

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

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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.

References

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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.