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Metapragmatic variation across the New Englishes: The use of the meta-illocutionary lexicon in British, Hong Kong, and Kenyan English

The meta-illocutionary lexicon is a subset of the ordinary language which comprises all inflectional and derivational variants of lexemes referring to illocutions (e.g., *request, commands, begging, thankful, apologetically*, etc.). It is used by ordinary language users to name, talk about, and discuss illocutions in context, and allows researchers to tap into first-order conceptualizations of linguistic actions (cf. Schneider 2017). While most research on the meta-illocutionary lexicon to date has focused primarily on native varieties of English (cf. Schneider 2021, 2022; Schoppa 2022), its use in the New Englishes remains largely overlooked. At the same time, studies on pragmatic variation across the New Englishes have mainly considered the use of pragmatic markers (cf., e.g., Leimgruber 2018, Unuabonah & Gut 2018) and speech act realization (cf., e.g., Anchimbe 2018, Schröder & Schneider 2018), but have largely ignored metapragmatic and metacommunicative aspects of language use.

The aim of the present talk is to combine the research areas of metapragmatics and/or metacommunication on the one hand, and (pragmatic) variation in the New Englishes on the other. In particular, this study considers ordinary language users' talk about three directive illocutions (*requesting, commanding, begging*) and three expressive illocutions (*thanking, apologizing, congratulating*) across British English, Hong Kong English, and Kenyan English. Based on empirical blogging data extracted from the appropriate GloWbE sub-corpora, instances of the meta-illocutionary lexicon in use were annotated for their communicative function in context. Following and applying Verschueren's (2021) notion of *metalinguistic activity types*, meta-illocutionary items in context generally realize DESCRIPTIVE, PERFORMATIVE, or SELF-REFERENTIAL functions. While the first two are defined by the pragmatic presupposition that the named illocution is or was performed felicitously (in the discursive here-and-now vs. displaced in time and/or space), the SELF-REFERENTIAL function comprises a wide variety of meta-comments on the felicity of actual or potential occurrences of the illocution in question.

The present study will compare both (a) quantitative distributions of these communicative functions and (b) function-to-form mappings for each communicative function, considering variation across illocutions on the one hand, and the selected varieties on the other. Preliminary results indicate that while references to directive illocutions are generally dominated by the DESCRIPTIVE function, references to expressive illocutions favor the PERFORMATIVE function; variation across individual directive illocutions and individual expressive illocutions are minimal respectively. However, there do exist some cross-varietal differences, which mainly pertain to the PERFORMATIVE function across expressives: Quantitatively, distributions of this function were similar for BrE and HKE, but higher – across all expressive illocutions – for KenE. Qualitatively, bloggers from Great Britain and Hong Kong tended to favor abbreviated forms to realize the PERFORMATIVE function (i.e., *thanks, apologies, congrats*), whereas Kenyan bloggers preferred the explicit performative (i.e., *I thank you, I congratulate you, I apologize*). In an overall plea for a combination of the two research paradigms involved, these and further upcoming results are discussed against the background of concepts from research on (the pragmatics of) New Englishes such as pragmatic transfer and fossilization, as well as the speech-act-theoretic notion of felicity and its first-order conceptualizations.

References

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