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An Ethnographically Grounded Approach to Speech Act Research – the Case of Responses to Thanks in Namibian English

Speech act research in Variational Pragmatics has a long tradition in eliciting data via Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaires and analyzing the resulting data based on the CCSARP coding manual (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). While adhering to this tradition, we have extended and refined this method in the context of an ongoing research project on the pragmatics of Namibian English (NamE). Most importantly, we have developed a questionnaire with new DCT scenarios specifically for the Namibian context from the ground up, based on insights from field notes, interview data, workshop results and close collaboration with colleagues at the University of Namibia. The resulting questionnaire elicits four different speech acts in seventeen scenarios and has been pre-tested and further improved based on impressions from a first round of data gathering. Furthermore, it has been administered both as a written questionnaire and as an interactive experiment recording oral responses.

In this talk, we will briefly explain the methodological rationale behind developing our questionnaire and its role in the larger project. We will then exemplarily present our findings on Responses to Thanks in NamE (for previous research, cf. Schröder & Schneider, 2021), with a focus on the situation-dependency of pragmatic strategies and differences between demographic groups within the community of practice studied, namely students at the University of Namibia. The contrast between the two most common strategies, WELCOME and PLEASURE, will be discussed in detail. The findings will further be triangulated with qualitative data gathered from the same group of participants. In our conclusion, we will discuss the creation of a pragmatic profile as a pivotal technique in Variational Pragmatics, in this case for situating NamE within the larger context of World Englishes.

References

- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Schröder, A. & Schneider, K. P. (2021). A variational pragmatic approach to responses to thanks in Namibian English: From quantitative to qualitative analysis. In *The Dynamics of English in Namibia: Perspectives on an Emerging Variety*. (pp. 195-215). Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: Benjamins.