Book Review


Discourse-Pragmatic Variation and Change: Theory, Innovations, Contact is a well-researched volume that advances the research on discourse-pragmatic variation and change by exploring the theories, innovations and studies on language contact that have taken place in the field. According to the editors, Elizabeth Peterson, Turo Hiltunen and Joseph Kern, the book aims “to demonstrate the multiple, integrative threads of research that contribute to the overall quality and robustness of the field” (p. 1) of discourse-pragmatic variation and change by bringing together established and emerging scholars who are working in the area. The book comprises thirteen chapters which thematically trifurcate into “Innovations in Theory and Method”, “Innovative Variables in English” and “Language Contact”. The chapters address different kinds of discourse-pragmatic features, including discourse-pragmatic markers, quotatives, intensifiers, general extenders and politeness markers.

Part 1 captures four chapters that focus on theoretical issues and methodological questions. In Chapter 1, Derek Denis explores how pragmatic markers such as epistemic parentheticals (e.g., I think, I guess) develop abruptly, rather than through gradual development. He combines real-time and apparent-time approaches to document the changes that have taken place over time in data obtained from 20th century Southern Ontario English. He supports his argument with the theory of Constant Rate Effect and the conceptualisation of grammaticalisation as abrupt reanalysis. He submits that the lexical items that occur at clause-initial and clause-final positions and that already trigger “implicatures consistent with the meanings that are conventionalized by functional heads” above complementiser phrases can be reanalysed as pragmatic markers (p. 37). Erik Schleef and Bradley Mackay, in Chapter 2, examine the pragmatic
marker you know by using matched guise tests in order to ascertain the influence of social factors such as age and sex on the evaluation of the marker. They argue that you know is not a non-standard feature and that age and sex have no influence on the evaluation of the marker, except for working-class individuals who rate the users of you know as less formal or less fluent than other people.

In Chapter 3, Steven Levey, Laura Kastronic, Salvio Digesto and Mélissa Chiasson investigate non-canonical quotatives such as être comme/como (be like), genre/genere (type/kind/sort) and faire/faire/fazer (to do) in three varieties of French (Quebec, Acadian and European varieties), Brazilian Portuguese and Italian. They argue that English is an insignificant factor in the rise of être comme, since être comme is present in Acadian French, which is spoken in a French-dominant area, and that the increase in its frequency relegates older quotatives such as dire ‘say’ to a less central role in the quotative system. Liesbeth Degand, Zoé Broissin, Ludivine Crible and Karolina Grzech, in Chapter 4, demonstrate the validity of an annotation scheme (a method that enriches corpus data with linguistic and extra-linguistic information), which was utilised to compare the use of discourse markers in four languages: French, Spanish, English and Polish. They affirm that the annotation scheme portrays the polysemous and polyfunctional nature of the discourse markers across the four languages. Their study also demonstrates that a high frequency of discourse markers have interpersonal functions in Spanish and Polish, most likely due to the large number of such discourse marker types in the two languages. Thus, their work is relevant to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies.

The four chapters in Part 2 of the book investigate discourse-pragmatic features that are rarely studied in varieties of English or that provide new insights into previously studied features. Chapter 5, written by Daniela Kolbe-Hanna and Laurel Brinton, discusses sentence-final is all in American English from a corpus-based synchronic and diachronic approach. They posit that is all, together with variants such as was all, which is used to signal the speaker’s desire for the addressee not to infer more than what has been said, developed from that’s all/that is all through phonological reduction, deletion, voicing and reanalysis. Chapter 6 by Karin Aijmer investigates the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic features of totally as an innovative intensifier in UK English. Her analysis shows that totally as an intensifier occurs in unusual syntactic contexts, such as its combination with scalar adjectives (e.g., totally nice, p. 136). Furthermore, totally is now used as a discourse marker, occurring as an emphasiser at the end of an utterance and as a response marker, where it “has lost its conceptual meaning” (p. 146).

In Chapter 7, Tim Gadanidis and Derek Denis investigate the distribution of uh and um in Canadian English, and use this account to defend the
normalisation method of counting discourse-pragmatic features. Through their analysis of interviews in the Earlier Ontario English Collection obtained in 1984, they suggest that *uh* appears to have expanded its functional range during this time, becoming more frequent in non-initial contexts, particularly among women. They affirm that normalised frequency data can be grouped based on linguistic and social constraints. Lastly, in Chapter 8, Mirjam Eiswirth explores listener responses in conversations involving different social groups in order to highlight the advantages of using interactional turns in conversations as units of (statistical) analysis. She defines listener responses as “the vocalized responses listeners can do during an ongoing (multi-unit) turn of the other speaker without taking over the floor” (p. 173), and identifies three types of listener responses: “listener-driven responses, speaker-driven responses, and responses driven by both speaker and listener to similar degrees” (p. 180). Using gender as a social variable, she reveals that male listeners offer more responses when the speakers are female, while female listeners produce fewer responses when the speakers are male.

Finally, Part 3 of the book, which comprises five chapters, investigates discourse-pragmatic variation within the context of language contact. Chapter 9 by Chloé Diskin-Holdaway is an investigation of the discourse-pragmatic marker *you know* in two L1 varieties of English (Irish English and Australian English speakers) and two L2 varieties (Polish and Chinese L1 speakers of English residing in Ireland). The author observes that while there was no significant difference in the frequency of *you know* between the two L1 groups, there was a near-significant difference in the frequency of *you know* between the L1 and L2 speakers. Moreover, the L2 speakers seem to favour *you know* for discourse-organising aims while the L1 speakers appear to favour *you know* for interpersonal functions. Although the study offers a number of very interesting results, the literature review section could have been enriched with studies that investigate discourse-pragmatic markers in African and Asian Englishes, examples of which include *well* in Xhosa English (de Klerk, 2005) and *so* in Hong Kong English (Lam, 2009).

In Chapter 10, Joseph Kern provides an interesting comparative study of English and Spanish general extenders (e.g., *or anything, y así*) in the speech of balanced bilinguals, who are equally proficient in English and Spanish. He notes that the contact between English and Spanish has no effect on the use of general extenders in the speech of the Spanish–English bilinguals. Although he claims that “general extenders have not been analysed in contact situations” (p. 213), there are some other previous studies on the subject, such as Aijmer’s (2013) examination of general extenders in Singapore English and Buysse’s (2014) exploration of general extenders in the utterances of
Dutch learners of English. Hélène Blondeau, Raymond Mougeon and Mireille Tremblay, in Chapter 11, investigate changes in the grammatical and discursive functions of the consequence markers (ça) fait (que), alors, donc and so in Canadian French by using data obtained from the 1970s and 2010s in Montreal, Quebec and Welland, Ontario. They note that the two varieties of Canadian French are related but spoken in different sociolinguistic contexts. They observe that while there was moderate divergence in the frequency of the markers in the 1970s, there was greater divergence in the frequency of the markers in the 2010s, across the two varieties.

Unlike Chapter 10, which focuses on discourse-pragmatic features in a second language context, the last two chapters of the volume focus on the use of discourse pragmatic-features in foreign language contexts. Chapter 12 by Gisle Andersen is an exploration of the functions of two borrowed English politeness markers and their alternate domestic variants, please/så snill vær and sorry/(jeg) beklager and unnskyld, which occur in requests and apologies, respectively, in four Norwegian corpora. He reveals that the Norwegian variants outnumber the Anglicised variants. He also observes that the illocutionary force of please is generally greater than that of its local competitor and it is mainly associated with a relatively strong commitment to the illocutionary act of requesting. On the other hand, sorry is largely linked to a weak commitment to the illocutionary act of apologising. Finally, in Chapter 13, Elizabeth Peterson, Turo Hiltunen and Johanna Vaattovaara examine the functions of a borrowed politeness marker pliis (please) and its interaction with the local variant kiitos in Finish by using two datasets: an opportunistic, experimental collection and a corpus compiled from web-scraped texts. They observe that pliis tends to occur in a clause-internal position in a request, while kiitos occurs at the end of a clause. They also note that pliis is associated with a more urban Helsinki style and is related to matters such as “solidarity, community, and positive politeness” (p. 291).

One of the strengths of this volume is that it contains chapters that focus on several varieties of different languages besides English, including Canadian French/French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Brazilian Portuguese, Polish and Spanish. In the case of English, varieties from the US, UK, Canada, Australia and Ireland are included. Moreover, these different chapters provide state-of-the-art reviews of the different discourse-pragmatic features under study and employ diverse approaches and methodologies that can be utilised to investigate similar phenomena elsewhere. The different results and discussions are interesting and inspiring and make valuable contributions to the field. Furthermore, the chapters raise questions that indicate the need for further research on the different subjects. However, the volume would
have been more interesting if the editors had included chapters that capture discourse-pragmatic variation and change in other parts of the world, such as Africa and Asia where an increasing amount of research is being conducted in the field.

Apart from this, the editors have done an exemplary job in putting together well-researched chapters that expand the scope of discourse-pragmatic variation and change. Therefore, scholars are invited not only to peruse the pages of the edited book, but to also take up the challenge of finding answers to some of the questions raised in the chapters.

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References


