The role of social and linguistic factors in the production of Nigerian English speech acts

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Previous studies investigating speech acts have shown various social and linguistic factors that influence speakers’ choice of speech acts can vary across varieties of English. For example, cultural differences in terms of hospitality have been proposed to explain differences in the choice of offers between English English and Irish English speakers (Barron 2005). Moreover, the social distance between interlocutors seems to determine the difference between speakers of the two varieties in the rate of re-offering after a refusal (Barron 2005). Factors influencing pragmatic choices by speakers of New Englishes have so far been researched mainly in studies focusing on a single type of speech act (e.g. Anchimbe 2018, Degenhardt 2021, Degenhardt & Bernaisch 2022, Gut & Unuabonah 2022) and using different methodologies such as discourse completion tasks (DCTs; Anchimbe 2018) and corpus-based studies (Degenhardt 2021, Degenhardt & Bernaisch 2022, Gut & Unuabonah 2022).

For Nigerian English, previous studies based on corpus data have suggested that, in contrast to British English, the factors social distance and power relationship do not determine the choice of requesting strategy (Gut & Unuabonah 2022). It is the aim of the present study to investigate the role of these factors across different speech acts produced by Nigerian English speakers, using DCTs. To this end, 800 offers, requests and refusals, respectively, that were elicited with DCTs were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively according to the speaker’s pragmatic strategy and the influence of the factors social distance, social power and formality of the context. The results show that the three social variables as well as the type of speech act influence the choice and linguistic forms of speech acts. There were also some interactions between the factors.

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