Contrasting pragmatic choices in responding to thanks in Ireland, England and Canada
Anne Barron

Contrastivity and comparability are two of the central tenets of variational pragmatic research, a field focused on the comparison of pragmatic choices across present-day intralingual varieties. In recent years, discussions on a tertium comparationis, or ‘common platform of reference’ (Krzeszowski 1990: 15), have considered the applicability of the sociolinguistic concept of the variable to cross-varietal pragmatic studies (cf. Barron 2017; Jucker & Taavitsainen 2012; Pichler 2016; Schneider 2010; Staley 2018; Terkourafi 2012). The present paper takes up this discussion of contrastivity and comparability in cross-varietal speech act analyses. Specifically, it examines responses to thanks in the Lueneburg Direction-Giving (LuDiG) corpus, a corpus of direction-giving exchanges with informants in Canada, England and Ireland, and discusses some of the challenges of achieving comparability and of defining the pragmatic variable.

The analysis highlights the need for a multi-faceted definition of the variable and one which pays attention to the linguistic context. Like previous cross-varietal studies of responses to thanks in English (Bieswanger 2015; Farenkia 2013; Schneider 2005; Schröder/Schneider 2018), the study shows the importance of position as a second pair part as well as function in guiding the analysis, but it also highlights the need for a definition relating to sequential position. On a sociopragmatic level, the study highlights variation in preferences for a zero realisation across varieties. It also reveals how an alternative definition of the variable may shed a different light on findings.

References: