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“Meta-pragmatic reasoning and oral speech act performance in Namibian English – OFFERS and RESPONSES TO THANKS from a qualitative and quantitative perspective”

The research project “A Pragmatic Profile of Namibian English” investigates the pragmatics of Namibian English (NamE) using a multi-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative elicitation methods. Its underlying goal is to do justice to the complex cultural and linguistic ecology of Namibia, within which NamE has a unique role and status (cf. Schröder 2021). We do so by means of an ethnographically grounded and data-driven approach to the investigation of speech acts, informed by both variational pragmatics (see e.g. Schneider 2021) and Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz and Thornberg 2020).

A methodologically challenging and intriguing part of our data is a collection of oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT) answers with corresponding qualitative interviews following the DCT elicitation, which was specifically intended to engage participants in meta-reflection about cognitive processes, ideas and beliefs underlying their speech act performance. This data is immensely useful for testing the ecological validity of the DCT study, but also provides insights into explicitly reflected as well as implicitly operative social, cultural and individual factors that influence speech act realization strategies chosen by our informants.

In this presentation, we will first provide a brief overview of our findings regarding speech act performance for OFFERS and RESPONSES TO THANKS in NamE. We will then exemplarily demonstrate how the interview data helps us to illuminate aspects that would not be easily interpretable from the quantitative analysis of speech act production alone. Finally, we will discuss some general insights into the socio-cultural ‘logic’ underlying communicative interactions in NamE gained from analyzing the interview data, specifically concerning questions of politeness, status, power, and speaker attitude. We will conclude by emphasizing the both context- and culture-dependent nature of communicative action, for which performance data only represents the tip of the iceberg.

References

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