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New Methods and Insights

Edited by Heike Pichler

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Introduction: discourse-pragmatic variation and change

Heike Pichler

Background

Following Macaulay's (2002, 2005) repeated calls for a fuller integration of discourse-pragmatic features into the variationist research agenda, the last decade or so has seen an unprecedented upsurge in quantitative research investigating patterns of variation and change in the use of conventionalised, polyfunctional linguistic items and constructions such as *innit*, *you know*, *as I say*, and *stuff like that*, *you get what I mean*, *at the end of the day*. The growing scholarly fascination with these features is reflected in an expanding number of journal articles exploring their variability and trajectories of change (see later pages for selected references), the recent and forthcoming publication of several book-length treatments investigating their structured heterogeneity in synchronic dialect data (see, for example, Aijmer 2013; Andersen 2001; Buchstaller 2014; D'Arcy in prep.; Macaulay 2005; Pichler 2013; Tagliamonte 2016) as well as a flourishing international conference series dedicated specifically to their quantitative analysis (www.dipvac.org). In her analysis of the state of the field, Pichler (2013: 6–9) has attributed the international surge in variationist studies of discourse-pragmatic features to two factors: their recent theoretical reconceptualisation as integral elements of the linguistic system (see, *inter alia*, Brinton 2006; Diewald 2006; Kaltenböck *et al.* 2011; Traugott 2003; and contributions in Degand and Simon-Vandenberg 2011); and recent methodological advancements in accountably quantifying their variability (see, *inter alia*, Buchstaller 2009, 2011; Cheshire 2007; D'Arcy 2005; Pichler 2010, 2013; Pichler and Levey 2011; Wagner *et al.* 2015).

Because of the myriad complexities involved in defining discourse-pragmatic features as linguistic variables (see Buchstaller [2009]; Pichler [2010, 2013: Ch. 2]; Tagliamonte [2012: Ch. 9] for details), early variationist discourse studies have tended to focus on individual items or constructions (e.g., *don't you think*, *eh*, *I mean*, *I think*, *presumably*, *you know*, *you see*) and compared their frequency and functionality across social groups, without acknowledging that these features are embedded within a broader variable

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system (see, for example, Erman 1992; Holmes 1986, 1990, 1995; Macaulay 1995; Stubbe and Holmes 1995; Woods 1991; but see Cheshire 1981; Dines 1980; Ferrara 1997). Nonetheless, by demonstrating that the use of discourse-pragmatic features – like that of features at other levels of the linguistic system – is variable, changeable and socially indexical, these studies have laid the groundwork for subsequent work which has developed methods for quantifying discourse-pragmatic variation in maximally accountable ways. These more recent studies have generally analysed individual discourse-pragmatic features in the context of their functionally-, positionally- and/or derivationally-equivalent co-variants, and extended the focus of analysis to the intra-linguistic conditioning of discourse-pragmatic variation and change (see, *inter alia*, Andersen 2001; Buchstaller 2006a, 2008, 2014; Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009; Cheshire 2007; D’Arcy 2005, 2007; Denis 2011, 2015; Diskin 2015; Drager 2010, 2011; Fox 2012; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Levey 2006a; Levey *et al.* 2013; Macaulay 2001, 2006; Pichler 2009, 2013; Pichler and Levey 2011; Rodríguez Louro 2013; Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2004, 2009; Tagliamonte and Denis 2010; Waters 2013). The methodological advancements have inspired an increasing number of studies that provide important insights into the sociolinguistic mechanisms underlying discourse-pragmatic variation and change, and thus make important contributions to current theories of language variation and change. Yet despite having ‘progressed substantially in recent years’ (Macaulay 2013: 230) and having contributed important theoretical insights, quantitative variationist research of discourse-pragmatic features continues to be dwarfed by studies of phonological and morpho-syntactic variables in terms of number, scope and impact.

This volume brings together a group of scholars widely recognised for their contributions to discourse-pragmatic variation and change research, with the purpose of stimulating the vitality and growth of this line of research. To meet this objective, the volume assembles an authoritative and original collection of articles which: (i) introduce a range of contrasting yet complementary new methods specifically tailored to the requirements of studying *discourse-pragmatic* variation and change; and (ii) provide new empirical and theoretical insights into the sociolinguistic dimensions of discourse-pragmatic variation and change in contemporary varieties of English. With its dual focus on presenting innovative methods as well as new results, the volume will provide an important resource for both newcomers and veterans in the field of discourse variation analysis alike, and spark discussions that will set new directions for future work in the field.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will first set out the terminology and define the scope of the volume (‘Terminology and scope’). I will then outline in more detail the overarching aims of the volume (‘Overarching aims’).

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Following a brief description of the general structure of the volume ('Organisation'), I will offer a brief overview of individual contributions ('Overview') before sketching out the general themes to emerge from the collection of contributions ('Implications'). In doing so, I will evaluate the strengths of the approaches advocated by the volume contributors, and indicate why and where they should be reapplied. I will also discuss how the findings presented in this volume refine current models of discourse-pragmatic variation and change, and what implications this may have for future research (design).

Terminology and scope

At the outset, it is important to clarify the contributors' use of terminology and delimit the empirical scope of the volume. The linguistic features examined in the following chapters include a heterogeneous category of items and constructions such as *so*, *in he*, *as I say*, and *what have you*, *you get what I mean* which share neither a common set of formal linguistic properties nor an agreed upon macro-label (see, *inter alia*, Brinton [1996: Ch. 2, 2008: Ch. 1]; Fischer [2006b]; Jucker and Ziv [1998]; Schourup [1999] for overviews of relevant debates). Moreover, they perform vastly different micro-functions such as modifying propositions (*so*), seeking corroboration of propositions (*in he*), marking continuation (*as I say*), extending sets (*and what have you*), seeking hearer involvement (*you get what I mean*) etc. Many researchers indiscriminately label such features 'discourse markers' (DMs), 'pragmatic markers' (PMs) or 'discourse particles' (DPs). Others, by contrast, make a typological distinction among DMs which perform a structural role, PMs which signal speaker stance, and DPs which have scalar or modal meaning (Fraser 1990; Schourup 1999; but see also Blakemore 1987; Schiffrin 1987; and contributions in Abraham 1991). Because these conceptual distinctions are not consistently applied in the literature and because individual features can function across the macro-functions ascribed to DMs, PMs and DPs (see, for example, Kärkkäinen [2003] on *I think*), this volume has adopted the alternative, conceptually more neutral label 'discourse-pragmatic features' to refer to the category of linguistic items and constructions studied by its contributors. What unites this super-category of formally, functionally and syntactically heterogeneous features is that (i) they perform a range of interpersonal and/or textual functions in discourse; (ii) their use is motivated first and foremost by their functionality. (For a more detailed definition of the category of 'discourse-pragmatic features', see, for example, Pichler [2013: 4–6].) Based on these properties, the contributors conceptualise the features studied in this volume as *discourse-pragmatic* variables rather than lexical or morpho-syntactic variables, two alternative classifications applied, for example, to quotatives

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(see Buchstaller [2014: 251–2] for details). In addition to the macro-label ‘discourse-pragmatic features’, the contributors employ micro-labels such as ‘quotatives’, ‘utterance-final tags’ or ‘discourse *like*’ to refer to the specific (set of) item(s) or construction(s) that they analyse and discuss. (The micro-labels used are generally a telling indicator of how the variable (context) or scope of analysis was defined, for example, in terms of function, position or form.) When contributors *do* adopt the labels DM, PM or DP, they do so in full knowledge of their underlying conceptual bases.

The discourse-pragmatic variables examined in the volume include both under-explored and well-researched variables: interjections (e.g., *So duh*), vocatives (e.g., *Trust me, bruv*), text-organising features (e.g., *Er as I say like*), response elicitors (e.g., *I will concentrate more and focus when I'm by myself. Do you get what I'm saying?*) (Andersen); adverb-like features (e.g., *Now, food was rationed*) (Waters); question tags (e.g., *It's a sin, innit*) (Pichler); utterance-final tags (e.g., *I had a class with her, right*) (Denis and Tagliamonte); general extenders (e.g., *I had a couple of colds or whatever*) (Tagliamonte; Wagner *et al.*); quotatives (e.g., *I was like, 'Oh my god'*) (Rodríguez Louro; Levey); intensifiers (e.g., *I know who really matters in my life*) (Fuchs and Gut); and discourse *like* (e.g., *She's like skinny*) (Drager). The use of these variables is examined in dialects of the following inner- and outer-circle Englishes: UK English (Andersen; Waters; Pichler; Tagliamonte; Fuchs and Gut); Canadian English (Waters; Denis and Tagliamonte; Levey); Australian English (Rodríguez Louro); Indian, Philippine and Singapore English (Fuchs and Gut); American English (Wagner *et al.*); and New Zealand English (Drager). The volume thus covers a wide spectrum of variables and varieties, and generates a broad knowledge base on which future work can build.

Overarching aims

The volume was developed to showcase and promote the variationist analysis of discourse-pragmatic features in synchronic and longitudinal English dialect data. Some of the key players in the field were invited to contribute chapters which explore original and variegated avenues in discourse-pragmatic variation and change research, and which address the two overarching aims of the volume. They are: (i) to offer new empirical and theoretical insights into the mechanisms underlying discourse-pragmatic variation and change; and (ii) to provide new methodological and theoretical suggestions for approaching the complexities of analysing variation and change in this component of language.

The contributors readily and enthusiastically heeded the invitation to design studies that would allow them to demonstrate the richness and diversity of discourse variation research, and advance current understanding of the social and system-internal dimensions of discourse-pragmatic

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variation and change. Thus, the analyses of the well-researched quotative, general extender, intensifier and discourse *like* variables were designed to examine their variable use in new data sources, varieties and populations (Tagliamonte; Rodríguez Louro; Levey); probe new dimensions of their variability (Fuchs and Gut; Drager); and test long-standing, conflicting claims in the literature about their sociolinguistic conditioning (Wagner *et al.*). The analyses and discussions of the less widely studied interjection, vocative, tag and adverb variables were configured to identify and document innovations in their repertoires and usage patterns (Andersen; Pichler); probe the mechanisms underlying their innovation (Denis and Tagliamonte); and evaluate different approaches to systematically studying patterns of variation and change in their use (Waters). To maximise the impact of their studies, the contributors were asked to situate their findings in the broader context of the variationist literature and point out potential implications of their findings for future work in the field. The contributions in this volume thus broaden and deepen our understanding of the details of discourse-pragmatic variation and change, and encourage new ways of thinking about variability at this level of linguistic structure.

In order to explore the research avenues outlined, the contributors chose to refine and reassess established ways of approaching the analysis of discourse-pragmatic features within a variationist framework (Labov 1972b). As a result, the volume introduces alternative ways of identifying discourse-pragmatic innovations and analysing them in mega-corpora (Andersen; Pichler; Fuchs and Gut); coding discourse-pragmatic features for their semantic-pragmatic variability and mutability (Denis and Tagliamonte; Wagner *et al.*); elucidating the nature, trajectory and acquisition of discourse-pragmatic change (Denis and Tagliamonte; Tagliamonte; Rodríguez Louro; Levey); and exploring how discourse-pragmatic features are manipulated in the construction of stances and styles (Drager). Moreover, several contributors address an issue that remains contentious for some: whether (all) discourse-pragmatic features should be conceptualised as linguistic variables, and how much flexibility is required and/or acceptable to define them as variables (Waters; Pichler; Denis and Tagliamonte; Cheshire). The great value of the methods and approaches advocated in the volume is demonstrated in the results they reveal (see 'Overview' for details). To facilitate future replication (see Macaulay [2003] on the value of replication), contributors were asked to describe their methods in some detail, outline their rationale, and discuss how they could be applied to the analysis of other discourse-pragmatic variables and/or the pursuit of different research objectives. By presenting contrasting but complementary methods and approaches to analysing the complexities of discourse-pragmatic variation and change, the volume constitutes an important resource for scholars new to

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the field as well as those keen to expand their approach to studying variation and change in the use of discourse-pragmatic features.

Organisation

The chapters in this volume deal with multiple, overlapping issues pertinent to discourse variation research. As a result, any attempt to partition the volume into narrowly thematic sections risks distracting from the combined strength of the contributions. Notwithstanding the fact that *all* chapters address key methodological issues in the study of discourse-pragmatic variation and change, I have structured the volume into four parts that reflect the range of issues covered. What serves to unify the four parts and all contributions is their fundamental concern with providing new empirical results and advancing methodological approaches.

- I: **Methods.** The two chapters in this part by Andersen and Waters set out methods for identifying innovative discourse-pragmatic forms and for conceptualising both new and old forms as discourse-pragmatic variables.
- II: **Innovations.** This part of the volume features two chapters, one by Pichler and the other by Denis and Tagliamonte, which detail methods for uncovering innovations in the use of well-established discourse-pragmatic forms and for elucidating the nature of discourse-pragmatic innovations.
- III: **Change:** In this part of the volume, Tagliamonte, Rodríguez Louro and Levey provide longitudinal perspectives on discourse-pragmatic change and explore children's participation in discourse-pragmatic changes in progress.
- IV: **Variation:** Fuchs and Gut's, Wagner *et al.*'s and Drager's chapters in the final part of the volume examine the effect of register (formality, familiarity) on discourse-pragmatic variation and demonstrate the role of discourse-pragmatic variables in signalling speaker stance.

The volume concludes with an epilogue by Jenny Cheshire, one of the first scholars to investigate discourse-pragmatic variation (see Cheshire 1981) and the scholar whose foundational work in the field has inspired this volume.

Overview

To help readers locate the chapters that are most relevant to their interests and needs, I will provide a brief overview of the volume. My descriptions will focus on detailing which variables and varieties were studied in each chapter, which goals were pursued and what results were produced. Because research themes cut across chapters, I will evaluate their collective implications and impact in the next section.

The volume begins with two chapters focusing on **methods** in discourse variation research. In the first chapter ('Using the corpus-driven method to

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chart discourse-pragmatic change'), **Andersen** advocates combining corpus-based and corpus-driven methods for identifying discourse-pragmatic innovations. Andersen argues that a major drawback of the corpus-based approach (the standard approach in discourse variation studies) is that data extraction is determined by researchers' prior knowledge of variant forms; this risks inclusion in the analysis of only a sub-set of relevant variants and not accounting for previously undocumented ones. The corpus-driven method overcomes these limitations by calculating the frequency of individual words and word sequences in corpora; subsequent comparison of these frequency and co-occurrence patterns across corpora recorded at different time points facilitates the identification of potentially innovative variants. In addition to outlining the key steps of this approach, Andersen illustrates its value by applying it to an analysis of discourse-pragmatic innovations in contemporary London English. His analysis reveals a number of forms and constructions that are strong candidates for innovation, such as *duh*, *blood*, *at the end of the day* and *you get what I'm saying*. As such, it provides a useful addition to recent studies exploring discourse-pragmatic change in this variety (see, *inter alia*, Andersen 2001; Cheshire *et al.* 2008, 2011; Fox 2012; Pichler Chapter 3; Torgersen *et al.* 2011).

Chapter 2 by **Waters** ('Practical strategies for elucidating discourse-pragmatic variation') addresses the two fundamental questions underpinning any variationist analysis (of discourse-pragmatic features): how to define the variable, and how to circumscribe the variable context? Waters's review of previous discourse variation studies demonstrates that scholars have variously defined discourse-pragmatic variables on the basis of semantic, functional or derivational equivalence between variants, and that they have variously appealed to form, function and/or position to circumscribe the envelope of variation. Waters does not challenge this lack of conceptual uniformity but argues that it is a necessary reflection of the heterogeneous nature of the category of discourse-pragmatic features which have been examined. She supports this view in her detailed discussion of how to quantify the variable use of adverbs with discourse-pragmatic functions (e.g., *actually*, *really*, *now*). The use of these features is notoriously difficult to quantify because of their positional mobility, inherent multifunctionality and lack of semantic bleaching. Waters concludes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to studying discourse-pragmatic variables; accountable variationist analyses of discourse-pragmatic features must be designed to accommodate the specific characteristics of the feature studied as well as the specific goals of the study conducted.

The second part of the volume on **innovations** opens with a chapter by **Pichler** (Chapter 3) ('Uncovering discourse-pragmatic innovations: *innit* in Multicultural London English') which investigates the use of *innit* and other

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negative-polarity interrogative tags in a socially stratified corpus of contemporary London English. By closely investigating variants' positional, scopal, functional and social properties, Pichler uncovers that *innit* and a small number of its derivationally-equivalent co-variants are rapidly innovating in this variety. Their use is no longer restricted to right-periphery, clause-final positions but extends to the clausal left periphery and positions adjacent to left-dislocated and lone noun phrases. In these positions, *innit* and other variants broadly function to secure hearer involvement (e.g., *Innit, I don't like trains.*) and to facilitate referent activation (e.g., *The sister, innit, she's about five times bigger than me.*). These innovations had gone unnoticed in two previous analyses of *innit* in the same dataset which had paid insufficient attention to the form's variable position and scope (Palacios Martínez 2015; Torgersen *et al.* 2011). Pichler argues that identification of these innovations and exploration of how they become embedded in any pre-existing system is made possible by adopting an empirically- and theoretically-grounded but flexible approach to defining the variable (context), thus supporting Waters's proposal in Chapter 2.

In the next chapter (Chapter 4) ('Innovation, *right?* Change, *you know?* Utterance-final tags in Canadian English'), Denis and Tagliamonte draw on a socially stratified corpus of Toronto English to explore innovations in the system of utterance-final tags (UFTs), i.e., 'any utterance-final discourse feature [such as *you know, right, yeah, eh*] that primarily communicates to a hearer that the preceding proposition contains shared knowledge'. Their analysis reveals that the UFT system is dominated by *right* and *you know*, with the former increasing and the latter decreasing in frequency in apparent time. To assess whether this pattern reflects ongoing grammaticalisation, whereby *right* is gradually expanding into the discourse contexts of *you know*, or lexical replacement, whereby *right* simply replaces *you know*, Denis and Tagliamonte code UFTs for the discourse contexts in which they occur. Distributional results suggest that as the status of *right* changes from innovative to majority variant, it is expanding in use across discourse contexts. However, a grammaticalisation hypothesis is rejected by the results of sophisticated statistical tests which show a lack of differences in the number of discourse contexts in which different generations of Torontonians use *right*, suggesting that *right* was available across contexts from the outset. Denis and Tagliamonte thus conclude that the rise of *right* in Toronto English is a case of lexical replacement.

Part III on **change** opens with two chapters offering a diachronic perspective on contemporary discourse-pragmatic variation patterns. Tagliamonte's chapter (Chapter 5) ('Antecedents of innovation: exploring general extenders in conservative dialects') draws on a database of four relic dialects spoken in peripheral communities in the north of United Kingdom in order to explore the

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use of general extenders (GEs), i.e., constructions such as *and stuff*, or *something like that* which prototypically serve a set-extending function but also frequently perform interpersonal and textual functions. Because relic dialects tend to preserve earlier stages of language development longer than mainstream dialects, they can serve as a proxy for diachronic data from which an earlier stage of GE development can be deduced. Analysis of these data thus allows Tagliamonte to test conflicting claims in the literature that synchronic patterns of GE variability are a product of grammaticalisation (Aijmer 2002; Cheshire 2007 vs. Pichler and Levey 2011; Tagliamonte and Denis 2010). Tagliamonte's analysis of two measures of grammaticalisation, syntagmatic length and co-occurrence with other discourse-pragmatic features, demonstrates that short GE variants such as *and (all) (that)* dominate the GE system in the relic data and that co-occurrence rates are higher with shorter than with longer GEs. Thus, Tagliamonte argues, the predominance of short GEs in synchronic dialect data is not a reflex of grammaticalisation but the retention of a conservative pattern of GE use in northern UK Englishes.

Chapter 6 by **Rodríguez Louro** ('Quotatives across time: West Australian English then and now') investigates quotative variation (e.g., *And he says*, *'Well, that's her thing.'* *She's like*, *'Oh.'*) in spontaneous narratives of personal experience collected from Western Australian adults born between 1870 and 1980. The diachronic perspective afforded by these data enables Rodríguez Louro to establish dramatic changes in the choice of quotative variants as well as the performance of narratives between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries. Although *say* constitutes the majority variant throughout the time-frame covered by the data, it is gradually being replaced by other variants, including *zero*, *think*, *go* and, negligibly, *be like*. The ingress of non-*say* quotative variants is accompanied by an increase in self-revelations through reports of inner thoughts, feelings and attitudes. This observation leads Rodríguez Louro to posit that the changes affecting the constitution of the quotative variant pool and the linguistic conditioning of the *say* variant are inseparably intertwined with changes to how quoted content is used in narratives (see D'Arcy [2012] for similar developments in New Zealand English). According to Rodríguez Louro, it is the increase in internal thought-encoding that ultimately gives rise to the incursion of *be like* into late twentieth-century Australian English.

The third and final chapter on change by **Levey** (Chapter 7) ('The role of children in the propagation of discourse-pragmatic change: insights from the acquisition of quotative variation') explores how preadolescents acquire the innovating quotative variant *be like* (e.g., *She was like*, *'Don't do this to me.'*). Levey examines the formal constitution of the quotative system and its underlying variable grammar in three complementary datasets of Ottawa English: recent recordings of children aged eight to nine and eleven to twelve (to probe

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fine-grained age differences in the acquisition process); recent recordings of adults (to incorporate an apparent-time component and situate children's usage patterns in relation to community norms); and recordings of children and adults made in the early 1980s (to introduce a diachronic control and verify the existence of change). Levey's analysis of these datasets reveals that preadolescents participate in and advance changes affecting the quotative system: the children have acquired the form *be like* and its linguistic constraints. However, subtle differences between younger and older children's variable grammars for *be like* show that younger children's variable grammar is less closely aligned with that of adults in the community than older children's. Based on these results, Levey proposes that the acquisition of adult-like patterns of discourse-pragmatic variation is a more prolonged process than that of phonological variation.

The final part of the volume on **variation** begins with two chapters on register variation. **Fuchs and Gut's** chapter (Chapter 8) ('Register variation in intensifier usage across Asian Englishes') introduces two complementary methods for the semi-automatic analysis of discourse-pragmatic variation: cluster analysis, used to uncover variation patterns across independent variables; and phenograms, used to visualise these patterns and facilitate their interpretation. Following a very detailed outline of these methods, Fuchs and Gut apply them to their investigation of the combined effect of register and variety on variation in the use of intensifiers, i.e., items such as *very* and *hardly* which are used to modify the following word. Their analysis of intensifier use in twelve registers of three Asian Englishes recorded in the *International Corpus of English* (Indian, Philippine and Singapore English) confirms Aijmer's (2013) recent findings that register and variety dramatically affect discourse-pragmatic variation patterns. It reveals: (i) variety-consistent effects of formality on intensifier frequency (higher frequency in spoken/less formal than written/more formal registers); and (ii) more marked cross-variety intensifier frequency differentials in informal than formal registers. Moreover, the authors find that the three Asian varieties do not share a uniform pattern of intensifier use; they differ in terms of intensifier frequency and variant distribution. Fuchs and Gut explain these differences with reference to the varieties' differential socio-political development.

While Fuchs and Gut's study focuses on comparing variable and variant frequencies across registers, **Wagner et al.'s** study in Chapter 9 ('The use of referential general extenders across registers') is concerned with comparing variable frequencies and *functions* across registers. The comparison is of GE use in two corpora of US English which are comparable in terms of speaker demographics but differentiated by register: talk between familiars vs. talk between non-familiars. The analysis challenges the reliability of previous work which has relied on GE frequency comparisons to propose that register exerts