great impact on the use of general extenders in the data. The final paper dealing with variation, by Katie Drager, deals with phonetic variation, style and stance. Drager returns to data she has studied before and teases out results dealing with how teenage girls perform their identity as members of specific groups in the school community through use of the quotative and discourse particle *like* and the pronunciation variants of it. The feature studied is salient among the informants, and therefore a prime candidate for studying identity and style. There are clear patterns of pronunciation associated with stance, as speakers either align with the people they quote or not.

The volume is concluded by an “Epilogue” by Jenny Cheshire. She declares the volume “a landmark, putting discourse-pragmatic variation and change centre stage and demonstrating how it can be accommodated within the variationist framework” (p. 252). She chooses to highlight four main approaches presented in the volume, contextualising them in previous research and suggesting further avenues of study. First, she discusses language change and particularly Tagliamonte and Denis’s ideas about lexical replacement. Her second choice is the question of clause peripheries, which arise in Pichler’s paper. The third point of interest Cheshire discusses is the acquisition of discourse-pragmatic variation, which was studied by Levey. Finally, she highlights the social meaning of discourse-pragmatic features and particularly the way Drager has combined questions of style and stance with a detailed phonetic analysis. Again, Cheshire brings her own extensive familiarity with the topic and creates connections to earlier research. The final point Cheshire makes in her paper concerns the contentious question of the variable. While many of the papers in the volume present ways of creating a variable to study, Cheshire remains somewhat sceptical, and sees not just the advantages of being able to apply sophisticated methodologies but also the danger of forcing discourse-pragmatic features into a mould that does not leave enough room for recognising their multifunctionality.

This volume is probably a necessary read for anyone interested in discourse-pragmatic variation and change. Dealing with discourse-pragmatic features explicitly in the variationist framework, the studies provide detailed descriptions of methods for identifying innovative features and classifying instances in a replicable, objective manner. They present techniques of visualisation which allow for new foci of research to be identified and approach quantitative methods with a dedicated explicitness. Many new research questions are identified in the chapters, and it is clear that this volume presents a solid rock for anyone in the field to build their future research on.

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