

Variational pragmatics meets contrastive pragmatics: English and German in Namibia

Friederike Kern (Bielefeld) & Anne Schröder (Bielefeld)

While variational pragmatics looks at intralingual variation in pluricentric languages (Schneider & Barron 2008; Barron 2017), contrastive approaches to pragmatics traditionally compare interlingual differences from a cross-cultural (Wierzbicka 1991; Spencer-Oatey 2008) or intercultural perspective (Cogo & House 2017). Hence, we find descriptions of the pragmatic differences between English and German (e.g. House 1996; House 2006), English and Japanese (Tanaka, Spencer-Oatey, Cray 2008), or Greek and German speakers (Pavlidou 2008), to name just a few. Similarly, there are studies on pragmatic variation in Austrian and German German (e.g. Muhr 2008; Wurga 2008), in Western and Eastern German (Birkner & Kern 2008), Cameroonian and hexagonal French (Mulo Farenkia 2015) or in Irish, American and English English (e.g. Schneider 2005), respectively. However, to our knowledge these approaches to pragmatic variation have hardly ever been combined so far.

The presented research project addresses this gap by investigating pragmatic phenomena in Namibia from a variational pragmatics as well as from a contrastive perspective. Because with independence, English was made the only official language of this multi-ethnic country, which, however, also has a German colonial past and seems to be the only former German colony, in which the language is still spoken to some considerable degree (Wiese et al. ms). Hence, in Namibia we find English and German spoken both as a first (L1) and as a second/foreign (L2) language (Buschfeld & Schröder fc.; Pütz 1992), and this allows for a fourfold comparison: 1. a comparison between English as spoken in Namibia and English as spoken in so-called 'established' L1-varieties (see also Schröder & Schneider fc.2019); 2. a comparison between German German and Namibian German; 3. a comparison between Namibian English and Namibian German; and finally, 4. a comparison between L1 and L2 varieties of English and of German.

To this end, we will analyse German and English data on Responses to Thanks collected in Namibia, the US, England, Ireland, and Germany, using an English and a German version of the same mixed-task multi-focus questionnaire (cf. Schneider 2005: 110-111 for details), warranting immediate comparability. This will allow us to make substantiated statements on the intralingual as well as on the interlingual variation of English and German in Namibia and to describe Namibian particularities with regard to both languages. As these may concern more than one of the languages spoken in this multilingual ecology, this may eventually also help to establish pragmatic and cultural differences between different ethnicities and speaker groups in the Namibian context and beyond.

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