

Exploring the pragmatics of Indian English(es)

Claudia Lange

Technische Universität Dresden

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

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* (Benamins 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).