

Integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches in the study of DISAGREEMENTS in Hong Kong English

The study of World Englishes has traditionally focused on the structural description of varieties and largely neglected the level of pragmatics (E. W. Schneider, 2007, p. 47). Similarly, variation within the pragmatics of pluricentric languages has long been under-researched. Recently, however, the framework of Variational Pragmatics (K. P. Schneider & Barron, 2008), a framework originally developed for the analysis of pragmatic variation in first languages, has been applied to second language varieties (e.g., Schröder & Schneider, 2018). While Variational Pragmatics is methodologically flexible, studies are often based on elicited written data, which do neither necessarily reflect natural language use, nor allow for an interpersonal analysis. Especially, when trying to describe speech units that are negotiated across several turns and not realised with context-independently recognisable forms, such an approach becomes essential (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 60; Locher & Graham, 2021).

The present study deals with the identification, description and analysis of DISAGREEMENTS in Hong Kong English. Hong Kong constitutes a diverse speech community in which English still plays an important role despite changes in the socio-political context (Bolton et al., 2020). With speakers of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds coming together, variation on the pragmatic level can be expected. DISAGREEMENTS were traditionally conceptualised as face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987) and dispreferred (Pomerantz, 1984) but more recent work with a less Anglocentric focus has revealed their multifunctionality (Hoinărescu, 2016; Konakahara, 2015; Sifianou, 2012). Cultural influences on their realisation have also already been shown in conversations between Hongkongers and Americans (Cheng & Tsui, 2009). Following the methodological requirement of contrastivity (K. P. Schneider, 2010, pp. 252–253), Hong Kong Chinese are compared to Mainland Chinese, returnees and expats. In video recorded dyadic conversation, they talked to an acquainted or unacquainted person about uncontroversial topics, such as the local cuisine or entertainment industry. Within the conversations, sequences in which opinions or views are negotiated between the participants were identified and coded for the way in which concrete DISAGREEMENTS were realised. Moreover, the interlocutors were retrospectively asked in separate interviews about their perception of potential DISAGREEMENTS in their conversation. The aim is to reveal sociopragmatic variation in the realisation and assessment of DISAGREEMENTS within a speech community in which English has the status of a second language. The study employs qualitative methods to develop a taxonomy of the multimodal and multifunctional nature of DISAGREEMENTS and seeks to explore the opportunities and challenges when statistically measuring the influence of extralinguistic factors on the use of specific realisation strategies.

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