

Book Reviews

Felix-Brasdefer, J. César and Dale April Koike (eds.). 2012. *Pragmatic variation in first and second language contexts: methodological issues*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, Hardback ISBN 978-90-272-1872-8. E-Book ISBN ISBN 9789027273277. 338 pp. Price Hb € 99 / \$ 149.

Reviewed by Rachel Mapson, Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK, rmapson@qmu.ac.uk

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This book germinated in a workshop held in Indiana back in 2010, and explores methodological considerations in the study of pragmatic variation within L1 and L2 contexts. The various chapters span a range of theoretical frameworks and research methods, illustrating the need for research approaches to be commensurate with the context in which data are generated.

The complexity of pragmatic variation is evident throughout the book. This complexity derives from studies on pragmatic variation focussing on either, or both, macro-social influences (age, class, ethnicity, gender and region) and micro-social variables that are contextually related (for example power and social distance), with analysis undertaken at different levels (formal, actional, interactional, topical and organizational). Furthermore, the construction of social meaning is studied from either a cross-cultural or intra-cultural perspective; the latter is referred to as *variational pragmatics*.

The focus on methodology in this volume is designed to provide a foundation for further studies in this field. The first eight chapters describe empirical studies on the influence of various sociolinguistic and contextual factors on pragmatic variation across different cultural and linguistic landscapes. Chapters 1 to 4 examine L1 contexts, while Chapters 5 to 8 focus on L2. Chapters 9 and 10 focus exclusively on methodological and theoretical concerns, and the volume is rounded off in Chapter 11 with a summary of the issues revealed throughout.

In Chapter 1, Felix-Brasdefer explores the influence of gender on speech act sequences in transactional market interactions in Southern Mexico. Naturally occurring interactions were audio recorded in a quasi-ethnographic approach, and analyzed at actional, interactional, and stylistic levels. Findings on the influence of gender support earlier studies of similar interactions in Greece (Antonopoulou 2001). However, the sound quality of the audio recordings was problematic and it is likely that co-construction of interaction could have been better evidenced on video.

Chapter 2 is a contrastive analysis of stance in messages on US English and French online fora, in which the university students from both countries interact using their L1. Blyth adopts a mixed methods approach to examine stance around individualism. Quantitative analysis involving concordances and collocations was combined with qualitative examination of the way differences were negotiated. The chapter includes useful discussion around the challenges of analyzing online scripts. Findings illustrate how US students viewed individualism positively, in contrast to the negative perspectives of the French students. This study makes for interesting reading, although interactions of this type, with all parties using their L1, are perhaps unusual.

In Chapter 3, Flores-Ferrain combines linguistics and psychology in a mixed methods study of intra-lingual varieties of Spanish during therapist/patient motivational interviews. The interviews concerned ongoing treatment involving a male Cuban American therapist interacting with four Dominican female patients. Qualitative analysis identified mitigation use, while quantitative analysis looked for patterns in the way therapist and clients used mitigation. The results, perhaps unsurprisingly, indicate that variation in language use was influenced by speaker role, and the presence/absence of conflict.

Chapter 4 sees Zhu and Boxer explore face-to-face interactions in English as a lingua franca. Their particular foci are the verbal and non-verbal features of disagreements in informal interactions between L2 speakers of English in *English corners* in China. These 'corners' are usually areas within parks where Chinese speakers of English congregate regularly to practise their use of the language. The authors adopt an interactional sociolinguistic approach which uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine seven sociolinguistic factors, including a mix of macro and micro social variables. The authors suggest that the prevalence of strong disagreements might result from pragmatic transfer from Mandarin. The discussion therefore picks up on the severity of sociopragmatic errors, and the value of L2 speakers being explicitly aware of cross-cultural pragmatic differences. The study additionally underlines the difficulties in obtaining naturally occurring data. This chapter also highlights the value of capturing visual information, which was critical to coding utterances as strong/weak disagreement, since verbal content was frequently subverted by facial expression.

In Chapter 5, Bardovi-Harlig compares L1 and L2 use of American English. Her examination of variation in the use of conventional expressions was a by-product of data collected through a computerized oral completion task. Results indicate the smaller repertoire of conventional expressions possessed by L2 speakers. L1/L2 contrast sometimes occurs at the actional level, in speakers' use of different speech acts, or through use of different expressions within the same speech act.

Discussion therefore highlights how analysis examining only the type of speech acts used, rather than those pragmatically available but not spoken, risks missing the variation that exists within those structures. The study additionally reveals some of the difficulties newer language learners experience with oral completion tasks, where misunderstanding of prompt words may impact their responses.

Chapter 6 details Koike's study of discourse between L1 and L2 English speakers in the USA. Secondary data, of informal interviews, is examined for L2 pragmatic adjustments. These are related to Goffman's (1974) frames of discourse, generating some useful observations around the influence of institutional roles on pragmatic expressions and who instigates conversation. Koike discusses how frames of discourse guide people's use of pragmatic resources, and how the desire to change frames can also be signalled through these same resources. Frames are more likely to contrast in intercultural interactions, making these exchanges useful for observing how misunderstandings are resolved.

In Chapter 7, Woodfield provides a clearly detailed examination of pragmalinguistic awareness in L2 use of British English. The longitudinal study, involving eight graduate students from Asia, focussed on perceptions around socio-contextual influences and appropriate forms of language. Data were generated from open role-plays followed by retrospective verbal reports (RVRs). Findings illustrate the multiple challenges learners experience when trying to formulate requests appropriately. The chapter provides valuable insight into the use of introspective methodology, and the effectiveness of combining elicitation data with RVRs. It highlights particular considerations needed on the timing of RVRs, and the language used within them.

Compennolle and William's study of L2 learners of French in a US university is described in Chapter 8. Their specific focus is the use of T/V in relation to external (social) and internal (linguistic) factors. Data were generated in asynchronous online discussions between mixed groups of learners from three stages of L2 study. Although the study found high levels of appropriate use of second person pronouns, it also identified the problems learners experience with them. Methodological considerations include the need to refine task design to make it appropriate for asynchronous computer-mediated discourse while avoiding over-simplification of the situations analyzed, to ensure the richness of data.

Chapter 9 is a reflection on research design for exploring pragmatic variation and variational pragmatics. Cohen discusses potential research approaches to a hypothetical doctor/patient interaction. There is useful discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of methods involving naturally occurring (including corpora) and elicited data (judgement tasks, DCTs and role plays), and the sociolinguistic influences that can be explored. It is worth reflecting that these are discussed in isolation from the ethical concerns that would be paramount in

a study of medical interaction, and which might significantly limit the range of options available.

In Chapter 10, Terkourafi's critical review of methodologies associated with pragmatic variation and variational pragmatics is broader in scope, as it is not tied to a hypothetical research question. It is however, one of the more challenging chapters to read. Her examination of key concepts, theoretical principles and methodologies concludes with her own proposal for methodological approaches that facilitate progression beyond pragmatics and sociolinguistics to expose the social dimensions that emerge from data. Terkourafi reinforces the subjectivity and cultural sensitivity relating to all social factors which research methods need to account for, and embrace.

In the final chapter, the editors conclude the book with a useful table summarizing the key points and methods adopted in each chapter. The editors outline the purpose of qualitative studies to tease out the detail of pragmatic variation and participants' perceptions of pragmatic competence. In contrast, quantitative research analyses the frequency and patterns of pragmatic variation and the impact of sociolinguistic variables. They then problematize data collection and analysis in qualitative and quantitative approaches, again outlining these issues in a clear tabular format. The editors signpost some areas for further study, including pragmatic variation within prosody and intonation, pragmatic variation in situations involving language contact, and a focus on the lesser studied social variables of age, class, ethnicity and religion.

This collection of different approaches to pragmatic variation and variational pragmatics illustrates the range of methodological approaches that can be adopted, and helpfully relates them to specific L1 and L2 contexts. The studies outlined here involve experimental data, analysis of natural discourse, and introspective methods. Many of them share the common theme of adopting multi-method approaches commensurate with capturing the complexity of perceptions and rationale behind language use. Two methodological themes that recur are the value of video data, which capture richer material for analysis, and the need to consider the abilities of L2 learners in research design.

The complexity of the theoretical concepts in pragmatic variation can be difficult to disentangle, and the authors do this with varying degrees of success, with some chapters making for easier reading than others. Overall, this volume is a valuable resource for masters or doctoral students and more seasoned researchers, providing inspiration for study of language in both face-to-face and computer-mediated situations. This is a welcome and complementary contribution to the existing knowledge around cross-cultural pragmatic variation and intercultural studies, which reinforces the understanding that variational pragmatics can be extended to include intra-lingual variation in a language used as L1 or L2.

References

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