

## GEOGRAPHICAL CONTRAST IN VARIATIONAL PRAGMATICS

- Date:** July 30 – August 01, 2025
- Location:** Bielefeld (Germany)
- Invited speakers:** Jonathan Culpeper (Lancaster University)  
J. César Félix-Brasdefer (Indiana University)  
Jenny Nilsson (Isof Gothenburg)
- Discussants:** Antje Dammel (University of Münster) | Christa Dürscheid (University of Zurich) | Stephan Elspaß (University of Salzburg) | Ulrike Gut (University of Münster) | Eva Ogiermann (King's College London) | Klaus P. Schneider (University of Bonn)
- Organisers:** Tanja Ackermann, Henrik Discher, Anne Schröder, Pawel Sickinger, Horst Simon, Janel Zoske  
PraProNE ([www.uni-bielefeld.de/praprone](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/praprone)) and VariPrag ([vari prag.net](http://vari prag.net))

### Meeting Description

Since Schneider and Barron (2008) introduced the framework of *variational pragmatics*, there has been increasing interest in studying intralingual pragmatic variation. Variational pragmatics investigates pragmatic variation in both geographical and social space. This workshop, however, focuses specifically on the former. In this context, we are interested in all perspectives on the macro-social variable region, i.e., the national, sub-national, or local level.

Firstly, a central question concerns the geographical variable itself: What exactly shapes national and regional cultures and communities (see, e.g., van Dorst, Gillings & Culpeper 2024 on population density and politeness in Britain)? Given that region as such has little explanatory potential but hints at societal and cultural aspects, its complex interactions with other macro-social variables such as ethnic and cultural group membership or urbanity, age profile and socio-economic status of speakers are of great importance when investigating communicative language use (see Barron 2021 for an overview of the multiple facets of contexts).

Secondly, concerning geographical variation on the sub-national level, it is a non-trivial question of how region can be operationalized and modeled (e.g., by adopting geostatistical approaches). Also, the choice of participants matters: Traditionally, dialectology has mainly studied older, non-mobile men from rural areas to control for factors such as contact with other dialects. However, due to increased mobility, such an approach would not capture the reality of many people. As recent studies have shown, higher exposure to dialectal variation contributes to more dialect change (see, e.g., Jeszenszky, Steiner & Leemann 2024 on the calculation of a *Linguistic Mobility Index* for estimating long-term exposure to phonological variation). Concerning pragmatic variation, it is an open question whether a person's origin or their current place of residency, both clearly interrelated with social group membership, has a bigger influence on communicative language use.

Lastly, we are also interested in a metapragmatic perspective, which is relatively new to variational pragmatics research: Which pragmatic features are made salient (according) to members of particular communities? Which geographical areas are perceived as homogeneous from the perspective of communicative language use? Which contrasts between – regionally differentiated – groups of speakers are actively perceived or even reified as cultural stereotypes?

## References

- Barron, Anne. 2021. Contrastivity and comparability: Pragmatic variation across pluricentric varieties. *Sociolinguistica* 35 (1). 189–216.
- van Dorst, Isolde, Mathew Gillings & Jonathan Culpeper. 2024. Sociopragmatic variation in Britain : A corpus-based study of politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 227. 37–56.
- Jeszszky, Péter, Carina Steiner & Adrian Leemann. 2024. Effects of mobility on dialect change: Introducing the linguistic mobility index. (Ed.) Shiri Lev-Ari. *PLOS ONE* 19 (4).
- Schneider, Klaus P. & Anne Barron (eds.). 2008. *Variational pragmatics. A focus on regional varieties in pluricentric languages*. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 178). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

## Call for papers:

We invite contributions dealing with multi-standard languages as well as sub-national varieties of a language. We especially encourage contributions dealing with lesser-studied languages and varieties. Topics to be explored include, but are not restricted to:

- Cross-varietal comparisons of pragmatic variables
- The importance of the national, sub-national, or local level in pragmatics
- The social, cultural and ethnic dimension of geographical contrast in pragmatics
- Measures of linguistic mobility in pragmatics
- The influence of (local) linguistic and cultural ecologies on pragmatic preferences
- The perception (or construction) of geographical variation on a metapragmatic level
- Methodological approaches and challenges in variational pragmatics

We invite abstracts for 25-minute talks (+ 15minutes discussion). Abstracts should be anonymous and approximately 500 words in length, plus references. Please send your abstracts to [vari.ling@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:vari.ling@uni-bielefeld.de), and include your name, affiliation, and the title of the abstract in the body of the e-mail.

**Extended deadline for submission of abstracts:** February 3, 2025

**Notification of acceptance:** February 2025

For further information please contact: [vari.ling@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:vari.ling@uni-bielefeld.de)