Constructing (in)formal communities: A theoretical perspective on the perception of pronominal address in South African German

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This contribution deals with a metapragmatic phenomenon in a lesser-known variety of German spoken in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province, sometimes called *Nataler Deutsch* or *Springbokdeutsch* (Franke 2008). Based on ongoing qualitative analysis of semi-structured sociolinguistic group interviews, my central preliminary claim is that in South African German, the German T- and V-pronouns (*Du* vs. *Sie*) have been re-indexicalized with social meanings that both draw from cultural stereotypes (about German-speaking South Africans as opposed to Germans from Germany) *and* pre-existing pragmatic functions, which constitutes a special case in socially meaningful language variation. With my presentation of these findings and interpretations, I aim to put forward a theoretical discussion about the relationship between (meta)pragmatic and social meaning.

During field research in South Africa, the use of German T- vs. V-pronouns emerged as a highly salient metalinguistic topic that appears constitutive of the community's self-understanding, specifically in demarcation from Germans from Germany. Often unprompted, the claim that German-speaking South Africans only ever use T-pronouns recurred in many interactions. According to interviewees, V-pronouns are completely out of use and therefore feel strange. On the other hand, Germans from Germany were reported to prefer using V-pronouns. Speakers further constructed this ideological projection of language variants onto social groups via several folk linguistic hypotheses, which, interestingly, are strongly intertwined with reported cultural auto-stereotypes, including ideas of a generally casual, relaxed habitus resulting from the close-knittedness of the German-speaking minority as well as language and culture contact. Germans from Germany, on

the other hand, were usually described as comparatively distant, reserved and rule-obsessed people.

It seems that for German-speaking South Africans, the perceived use of either T-pronouns or V-pronouns has developed an interpretation as social meaning of perceived characteristics of communities of speakers, following typical cognitive-semiotic patterns of language ideology (Irvine and Gal 2000). Since pronominal address is frequently the topic of metalinguistic comments and directly inscribed into ideas of distinct communities and locales, these meanings appear to take the semiotic form of third-order indices or linguistic stereotypes (Silverstein 2003; Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006). This development of new meaning building onto pre-existing meaning strongly resembles the sociolinguistic variationist indexical field theory (Eckert 2008), according to which a single sociolinguistic variable may convey different more or less related possible (social) meanings, since contextual specifics always bleed into the perpetual reconstrual of the indexical sign relationship between language variants and their perceived social meaning. Since in the case described above, social meaning appears to (at least partly) derive from *pragmatic* meaning, a theoretical question becomes inevitable: In how far may the cognitive-ideological processes in the case described above fit into the same theoretical frameworks originally developed for shifts in purely social meaning? By pursuing this direction of interpretation, I hope that my contribution will provide an opportunity to discuss a current meta-theoretical consideration in how far the traditionally semantic, pragmatic and social approaches to meaning can or should be combined into a broader perspective, or an integrated theory of meaning (Eckert 2024).

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Navigating social dynamics through nominal terms of address in Colombian Spanish: A variational pragmatics approach

Valentina Concu | Wendy Valdez | Johan De La Rosa

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This paper examines regional pragmatic variation in Colombia by analysing nominal terms of address in Barranquilla, a major urban centre on the Caribbean coast with distinct socio-cultural and linguistic traits. While previous studies on Colombian Spanish have largely focused on pronominal address forms, this study provides the first quantitative analysis of nominal terms of address, which have so far been explored only qualitatively (Flórez 1985). Through a variational pragmatics approach (Schneider and Barron 2009), this research investigates how macro-sociolinguistic variables—age, gender, and particularly estrato—and contextual variables of distance and power influence the use of nominal address terms in Barranquilla.

A key contribution of this study is its examination of estrato not only as a social but also as a geographical factor. In Colombia, estrato is a spatially structured classification system, in which dwellings are grouped into six socio-economic strata (estratos 1 to 6) based on their characteristics and location within the city (Chica-Olmo, Sánchez and Sepúlveda-Murillo 2020). In Barranquilla, this means that linguistic choices are shaped by both social stratification and urban spatial distribution, making estrato a geographically embedded variable. While speakers from lower estratos (1 and 2) predominantly use informal, kinship-based address terms (papi, mami) in intimate settings, those from higher estratos (5 and 6) favour formal titles (señor/a, doctor/a), particularly in professional and hierarchical contexts. These patterns illustrate how regional identity and local social ecologies influence pragmatic conventions.

The interplay between regional and social variation was analysed using a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative findings revealed age and gender-

based distinctions, with younger speakers and women favouring affectionate terms in informal interactions and older speakers preferring formal terms in hierarchical settings. A Chi-square analysis of data from 92 participants confirmed significant effects of estrato, age, gender, distance, and power on address choices (p < 0.001), with power (Cramér's V = 0.19) and distance (Cramér's V = 0.10) being the most influential factors.

The study also introduces the concept of frametisation to explain how these variables shape the conventionalization of specific address terms. In personal, close-knit interactions, informal terms become embedded within those social frames, while in professional or hierarchical contexts, formal titles such as señor/a and doctor/a are conventionalized, reflecting power dynamics at play. The findings demonstrate how speakers across all estratos and age groups adjust their language based on contextual factors such as power and social distance, highlighting the complex interplay between language, hierarchy, and regional context.

By combining qualitative insights with quantitative validation, this study advances the field of variational pragmatics by highlighting the interaction between regional variation and social stratification. It illustrates how multiple sociolinguistic factors—particularly estrato, age, and gender— intersect with contextual elements such as distance and power to shape linguistic behaviour. The findings highlight the importance of examining language use within its broader geographical and social context, demonstrating how communicative choices both reflect and reinforce the social stratification and power dynamics characteristic of a regional setting like Barranquilla.

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Dr. Valentina Concu is a Lecturer and Language Coordinator for Italian at Leuphana University, Germany. She holds a Doctoral degree in Linguistics from Purdue University and has a background in historical linguistics, pragmatics, and corpus linguistics. She has published on topics such as explicit performatives, emoji usage, evaluative discourse, pragmatic variation in the history of German, and language pedagogy.

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Variational (im)politeness and the corpus-based approach

Jonathan Culpeper

Lancaster University

A relatively recent development within pragmatics has been the evolution of "variational pragmatics" (Schneider and Barron 2008), a subfield that operates at the intersection of pragmatics and dialectology and aims to examine how different pragmatic features vary according to a range of different social variables. Although most work has studied variation in pluricentric languages, such as English and Spanish, **across** different nations, my focus has been on variation **within** one language and one nation. Furthermore, I focus specifically on (im)politeness and deploy corpus methods to pursue this research.

In this presentation, I will review the programme of work that I have undertaken with Mathew Gillings and Isolde van Dorst (e.g. Culpeper and Gillings 2018; van Dorst, Gillings, and Culpeper 2024; Culpeper, van Dorst, and Gillings fc.). For example, Culpeper and Gillings (2018) used synchronic spoken British English corpus data from the *British National Coprus 2014* (BNC2014) to examine whether there were differing levels of solidarity, tentativeness, and deference politeness formulae across the north and south of England. The results suggest that the United Kingdom has a **general** affinity for negative politeness, i.e. a tentative, indirect style of politeness. I will discuss this research programme, and our extensions to it, reflecting in particular on method.

I will also make some general remarks about the study of (im)politeness, methods, and cultural and linguistic variation in Europe.

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Jonathan Culpeper

Jonathan Culpeper is Professor and former Head of the Department of English Language and Linguistics at Lancaster University, UK. His research covers pragmatics, stylistics and the history of English. His major publications in pragmatics include *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence* (2011), *Pragmatics and the English Language* (2014; with Michael Haugh), *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness* (2017; co-editor with Michael Haugh and Dániel Kádár) and *Second Language Pragmatics: From Theory to Research* (2018; co-authored with Alison Mackey and Naoko Taguchi). For five years he was co-editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (2009-14).

Pronouns of address in a job interview in Dutch and Frisian

Gerbrich de Jong | Maria den Hartog

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In the Dutch province of Friesland, the majority of inhabitants has Frisian as their first language alongside Dutch. The Frisian language is recognised as the second official language of the Netherlands and is strongly linked to Frisian identity and culture. Like Dutch, Frisian is a West Germanic language. One aspect that these languages have in common is that both make a distinction between formal (V; 'u' *you* in Dutch, and 'jo' *you* in Frisian) and informal (T; 'je' *you* or 'jij' *you* in Dutch, and 'do' *you* in Frisian) forms of address. However, works on Frisian grammar report that the way Frisian V and T, and Dutch V and T are used is not identical. Frisian V-forms are used more widely than Dutch V-forms (Tiersma 1999) and Frisian V is described as less formal than Dutch V (Popkema 2006). For example, Frisian speakers can use V with acquaintances living in the same village, whereas Dutch speakers would use T.

The differing rules for V and T in Frisian and Dutch mean that speakers of Frisian grow up with two languages which are culturally and regionally closely intertwined, but with different pragmatic "rules" of address. Previous studies have shown that speakers of a language with a V/T-distinction are sensitive to violations of the usage norms of V and T, and that these sensitivities differ between languages (den Hartog et al. 2024). In this study, we explore how the unique linguacultural context of Friesland affects Frisian speakers' sensitivities to address practices. Given that Frisian people grow up with two languages with different norms for V/T-use, how do Frisian people respond to T and V in Dutch and Frisian? We performed an experiment to test Frisian speakers' implicit and explicit preferences for V and T in Frisian and Dutch in a formal setting: a video-based job interview. 306 speakers of Frisian participated in the experiment, in one of four conditions. The interview was in Frisian or Dutch, and participants were addressed with V or T. Implicit preference for V or T was measured through ratings of the recruiters, the company, the job, and the expected salary. Participants were also explicitly

asked whether they would prefer to be addressed with V or T in a job interview.

First, our results show no main effect of T vs. V, but the recruiters, job, and company are rated more positively when the job interview is performed in Frisian. This finding reflects the positive attitude that Frisian speakers generally have towards their own language and culture. Second, we find that older speakers found the recruiters more agreeable when the recruiters used V (in Frisian and Dutch). The factor age as relevant to the choice between and effect of T vs. V has previously been found for Dutch (Van Zalk and Janssen 2004). Third, a majority of participants indicate an explicit preference for T in Frisian (86%) and Dutch (88%) in the context of a job interview. This is unexpected, since this does not reflect the more widespread use of V-forms in Frisian described in the literature. Overall, our results suggest that speakers' intuitions about V and T are highly similar in Frisian and Dutch, and more in line with Dutch than with previous descriptions of address practices Frisian. However, the explicit preference for having the job interview in Frisian hints at a conflict between explicit and implicit language behaviour within this group of speakers. We argue that the unique linguacultural situation in Friesland thus leads to particular pragmatic preferences which contrast with those found in other regions of the Netherlands.

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Gerbrich de Jong

Gerbrich de Jong studied Dutch and Frisian language and culture at the University of Groningen. She works as a teacher trainer of Frisian at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden, Friesland.

Furthermore, she is an external PhD Candidate at Radboud University Nijmegen. She studies forms of address in the bilingual (Dutch and Frisian) province of Friesland, with special attention to indirect address, which is commonly used in Friesland.

Maria den Hartog

Maria den Hartog is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Language Studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen. Her PhD project is about the effect of formal and informal pronouns of address (in Dutch: 'u' *you* and 'jij' *you*) on the person who is being addressed. She studies these effects in Dutch and in German using a wide range of methods: from questionnaires to cognitive and psycholinguistic measures in the lab such as EEG and eye tracking. She also has an interest in the historical background of the current address systems and investigates the diachronic aspects of address through corpus studies of Dutch and German 17th century newspapers.

Diachronic and diatopic variation in German requests: High-imposition contexts since the 19th century

Henrik Discher | Laura Fischlhammer

Freie Universität Berlin | PLUS Salzburg

Variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008) investigates the effect of geographical and social factors on the pragmatic behavior of speakers within one language. Previous studies on multi-standard German (Auer 2021) primarily focused on the geographical dimension of intra-lingual variation in present-day language. These studies either compared national varieties, e.g. German German and Austrian German in request realization (Warga 2008), or examined intra-national variation, e.g. request strategies in Germany and German-speaking Switzerland (Ackermann 2021). However, a historical perspective has not yet been integrated into the analysis of diatopic pragmatic variation. Likewise, diachronic studies traced the development of pragmatic features in German, e.g. *bitte* 'please' (Ackermann 2023), without considering potential geographical variation in depth.

In our talk, we will discuss both diachronic **and** diatopic variation in German requests. Particularly, we are interested in the relation between present-day regional politeness norms and their diachronic development. By uttering a request, the speaker performs a directive speech action that is at the cost of the hearer and inherently shows face-threatening potential (e.g. Leech 1983, Brown and Levinson 1987). Thus, requests enable us to analyze the variation of politeness strategies such as deference, solidarity or tentativeness politeness across time and geographical space. We thereby draw on two empirical data sets: (1) a historical corpus of over 1,000 letters from the 19th century written by immigrants to the United States (Elspaß 2005), patients from psychiatric hospitals (Schiegg 2022) and soldiers (Neumann 2019) and (2) results from a present-day online study with more than 2,000 participants from Germany, Austria and Switzerland featuring Discourse Completion Tasks. All data were manually annotated for the expression of politeness (e.g. terms of endearment as solidarity politeness

markers and conventional indirectness as tentativeness politeness markers). In addition, socio-demographic data are available for each speaker (e.g. regional origin and social background). We limit our analysis of politeness-sensitive requests in German to high-imposition contexts only, which are typically attended by high social and psychological burdens. This covers, e.g. requests for financial support. Applying (geo)statistical modeling, these contexts will be explored for diachronic and diatopic variation. Regarding request strategies, for instance, conventional indirectness, e.g. by means of ability questions (*Can you VP?*), tends to occur more frequently in the present-day data compared to the 19th-century letters, irrespective of geographical factors, potentially reflecting a diachronic rise of tentativeness politeness in German overall.

By combining historical and present-day data, we aim to provide novel insights into how regional politeness norms change over time. This approach allows us to expand variational pragmatics research with a diachronic perspective. Finally, we will also address methodological challenges in aligning historical and variational pragmatics.

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Henrik Discher is a doctoral researcher at Freie Universität Berlin. His research interests include variational pragmatics, formal approaches to semantics and pragmatics as well as (historical) sociolinguistics with a special focus on experimental methods and statistical modelling. He has been research fellow in the Weave project "Variational pragmatics of German – Comparing Communicative Patterns" funded by DFG, FWF and SNF since 2023.

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The uses of *voilà* in Cameroonian and Ivorian French: Between discourse structuring and interactional anchoring

Adama Drabo | Martina Drescher

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This study explores the various ways in which the discourse marker *voilà* is used in spoken French in Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon. Drawing on the framework of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008; Drescher 2014), we aim to understand how this linguistic element adapts to different geographical and sociocultural contexts, considering the influence of local languages and the specific interactional dynamics of each country. Our analysis is based on a corpus of spontaneous conversations recorded in diverse social settings (family, friends, professional interactions), providing real-life observations of *voilà* in use. Preliminary results reveal notable differences: in Côte d'Ivoire, *voilà* is primarily used to conclude a speech turn, reinforce an obvious fact, or draw attention to a significant event. In Cameroon, it is more commonly employed to structure discourse, emphasize a statement, or reformulate an idea. Beyond these variations, we will also examine how speakers perceive *voilà* themselves. Can it be considered an identity marker that reflects the discursive particularities of each linguistic community? Through this analysis, we highlight the effects of language contact and how everyday interactions shape the use of discourse markers in African varieties of French.

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Adama Drabo

Adama Drabo is a former DAAD and BIGSAS (*Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies*) fellow. He defended his PhD in 2021 within the framework of pragmatics in Ivorian French, focusing on discourse markers.

Following his doctoral research, he joined the *Morality* project as a postdoctoral researcher within the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, becoming a full member of the Cluster in 2022.

Since 2023, he has held the position of Assistant Professor at Université Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire). After postponing the effective start of his position to March 1st, 2025, he was retained as a research assistant at the Chair of Romanistik II at the University of Bayreuth, to further strengthen his international academic experience.

He has since resumed his position as lecturer and researcher at Université Alassane Ouattara.

Pragmatic variation across highland and lowland pluricentric varieties

J. César Félix-Brasdefer

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Pragmatic variation has been analyzed at different levels of pragmatics and across pluricentric languages, including Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish, among others (Schneider and Placencia 2017; Nilsson et al. 2022; Schneider and Félix-Brasdefer 2022). The Variational Pragmatic framework has been adopted to examine pragmatic variability in conventions of language use and interaction considering three methodological principles: empiricity, contrastivity, and comparability (Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron 2021; Schneider 2021). Adopting these foundational principles, in this talk I focus on the impact of regional pragmatic variation and its interaction with contextual factors of the situation and macro-social factors, across pluricentric varieties of Spanish in two geographical regions, namely, highland and lowland (coastal) varieties. I will illustrate my analysis with natural data from service encounter interactions at the national and subnational level, highlighting the need to focus on intra-lingual pragmatic variation in coastal varieties. I also present an analysis of metapragmatics with data from intercultural speakers to examine perceptions of inter-varietal pragmatic differences. I conclude my talk with a discussion of innovative research methods to compare, contrast, and analyze cross-dialectal variation and intra-cultural conventions of language use and interaction.

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A corpus-based study on the expression of negativity in German online reviews

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The expression of negativity is a central aspect in complaint contexts. Indeed, there is no shortage of digital media platforms on which individuals can express negative experiences in written form, primarily as a form to communicate previous experiences with a wider audience of readers. At the same time, these online complaints offer a unique and valuable opportunity to draw on a vast body of pre-existing data to examine, through a corpus linguistics lens, authentic written language as used in everyday contexts, and how this linguistic variation is both socially and spatially structured.

While the analysis of online data in linguistic complaint research has increased in recent years (Meinl 2010; Decock and Depraetere 2018; Kunkel 2020), existing studies have predominantly focused on cross-cultural comparisons and/or oral interactions (House and Kasper 1987; Trosborg 1995; Zhang 2001). Studies scrutinizing the linguistic variation in the expression of negative online reviews within a single have received rather little attention.

The aim of this talk is to present a corpus-based investigation of how negativity is expressed in German online reviews. Specifically, we intend to outline the components that constitute a written negative review on the Internet, and how the potential variation therein is structured socially (e.g. in relation to socio-economic contexts of the fitness centers) and spatially.

We examine 1017 one-star reviews of gym chains (e.g. *McFit*, *Fitinn*, *Activ Fitness*) posted on Google Maps between 2021 and 2023 across three German-speaking cities (Berlin (Germany), Zürich (Switzerland) and Vienna (Austria)) to explore both regional variation and pragmatic strategies in complaint formulation. Following the taxonomy laid out by Decock and Depraetere (2018) and Ruytenbeek, Verschraegen, and Decock (2021), the analysis identifies and categorizes strategies of linguistic (in)directness, explicitness and face-threat in the linguistic realization of negativity.

The results reveal various similarities in the formulation of negative online reviews across the analyzed data, for example in the degree of explicitness. However, differences emerge between Zürich, Berlin and Vienna in how the gym is referenced and held responsible within the negative feedback. In addition, the reviews from Zürich display distinctive features in the way negative situations and negative feelings are described.

Our findings contribute substantially to the field of variational pragmatics, addressing outstanding research lacunae such as how pragmatic devices are regionally constrained, and more generally reconciling theoretical perspectives in and methodological approaches to corpus linguistics, digital humanities and pragmatics.

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Sabrina Guhe

Sabrina Guhe is a doctoral researcher at University of Salzburg. Her research focuses on media linguistics, complaint discourse as well as variational pragmatics. Since July 2023, she has been a research fellow in the Weave project "Variational Pragmatics of German – Comparing Communicative Patterns", funded by the DFG, FWF, and SNF.

Semantics, pragmatics and regional variation of *inschallah* in German

Semra Kizilkaya

Bielefeld University

In this talk, I examine the semantic and pragmatic characterization as well as regional variation in the use of the univerbated phrase *inschallah*, which translates to 'God willing' in Arabic, and has been borrowed into German through language contact. I argue that *inschallah* is a multipurpose expression serving predominantly as a modal adverbial (1) or as a discourse marker (2) conveying speaker-attitudinal, discourse structuring or politeness-related functions.

(1)   Hab so hunger insallah gibts daheim was geiles

        'I am so hungry, inshallah there's something delicious at home.'

        [1201575344014315520, 2019-12-02, X-GTA Corpus]

(2)   ASKIM so süß neben mir inshallah

        'MY DARLING (looks) so sweet next to me inshallah'

        [793235358452514816, 2019-12-08, X-GTA Corpus]

With discourse markers occupying the top of the borrowability scale (Matras 2009), *inschallah* has been borrowed into urban vernaculars of German. Similar to *wallah*, it certainly has an emblematic function associated with multiethnolects (Quist 2024). Besides a modal adverbial use affecting truth conditions, it shows a variety of pragmatic uses, i.e. conveying expressive or emphasizing functions, or serving as a frame marker at the end of a discourse sequence. Interestingly, in commissive speech acts, *inschallah* can mitigate the commitment of the speaker (to a previous request), minimizing the face threat for both interlocutors (Brown and Levinson 1987), or even signal the absence of relevant intentions to carry out the action, potentially presenting impolite behavior (Locher and Watts 2005). Regarding inter-individual variation, *inschallah* shows a third-order indexical, ironic function associated with negative stereotypes of Muslim speakers, similar to Mock Spanish (Ochs 1990; Hill 2008). This use is commonly attributed to jocular contexts or with

speakers of right-wing party affiliation, representing sarcasm/mock politeness (Culpeper 1996).

The data come from the *Cross-Topic German Twitter Archive* (X-GTA Corpus), which comprises a near-complete collection of all German-language tweets between 2018–2023 and is annotated for geo-locations (Tsolak et al. 2023). In my talk, I will discuss inter-individual variation in the use of different functions of *inschallah* by aligning regional properties like urbanity with socio-demographic factors, familiarity, i.e. through any language which actively employs the term, and metapragmatic as well as political and racial/ethnic stances in the individual Twitter profile descriptions. Findings are anticipated to be highly relevant for similar multilingual contact settings cross-linguistically.

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Dr. Semra Kizilkaya is currently a postdoctoral researcher in German linguistics at Bielefeld University's Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Studies. She earned her PhD in linguistics from the University of Cologne with a dissertation titled *Marking Changes: Affectedness at the Syntax-Semantics Interface*, which was awarded the Wilhelm-von-Humboldt Prize by the

German Linguistic Society (DGfS) in 2024. While she has specialized in the morphosyntax-semantics interface and verbal semantics, she is expanding her research focus to include social variation in pragmatics as part of her habilitation. She is also a member of the editorial team of the *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* (Journal of the Linguistic Society of Germany).

Face conceptualizations across dialects of Arabic: A variational pragmatic study

Afef Labben

University of Tunis

Variational pragmatics explores intra-lingual differences, focusing on pragmatic variation within and across dialects of the same language (Barron and Schneider 2009). As a pluricentric language, Arabic has increasingly garnered scholarly attention regarding pragmatic differences across its diverse national dialects or regional varieties (e.g. Alghazo et al. 2021; El-Dakhs 2021; El-Dakhs and Ahmed 2021; El-Dakhs and Ahmed 2024). Much of this research has focused on differences in the realization of speech acts in production data using elicitation techniques such as discourse completion tests or role plays. While valuable, these methods primarily offer insights into language use within controlled settings, leaving less explored the more nuanced pragmatic variations that occur in natural discourse.

This study investigates the pragmatic concept of "face" across Arabic dialects. Specifically, it compares and contrasts face conceptualizations in different Arabic dialects. While face lexemes do not represent natural language use, they provide valuable insights into the theorization of the concept of face. Following Sifianou (2011: 55) who asserts that "a theory cannot ignore lay people's notions of lay terms in use", this study contrasts face lexemes in different Arabic dialects to provide insights into the intra-lingual variation at the level of emic face understandings and use (i.e. face1) in order to contribute to face theory (i.e. face2). To the best of the author's knowledge, few studies have applied a variational pragmatic approach to the concept of face within Arabic dialects.

Due to the challenges in collecting comparable face conceptualization data from speakers of different Arabic dialects through the exclusive use of ethnographic or controlled elicitation techniques, this study adopts an alternative methodology. Barron and Schneider (2009) emphasize that variational pragmatics does not "dictate" specific methods; rather, it

encourages contrasting the different varieties of a language. Accordingly, there are no "best" methods to use in variational pragmatics as the methods would change according to the study's research objectives. In order to contrast face conceptualizations in Arabic dialects, three main methodological tools were used:

a. Qualitative analysis of face lexeme corpora from published works (Labben 2017 on Tunisian Arabic; Lynda 2017 on Algerian Arabic; Almusallam 2022 on Saudi Arabic; Khatib 2024 on Moroccan Arabic; Rumman 2024 on Jordanian Arabic).

b. Native Speaker Judgment Tasks (NSJTs) developed by the researcher to elicit insights into speaker perceptions and conceptualizations of face within different Arabic dialects.

c. Netnographic inquiry which consisted of observing and participating in online discussions involving speakers of different Arabic dialects on Facebook.

The use of these methods allowed the researcher to collect information about face terms and conceptualizations in 16 different Arabic dialects. Data analysis reveals phonological and lexical variation at the level of face-related lexemes. The findings also indicate similarities as well as divergences in how face is conceptualized in the investigated dialects. For instance, despite geographical proximity and a somewhat similar historical background, the use of colors in face lexemes differs between Algerian and Tunisian Arabic. Whereas a red face is a sign of embarrassment or shame in Tunisian Arabic, it can denote pride and honor in the Algerian Arabic example *ħammertalna wʒu:hna* (literally 'you reddened our faces', meaning 'you've honored us'). By investigating the concept of face within different Arabic dialects, this study aims to enrich the field of variational pragmatics and offer an understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity in the Arabic-speaking world.

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Exploring the pragmatics of Indian English(es)

Claudia Lange

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Within the considerable body of research on Indian English (IndE), the field of pragmatics is conspicuous by its absence: current handbook articles either do not mention it at all (e.g. Mukherjee and Bernaisch 2021) or devote half a page to it (e.g. Sridhar 2020). Moreover, it is only recently that empirical studies within a corpus-pragmatic framework have begun to emerge, comparing individual speech act realizations such as requesting (Degenhardt 2023), apologizing (Degenhardt and Bernaisch 2022), and thanking (Funke 2022) across South Asian varieties of English. Such studies represent a great advance over earlier work that relied mainly on fictional examples (e.g. D'Souza 1991; Pandharipande 1992), but there is obviously still a lot of scope for (variational) pragmatic research on IndE.

This paper will, firstly, outline how the macro-social variable "region" has been conceptualized for the Indian communicative space. D'Souza (1988) introduced the term "sociolinguistic area", a region that is "characterized by diverse social groups and diverse language families both of which in the course of time begin to share a grammar [of] culture and a grammar of language" (d'Souza 1988: 159). This "grammar of culture" thus encompasses the whole of South Asia, emphasizing that shared cultural norms and, by extension; rules of politeness and appropriate behaviour, transcend speech communities and national boundaries. The influence of the "grammar of culture" is further not restricted to Indian languages: as has frequently been observed, "English in South Asia is both adapting to the local grammar of culture and influencing it" (d'Souza 1988: 168). The main linguistic reflexes of this bidirectional "grammar of culture" are forms of address and kinship terms as well as the widespread adoption of *please* and *sorry* in Indian languages.

However, the variable "region" is bound to interact with other macro-social variables such as age and gender, but also with variables that are specific to the Indian context such as caste, in complex – and as yet largely

unexplored – ways. The second part of this paper will present some preliminary data from the Indian version of the "Questionnaire on Speech Actions in English" (Schröder, Sickinger, and Schneider 2024), focussing on regional variation below the national level.

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Claudia Lange is full professor of English linguistics at Dresden University of Technology, Germany. Her main research interests are Postcolonial Englishes with a focus on Indian English, contact linguistics, discourse-pragmatic variation and change and processes of standardization. Publications include *The Syntax of Spoken Indian English* (Benjamins 2012), the textbook *Corpus Linguistics for World Englishes* (Routledge 2020, with Sven Leuckert) and recently *Indian Englishes in the Twenty-First Century: Unity and Diversity in*

Lexicon and Morphosyntax (Cambridge University Press 2024, with Sven Leuckert, Tobias Bernaisch & Asya Yurchenko).

"You don't thank your family." Intergenerational differences in the expression of gratitude in the English-speaking Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora

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University of Cologne

The Sri Lankan civil war led to the dispersion of the Sri Lankan Tamil (SLT) community, which is now a multi-lingual, poly-centric but closely connected global diaspora. Proficiency levels of Tamil are diminishing with every generation, in particular in nations where Tamil is not a national language (cf. Canagarajah 2008, 2019; Sankaran 2021). Instead, individuals who were raised in predominantly English-speaking nations are usually native speakers of English (cf. Fernandez and Clyne 2007; Canagarajah 2008, 2019; Perera 2015; Sankaran 2021). Today, social media and an increase in global mobility enable the dispersed SLT community at large to defy spatial separation. Nevertheless, as this paper illustrates, English is often replacing Tamil as a lingua franca, particularly among members of the second and third generation.

Based on the analysis of a series of interviews that is combined with a corpus analysis, this paper shows how far Tamil conventions regarding expressions of gratitude are reflected in English. Compared to British English and American English, the direct expression of gratitude in the form of words is much more restricted in Tamil (Appadurai 1985: 236). According to Appadurai (1985), non-verbal ways of expressing gratitude are often used instead, which is reflected in the corpus analysed for the present analysis. Gestures such as nodding, see (1), are used instead and when gratitude is expressed verbally, it may also take the form of praise, e.g. complimenting the benefactor, see (2).

(1)   Ruben **nodded his thanks**. (Chai Time in Cinnamon Gardens, Shankari Chandran)

(2)   When I pushed him to acknowledge my sacrifice he'd murmured, "Yes, yes, ***you are a good grandson***." (*Hungry Ghosts*, Shyam Selvadurai)

Appadurai (1985) relates this to the Hindu belief that every living being needs to fulfil their pre-determined duty and to the conviction that thanking someone may inflict the evil eye on the person that is being thanked.

The data analysis in this paper tests to which extent Appadurai's (1985) observations can be applied to variation observed in verbal and non-verbal expressions of gratitude in the English-speaking SLT diaspora by way of corpus analysis. The corpus data and the meta-pragmatic comments point towards a functional split between instances where code-switches to Tamil occur and instances where individuals choose English expressions of gratitude: Tamil *Nandri*, see (3) is used much more sparingly and not with phatic function, in contrast to English expressions of gratitude, see (4).

(3)   ***Romba nandri***, he said, thanking her in Tamil. (*Boat People*, Sharon Bala)

(4)   I'm very well, ***thank you***! (*Song of the Sun God*, Shankari Chandran)

The interviews furthermore reveal intergenerational differences. Those individuals who left their homeland Sri Lanka as teenagers or adults still follow Tamil conventions more closely than younger individuals who were born and raised in the diaspora. In addition, metapragmatic comments made in the interviews reveal that members of the younger generations often criticize the generation of their parents for "not being appreciative" (TT 27, GER). The analysis of the interviews indicates that this is a pattern that can be found in many families living in the English-speaking and German-speaking Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, which is indicative of an apparent-time shift within the wider SLT diaspora community.

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Anke Lensch is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cologne (Germany). She completed her PhD, which was concerned with a quantitative and qualitative corpus-based approach to morpho-syntactic variation in English *-er* nominalizations at the University of Mainz (Germany) and has since started to work on changing pragmatic conventions in the English-speaking Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora community. For this purpose, she has compiled a corpus of English prose fiction written by Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora authors amounting to 1.5 million tokens and she is currently conducting interviews with second-generation Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora members from Germany, Switzerland, the US, Canada, Australia and the UK. Her research interests include cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, varieties of English and multilingual politeness.

Do cultural factors influence the exchange of compliments? The case of rural and urban Namibia

Gerhard Matheus

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Namibia's speech community is distinguishable by the diverse range of languages and dialects, with English as the official language. The population is split into two parts: the rural areas where traditional cultures and indigenous languages predominate, and metropolitan areas that are more cosmopolitan and impacted by global cultures. The rural-urban dichotomy provides a unique framework for investigating how geographical and cultural factors influence social interactions. Complimenting is one of the key speech acts integral to social interactions, and among all other functions, serves as a social lubricant (Holmes 1988). This paper adopts the framework of variational pragmatics (Barron and Schneider 2009) to examine the influence of social factors such as social class, region, gender and ethnicity on language use in rural and urban Namibia.

Semi-structured interviews combined with Discourse Completion Tasks with different compliment scenarios are used to illuminate connections between compliment behaviour and spatial and social factors in rural and urban Namibian settings. The paper indicates that the level of nation and region (data from rural and urban settings) accounts for a certain degree of variation in the choice of the compliments produced, and social variables like gender and ethnicity also impact complimenting behaviour. While compliments are more frequent and direct in urban areas, rural speakers often employ indirect or implicit forma, embedding narratives or using proverbs and idiomatic expressions which reflect communal orientation and the emphasis of collective identity in rural cultures. These differences underscore the importance of cultural differences and norms in the realisation of speech acts in multicultural settings.

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Gerhard Matheus is a Doctoral Researcher at Bielefeld University's Faculty of Languages and Literary Studies, focusing on variational pragmatics and how compliments are expressed in Namibian English. Her work explores how English interacts with indigenous languages and socio-cultural factors in post-colonial settings, enriching the understanding of linguistic diversity. With a master's in English studies, she developed a strong foundation in linguistic theory and sociolinguistics, sparking her interest in the social aspects of language. Her doctoral journey also encompasses interactive, inclusive teaching and learning that encourages critical thinking and engagement with complex linguistic topics. Her academic interests span pragmatics, sociolinguistics, World Englishes and intercultural communication and their influence on identities and communication in multilingual societies.

Does pragmatic behavior vary across geographical space?

Jenny Nilsson

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When examining language use in relation to geographical space, some phenomena are more straightforward to investigate than others. European variational linguistics and dialectology have long focused on spatial variation in the use of phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactical features, which are seemingly easy to map out. In recent years, however, the scope of investigation has expanded to also include pragmatic variation between national varieties of a language or regional differences within a language (see, e.g. Schneider and Barron 2008a; Jucker and Hausendorf 2022; and contributions therein). But, is there really geographical spatial variation in pragmatic behavior? Do phenomena such as greeting, cussing, and using certain forms of address vary across different regions? And how can we be sure that it is geographical space that affects any pragmatic differences?

In order to map out recurring pragmatic behavior, I believe it to be fruitful to start at the micro level of interaction. Here, interactional linguistics is very helpful, as it guides us in understanding why a specific pragmatic behavior is used in a particular context (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017). By looking at the micro level of situated interaction, we may gain insights into the pragmatic patterns of a group. After investigating the interactional behavior of several groups, we can hopefully say something about recurring pragmatic patterns in a larger geographical space (i.e. region or even nation).

However, as has been pointed out by many scholars concerned with space, not least within the field of variational pragmatics, we have to keep in mind that space is a layered concept (Schneider and Barron 2008b). As such, it is difficult to single out geographical space as a decisive or even a one-dimensional factor for linguistic variation. In this talk, I aim at problematizing geographical space in relation to pragmatic variation. I will draw on examples from a large video corpus of the national varieties of Swedish (Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish) and tackle the question of what we may or may not be able to investigate of recurring pragmatic behavior across space

when using interactional linguistics, statistical analyses, and variational pragmatics.

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Two perspectives on Namibian English pragmatics: Contrastive and intracultural aspects of Pragmatic Profiling

Anne Schröder | Pawel Sickinger

Bielefeld University

In 2022, the Pragmatic Profile of Namibian English (PraProNE) project set out to investigate the pragmatics of Namibian English by developing a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire maximally suited for gathering pragmatic performance data in English from Namibian university students (Schröder, Sickinger, and Schneider 2024). This questionnaire enabled us to collect large quantities of DCT data and thus to carry out thorough quantitative analyses of realisation strategies for the performance of APOLOGIES, OFFERS, REQUESTS, and RESPONSES TO THANKS in this emerging variety of English. Following the principle of contrastivity in variational pragmatics (Schneider 2021: 672), the same DCT questionnaire was employed to collect comparable data from students at three universities in the United Kingdom (UK). This contrast set allows us to make visible the distinctive features of Namibian English pragmatics in contrast to English English.

However, an in-depth understanding of the pragmatic choices and preferences of any speech community can only be achieved by complementing such contrastive and – by nature – etic perspective with an emic one. In PraProNE, we implemented this in the form of three series of qualitative interviews that informed our methodology, data analysis, and interpretation of quantitative results for Namibian English (Schröder and Sickinger 2025).

In this talk, we will give an overview of our quantitative findings, focusing on the specificity of Namibian English pragmatics in comparison to a variety of English spoken in the UK. Beyond the comparison of quantitative results for speech act realisation strategies, we will further exemplarily demonstrate how the specific combination of contrastive and intracultural research

perspectives has led to a more fine-grained understanding of central aspects of Namibian English pragmatics, and how it also raises new questions that will be addressed in future research.

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Anne Schröder is a professor of English linguistics at Bielefeld University. She studied English and French at the universities of Caen, France, Bristol, UK and Freiburg i. Br., Germany, where she also received her PhD in English linguistics. Her research interests include varieties of English around the world, with a focus on Cameroon Pidgin English, Tense and Aspect, and morphological productivity. More recently, she has investigated several aspects of Namibian English. Her latest project, funded by the DFG, is "A Pragmatic Profile of Namibian English", where she combines the quantitative methodology of Variational Pragmatics with qualitative approaches to communicative norms and practices. She is also the co-editor of *English World-Wide* (Benjamins).

Pawel Sickinger

Pawel Sickinger originally studied translation at Bonn University, then completed a PhD supervised by Klaus P. Schneider in cognitive translation studies and contrastive semantics. Together with Klaus P. Schneider, he conducted research on pragmatic variation, pragmatic competence and learner pragmatics in English. This line of work is continued and expanded in the context of the DFG funded project "A Pragmatic Profile of Namibian English" based at Bielefeld University, where Pawel Sickinger currently has a full researcher position.

Regional variation in Namibian English pragmatics: Contrasting data from rural and metropolitan contexts

Pawel Sickinger | Sandie Fitchat

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The central goal of the research project "A Pragmatic Profile of Namibian English" (PraProNE), as the name suggests, is to create a profile that describes the specific nature of Namibian English (NamE) pragmatics (Schröder & Sickinger 2025). There are, however, inherent limitations and practical necessities regarding the scope of large-scale pragmatic data collection. In the case of PraProNE, the project's main data set has been gathered entirely at the University of Namibia's (UNAM) campus located in the nation's capital, Windhoek. While students from all over the country study at UNAM, potential regional variation in NamE pragmatics cannot be comprehensively captured in this data set, given the singular location and community of practice probed. For other contexts in Namibia, therefore, one might question how representative the corresponding findings would be, in this case NamE speech act performance elicited via the Questionnaire on Speech Actions in English (QSAE; Schröder, Sickinger & Schneider 2024).

To determine how much intra-national variation would occur if the Windhoek group were compared to speakers of NamE in other regions of the country, a second set of data was elicited using the QSAE. The target population are students at UNAM's Sam Nujoma Campus, a smaller campus that lies in a rural coastal setting in west-central Namibia, close to the town of Henties Bay. These participants represent a comparable student population since they also have NamE as their principal language of education. This specifically enabled the project to investigate the influence of region and field of study on pragmatic norms and preferences for APOLOGIES, REQUESTS, OFFERS and RESPONSES TO THANKS in the respondents' Discourse Completion Task answers.

In this talk, we present findings from these contrastive analyses. The presentation comprises not only reporting on and quantifying the differences

found, but also a discussion of some of the underlying sociocultural factors that could have explanatory value regarding the pragmatic variation found in the data. The presentation will also discuss the methodological issue of extrapolating from a necessarily delimited group of participants to an entire variety of English, and how to best account for these limitations inherent to empirical research in pragmatics.

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Pawel Sickinger

Pawel Sickinger originally studied translation at Bonn University, then completed a PhD supervised by Klaus P. Schneider in cognitive translation studies and contrastive semantics. Together with Klaus P. Schneider, he conducted research on pragmatic variation, pragmatic competence and learner pragmatics in English. This line of work is continued and expanded in the context of the DFG funded project "A Pragmatic Profile of Namibian English" based at Bielefeld University, where Pawel Sickinger currently has a full researcher position.

Sandie Fitchat

Sandie Fitchat obtained her PhD in Linguistics at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2022. She has run her sole proprietorship The Word Factory, an editing, translating and publishing consultancy in Windhoek and Swakopmund, Namibia, for close to 40 years. She was also recently registered as a Sworn Translator (German to English) in the High Court of Namibia.

Conceptualizations of (im)politeness and (in)directness across German-speaking regions and countries

Philipp Striedl

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In this paper, I analyze conceptualizations of (im)politeness and (in)directness among almost 1000 online survey participants. Allegedly, German speakers from Austria, Germany and Switzerland differ in how they perceive and apply (im)politeness and (in)directness in communication. Stereotypes about communicative behavior refer not only to differences on a national level, e.g. "the polite Swiss" versus "the direct Germans", but also to regional categories like the "direct Berliner". Crosslinguistic studies on first-order perspectives – i.e. speakers' conceptualizations – of (im)politeness and (in)directness, have been contributing to a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena (e.g. Fukushima and Sifianou 2017; Hodeib 2024). However, empirical analyses from diverse cultural contexts remain scarce and there exists no comparative analysis of metapragmatic statements about (im)politeness and (in)directness between and within German-speaking Austria, Germany and Switzerland. With this study, I aim to bridge the empirical research gap by analyzing, firstly, how German-speaking participants describe (im)politeness and (in)directness, and secondly, if there are patterned geographical and/or social differences in their descriptions.

In an online survey, German-speaking participants from Austria, Germany and Switzerland answered three open-ended questions. They were asked in turns to describe in a few written sentences their understanding of a direct person, a polite person and an impolite person. In the subsequent part of the survey, they completed a listing task (e.g. Hough and Ferraris 2010) which is designed to collect common categories for a specific semantic domain. With four separate questions, participants were asked to list "people who are especially direct/indirect/polite/impolite". All answers were independently coded by two researchers, following an inductively defined

coding guideline. It is planned to complement the manual analysis computationally with semi-automatic conditional topic allocation (e.g. Wekhof 2024). Categories from the listing tasks were analyzed with respect to frequency and cognitive saliency (Sutrop 2001).

Preliminary analysis suggests that politeness was conceptualized along common topics such as "adhering to social norms". Directness was often described ambivalently as "being honest", "being blunt" and possibly "harmful" at the same time. Free listing data suggests regional differences in the categories that participants associated with "(in)direct people" and "(im)polite people". E.g. only participants from Switzerland listed Zurich residents as "direct people".

Besides offering insights into the cultural contexts of different conceptualizations of (im)politeness and (in)directness in German-speaking Austria, Germany and Switzerland, this study explores innovative methods for experimental discourse analysis by triangulating different types of data and ways of analysis.

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Philipp Striedl

Philipp Striedl is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Zurich. His research interests span cognitive sociolinguistics and linguistic typology. He has been studying processes of categorisation, and the relations between language, landscape and people using qualitative and experimental approaches.

The functional spectrum of the particle *eh* in Austria and beyond

Philipp Vergeiner

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The particle *eh* originated in Southern Germany and Austria (Schlieben-Lange 1979; Weydt 1983; Geyer 2012) and has since become a common feature of everyday German across the German-speaking world[1]. While previous research typically characterizes *eh* as marking propositions as context-independent or diminishing the relevance of preceding utterances (e.g., Thurmair 1989; Meibauer 1994; Eggs 2003), this primarily reflects its use in Germany. In contrast, Austrian German is reported to exhibit a broader functional scope for *eh* (Breindl 2015; see also Weydt 1983). However, these differences remain largely underexplored, with few studies addressing the pragmatic functional spectrum of *eh* in Austrian German (e.g., Zobel 2017; Csipak and Zobel 2014). Empirical investigations based on authentic conversational data, in particular, are scarce.

In this talk, the results of an exploratory study will be presented, addressing this research gap by adopting a variational pragmatic perspective to investigate the functional spectrum of the particle *eh* in Austria and beyond. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines corpus analysis with an online questionnaire survey, the study seeks to answer two key research questions: (1) What recurring functions can be identified for the particle *eh* in Austria? (2) How widespread are these functions in other German speaking regions, with a focus on Bavaria and Northern Germany? For research question (1), the analysis of spoken data from the "Ulrichsberg corpus" (cf. Wallner i. prep.) confirms that the functions identified in previous research, such as marking irrelevance or limiting the relevance of a preceding statement, are also used by Austrian speakers. However, additional functions were discovered that had not been previously documented, such as establishing coherence, indicating common ground, and evidential marking. Regarding research question (2), the questionnaire data reveal that these functions are prevalent across Austria. However, there are notable differences between participants from Austria, Bavaria, and Northern

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[1] Cf., e.g., https://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de/runde-1/f07/ (22.01.2025).

Germany. The findings suggest that *eh* has a broader functional spectrum in Austria, with some functions also present in Bavaria, but less so in Northern Germany. Thus, the study reveals that the functions of *eh* are pluriareally distributed, with a more diverse and developed functional spectrum in Austria.

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Dr. Vergeiner holds a postdoctoral position at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. Prior to this, he worked as a researcher in the project "German in Austria" at the University of Salzburg and the "VAMUS" project at the University of Innsbruck. Focusing on regional varieties of German, his

research interests include language variation and change across all linguistic levels (including pragmatics), dialectology (particularly quantitative dialectology and dialectometry) as well as language attitudes and language norms.

Regional variation in German address practices

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Extensive research on address behavior in varieties of languages such as English, Spanish or Swedish demonstrates that addressing is a complex social phenomenon, which is governed by various factors, often resulting in intralingual variation. However, comparatively little attention has been devoted to address variation within multi-standard German (Auer 2021). Existing studies, while yielding differences in (pro)nominal addressing practices across varieties of German, predominantly rely on qualitative methods, relatively small-scale data, or are restricted to the comparison of only two varieties of German (e.g. Clyne et al. 2009 for (pro)nominal address in Germany and Austria; Ackermann 2023 for vocatives in Germany and Switzerland).

In my talk, I will discuss the impact of the variable 'region' on address behavior in German, as well as its interaction with other macro- and micro-social variables. The analysis is based on a large-scale online study with more than 3,000 participants from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Discourse Completion Tasks were employed to elicit terms of address in a range of different scenarios which varied in terms of social distance, age relations, and communicative task. In addition, comprehensive socio-demographic data were collected for each participant.

The study is situated within the framework of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008). This approach investigates how geographical and other social factors shape pragmatic behavior and has been successfully applied for explorations of intralingual variation of various speech acts. I believe that it is also well-suited for analyzing address variation, as it enables the systematic consideration and control of the various factors influencing the choice of terms of address.

Overall, the aim of this study is to propose a systematic, quantitatively grounded approach to the analysis of address behavior with a focus on

regional variation, while also addressing the methodological challenges and limitations that arise in such research.

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Janel Zoske

Janel Zoske is a PhD candidate in the DFG-funded project *"Variational Pragmatics of German: Comparing Communicative Patterns"* at Freie Universität Berlin. She is also research associate at the Institute of English Philology at the same institution. In her PhD project, she investigates variation in syntactically (dis-)integrated forms of address in German within the framework of variational pragmatics. To this end, she employs a wide range of empirical methods, including questionnaires designed to elicit social norms, perception studies examining the social meaning of address forms, and sociolinguistic interviews.