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Variational pragmatics in the foreign language classroom

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Abstract

Situational variation has long been an accepted form of intra-lingual variation in speech act realisations. The effect of macro-social factors, such as region, ethnic background, age, social status and gender, on intra-lingual pragmatic conventions has, however, received comparatively little attention in the study of pragmatics to date [Kasper, G., 1995. Wessen Pragmatik? Für eine Neubestimmung fremdsprachlicher Handlungskompetenz. Zeitschrift für Fremdsprachenforschung 6 (1), 69–94, 72–73]. In addition, only very limited attention has been paid to macro-social pragmatic variation in modern dialectology, a discipline which focuses on the effect of macro-social factors on linguistic choices [cf. Wolfram, W., Schilling-Estes, N., 1998. American English. Dialects and Variation. Blackwell, Malden, MA, p. 89]. Variational pragmatics is a newly established sub-field of pragmatics which aims to meet this research gap. It is situated at the interface of pragmatics and dialectology and aims at a systematic investigation of the effect of macro-social pragmatic variation on language in action [cf. Schneider, K.P., Barron, A., 2005. Variational pragmatics: Contours of a new discipline. Unpublished paper presented at the 9th International Pragmatics Conference, Riva del Garda, July 10–15, 2005].

This paper highlights the need for a focus on macro-social factors. It draws attention to the fact that the rather blinkered focus on intra-lingual variation to date has meant that in research and teaching, languages have been generally viewed as homogeneous wholes, devoid

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of regional and social variation. By means of data from a selection of regional intra-lingual pragmatic studies, the paper attempts to highlight a number of parameters relevant to intra-lingual pragmatic variation. On this basis, a case is made for language teaching to include a variational perspective on conventions of language use.

Keywords: Variational pragmatics; Pragmatic variation; Regional pragmatic variation; Pragmatic pedagogy; L2 norm; Second language acquisition

1. Introduction

Situational variation due to differences in levels of social distance, social dominance and degree of imposition, has long been recognised to be a form of intra-lingual variation in speech act realisations (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Kasper, 1989, 1995, p. 72). Intra-lingual pragmatic variation attributable to regional and social factors, such as ethnic background, age, social status and gender (cf. Chambers, 1996, pp. 7–8), has, however, received comparatively little attention in the study of cross-cultural pragmatics (cf. Barron, 2003, p. 266; Barron and Schneider, 2005; Kasper, 1995, pp. 72–73; Schneider and Barron, 2005). Similar to the case in pragmatics, research in dialectology (i.e., in traditional dialect geography and contemporary urban dialectology) has not paid much attention to variation in language use, despite this discipline's focus on the investigation of synchronic variation. Instead, the study of dialect has concentrated overwhelmingly on regional and social variation on the phonological, syntactic and lexical levels of linguistic analysis (cf. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1998, p. 89). Given this general dearth of such research in pragmatics and in dialectology, we, therefore, do not know very much about the systematic nature of intra-lingual variation (cf. Barron and Schneider, 2005; Schneider and Barron, 2005). Consequently, there reigns a general assumption, also in the teaching of pragmatic competence, that regional and social factors do not influence language in interaction. Languages are seen as homogeneous wholes from a pragmatic point of view. This lack of interest in the effect of regional and social factors on linguistic (inter)action is all the more regrettable given that an awareness of such differences may help reduce conflicts between groups in society (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 1998, p. 89).

The purpose of this paper is firstly to highlight the research gap in the study of the effect of regional and social factors on intra-lingual choices in language use in both pragmatics and dialectology and to discuss the consequences of this for the teaching of foreign language pragmatics. Following this, the paper, taking the case of regional variation, aims at identifying preliminary parameters of intra-lingual pragmatic variation. On this basis, the relevance of variational pragmatics for the foreign language classroom is then discussed.

2. Languages viewed as homogeneous wholes

2.1. Pragmatics without macro-social variation

Pragmatics has long been concerned with the question of the universality of speech acts and of the strategies and linguistic means available for realizing speech acts (cf., e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1991; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989a; Kasper and Rose, 2002, pp. 164–167; Ochs, 1996, pp. 425–431). Two important strands of research are generally identified here, one emphasising the universal aspects of the classification, and linguistic realisation of speech acts, including not least the various politeness theories put forward (cf., e.g., Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Fraser and Nolen, 1981; Searle, 1969). The other trend in speech act research concentrates on the cross-cultural variability of speech act performance (cf., e.g., the edited volume, Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Currently, many pragmatic universals are recognised. These include the basic speech act categories of, e.g., requesting, greeting, leave-taking, etc., the broad range of realisation strategies for speech acts, such as apologies and requests, inference and also situational variation in the use of language (cf. Kasper and Rose, 2002, pp. 164–167; Ochs, 1996, pp. 425–428 for a more comprehensive overview). On the other hand, areas of cross-cultural variation have also been found. Such areas include the degree of relevance of different contextual factors in different communities and the different weightings of specific contextual factors across cultures. Also, research has shown that although the inventory of strategies and of modification devices may be similar in particular cultures, the choices made from this inventory and the distribution of these in terms of relative frequency may differ. In addition, differences may occur in the particular linguistic form employed to realise an individual strategy shared across cultures (cf. Ochs, 1996, pp. 428–431 for further details).

Problematically, however, cross-cultural pragmatic research has only dealt with intra-lingual pragmatic variation on the situational level. Situational variability is a dimension of variability that has been firmly instituted in variational sociolinguistics since Labov (1972). The investigation of situational pragmatic variation has adopted concepts from researchers such as Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). It has focused on the effect of social distance, social dominance and degree of imposition on language use conventions (cf., e.g., Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Kasper, 1989). Research focusing on such 'micro sociolinguistic factors', in Kasper's (1995, p. 72) terms, has been abundant. This wealth of research contrasts, however, with the limited research on the effect of factors, such as region, age, social status, gender and ethnic background, on language use conventions. In other words, pragmatic research on the effect of 'macro sociolinguistic factors', in Kasper's (1995, p. 72) terms, remains a research desideratum.

Early cross-cultural research in the form of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) did recognise that regional variation might influence language use conventions. This was apparent in the different intra-lingual varieties of English for which data was collected, i.e., Australian English (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Blum-Kulka and House, 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Weizman, 1989), American English (Wolfson et al., 1989) and British English (House-Edmondson, 1986; House and

Kasper, 1987).[1] However, regrettably, these different varieties of English were never compared in the CCSARP, at least not in a public forum. In other words, although there was a clear recognition in this project of the possible influence of regional variation, this aspect of variation was not further investigated. Indeed, the investigation of macro-social variation has continued to take a back seat in pragmatic research in general. Differences based on region, age, social status, gender and ethnic identity have been either abstracted away or, at the very least, not been systematically discussed. Consequently, there has remained an underlying assumption that variation relative to such macro-social factors does not exist (cf. Kasper, 1995, p. 72; Placencia, 1994, 1998; Schneider, 2001; Barron and Schneider, 2005). Kasper (1995, p. 73) laments on this situation, writing:

> *Der seiner makrosoziolinguistischen Merkmale entledigte Zielsprachenaktant ist damit ein beobachtungs- und beschreibungsinadäquates Konstrukt. Auch aus verschiedenen theoretischen Perspektiven der Soziolinguistik heraus ist der homogenisierte Zielsprachenaktant nicht zu begründen. Soziolinguistische Normmodelle haben seit jeher den Einfluß kontextexterner und kontextinterner Faktoren auf situiertes Verstehen und Sprechen hervorgehoben …*
>
> (The target language participant who is abstracted away from his macro-sociolinguistic characteristics is an inadequate construct from an observational and descriptive point of view. Neither can the homogenised target language participant be justified from the point of view of various theoretical sociolinguistic perspectives. Sociolinguistic norm models have always emphasised the influence of context-external and context-internal factors on situated understanding and speaking …)[2]

Márquez Reiter (2002) and Placencia (1994, 1998) have also recently highlighted this desideratum for macro-social variation in the context of the pragmatics of Spanish. Focusing on region, Márquez Reiter notes: "Very few [studies in Hispanic pragmatics] … have investigated pragmatic variation in Spanish". She describes the research area as "an exciting puzzle waiting to be built on" (2002, p. 148). Similarly, in a later paper, she comments:

> Several studies in Hispanic pragmatics have focused on speech act realization. … Very few, however, have investigated pragmatic variation in Spanish; that is to say, how different varieties of Spanish vary in their use of language in context … (Márquez Reiter, 2003, p. 167).

2.2. Macro-social variation without pragmatics

Research in dialectology and variational sociolinguistics (urban dialectology) has long established that macro-social factors correlate with linguistic choices. The latter, more recent, research tradition has focused predominantly on the phonological level of

[1] Not all pluricentric languages were differentiated regionally.
[2] This translation, as others in this article, is the responsibility of the present author.

language. However, a number of studies in this tradition have also revealed a correlation between higher-order social factors and variables in morphology, syntax and in the study of the lexicon (cf. Apte, 2001, pp. 43–46).[3] Indeed, this focus of dialect studies is nicely reflected in overviews of variation in regional dialectology, such as those by Bauer (2002) and Kortmann and Schneider (2005). Both of these works discuss variation only on the levels of phonology, morphology and syntax; pragmatic variation is not even mentioned.[4] Similarly, Rickford (1996), a reader-friendly overview of the applicability of sociolinguistic research on regional and social factors, concentrates on the phonological, syntactic and lexical levels of language variation. Macro-social variation in language use conventions is not discussed (cf. also Hughes et al., 2005).

Individual writers in dialectology have lamented this general lack of data on macro-social pragmatic variation. As early as 1978, Schlieben-Lange and Weydt made a plea for an extension of the scope of dialect studies to include a pragmatic perspective. More recently, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998, p. 89), in the context of their account of dialects in American English, remark, for instance: "The acknowledgment of language-use differences as a legitimate domain of dialect studies is relatively recent compared to the traditional focus of dialect studies on language form (i.e., lexical items, pronunciations, grammatical structures …"). In other words, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998, p. 56) acknowledge the fact that varieties may differ from each other, not only on the well-established phonological, grammatical and semantic levels, but also on the pragmatic level. Rather unusual for overviews of variation in dialectology, they devote a complete sub-section to differences in language-use conventions (1998, pp. 82–89). Here, they give an overview of studies which have revealed ethnic identity and gender to correlate with intra-lingual pragmatic variation (cf. also Tottie, 2002).

2.3. Foreign language teaching and the Kellogg's Cornflakes family

Cook (1999, p. 188) notes that "despite … objections, the native speaker model remains firmly entrenched in language teaching and SLA research." In other words, foreign language learners are generally expected to become native speaker clones and adopt target language (L2) ways of using language. However, it is not any particular L2 norm which the language classroom puts forward. No, it is the British or American norm, and thus also the British or American native speaker, who reigns supreme in language teaching. Not only that, but these British and American native speakers presented are "… wholesome White families who look as if they have walked off the back of Kellogg's Cornflakes packets …" in Pennycook (1999, p. 339) words.[5] Needless to say, this illusion of a homogenous L2 speech community contrasts strongly with the anti-essentialism advocated in critical language pedagogy (cf., e.g.,

[3] Milroy and Milroy (1993) and Trudgill and Chambers (1991) focus, for instance, on the syntax of varieties of English.

[4] Bauer (2002) also mentions variation in spelling and pronunciation.

[5] Indeed, even the description of a Kellogg's Cornflakes family is not completely realistic, since the study of families implies the study of variation according to age and gender – factors often forgotten in pragmatic descriptions in the classroom.

the special-topic issue of the TESOL Quarterly edited by Pennycook in 1999, particularly Cox and de Assis-Peterson 1999 and Pennycook, 1999). Rather than using macro-social variation in language use conventions as a means of addressing the complexities and diversities which exist in society in the foreign language classroom, they are abstracted away, and communities of native speakers are presented as homogeneous wholes.[6]

Exceptions to this distinctive trend in language materials towards homogeneity are few due, above all, to the fact that dialectology and pragmatics, rather than learning from each another, have rather lived an insular existence relative to each other. Holmes and Brown (1987) and Rose (2001) are two rather unique studies. Both deal with compliments, the former also with compliment responses. They provide suggestions for teaching pragmatic competence based on existing materials available. Both refer to gender issues; Holmes and Brown (1987) also mentions regional differences. In addition, the innovative volume edited by Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003), a volume of 30 lesson plans focusing on the teaching of various aspects of pragmatic competence, includes three lesson plans which deal with macro-social variation. Gender is addressed in Ishihara (2003), a lesson plan focusing on compliments and compliment responses. Also, age and gender variation are addressed in passing in the lesson plans of Pawan and Reed (2003) and Yates (2003). The former lesson plan demands that students reflect on the impact of gender and age on speech act realisations in the L1 and L2, and on the success of a particular perlocution depending on age and gender. Yates (2003), on the other hand, includes a discussion of gender and age issues in the context of a lesson plan on softening requests.

3. Variational pragmatics: examining macro-social factors

Schneider and Barron (2005) have proposed the establishment of variational pragmatics (VP), a sub-field of pragmatics, as a means of encouraging further research into the effect of macro-social factors on language in action (cf. also Barron and Schneider, 2005).

3.1. Variational pragmatics (VP)

Variational pragmatics can be regarded as an attempt to marry the fields of pragmatics and modern dialectology by promoting the systematic investigation of the effect of different macro-social features on language in (inter)action (cf. Schneider and Barron, 2005). From a pragmatic perspective, VP aims at complementing the study of pragmatics with a focus on macro-social factors. From a dialectologist position, it aims at complementing the study of variation with a pragmatic component.

[6] Interestingly, researchers, such as Cox and de Assis-Peterson (1999), Pennycook (1995) and Phillipson (1992), have criticised such a neutral view of English as representing a basic acceptance of colonisation by the USA and Britain and also a tolerance of political and economic exploitation.

The term 'dialect' here is not the restricted traditional understanding of the term 'dialect' as referring to a regional variety, but rather the more recent, comprehensive understanding of dialect as a super-ordinate term for regional, socioeconomic, ethnic or gender varieties, as advocated, for instance, by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998).

Variational pragmatics is a top-down approach to the study of pragmatics. In other words, it is concerned with the investigation of possible correlations between macro-social factors and the use of language in action. Macro-social factors refer here to factors, such as region, gender, ethnic, socio-economic and age. Similar to variational sociolinguistics, these macro-social factors as viewed as stable social categories to which individuals are allocated.[7]

VP does not impose any particular theoretical or methodological orientation. Rather, it puts pragmatics on the map of dialectology and variational linguistics. As such it is as varied as pragmatics itself. Studies may, therefore, focus on different phenomena, such as linguistic forms, speech acts or discourse patterns, and examine these using different methodologies or theoretical frameworks.[8] The study of pragmatic variation requires descriptive research on the relationship between macro-social factors and language use conventions. Contrastive descriptive research is particularly important in this context since it enables features related to the presence of certain macro-social characteristics to be highlighted (cf. Barron and Schneider, 2005).

The study of pragmatic variation also brings with it, of course, a search for generalisations. In other words, an interesting question posed in this area concerns the levels at which macro-social pragmatic variation occurs. An attempt is made in the

[7] Constructivists commonly criticise the conception of social structures as stable. They argue that social structures do not have a reality outside of local actions and practices. In other words, constructivists believe that social class, gender, etc. are things that individuals do rather than things that they are or have (cf. Coupland, 2001, p. 2; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999, p. 180). They argue that, depending on the interaction, an individual may be more or less female, more or less middle-class, etc. in a particular context. However, in favour of the variational perspective is, of course, the fact that social identities are not written sociolinguistically on a tabular rasa in a socio-historical vacuum.

[8] Meyerhoff (1999, 2001) is a study on the level of the linguistic form, for instance. Meyerhoff reports of the distribution and use of *sore* (sorry) and *sore we* (so sorry) in conversational Bislama, a pidgin/ creole spoken in Vanuatu. *Sore* can be used to realise distinct functions in Bislama. It can be used to apologise for something that has impinged or may impinge on others; it can be used to express empathy with somebody about a negative experience that person may be experiencing or may have experienced. Finally, *sore* may express the meaning "to miss someone or something." Interestingly, Meyerhoff finds that men and women use *sore* in an identical fashion except when it is used as a marker of empathy. Only women use *sore* in this later function. Meyerhoff argues that this difference can only be explained with reference to the non-linguistic external factor, gender.

Other empirical research from a rather sociolinguistically-oriented research strand which focuses on one language only, usually English, or, indeed, particular national varieties of English, is also relevant to variational pragmatics. Examples include studies by Manes and Wolfson (1981) on compliments in American English and Herbert (1989) on compliments in South African English and American English. Herbert (1990) and Holmes (1988, 1995) have also investigated the effect of gender on compliment/ compliment response studies in this tradition.

Speech-act based research is, of course, a further option. Such research is discussed in Section 3.2.

following to answer this question to some degree for the case of speech act-based research concentrating on regional variation. Despite the fact that research in variational pragmatics is only in its infancy, a clear pattern does appear to be emerging with regard to the levels at which variation is recorded.

3.2. Parameters of intra-lingual regional pragmatic variation

A speech-act perspective is taken in the present context in the search for parameters of regional pragmatic variation. This systematic investigation of the effect of region on pragmatic conventions is designed to highlight potential levels of macro-social pragmatic variation which may serve as a useful guideline not only for future research but also for the teaching of pragmatics from a variational point of view.

The speech act research in the following focuses on the strategies used to realise a speech act, on external modification and, finally, on internal modification (cf. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989a,b). Realisations of requests and offers are described using the concept of the head act, the head act being the minimal unit which can realise a particular speech act (cf. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989b, p. 275). Various strategies are employed to realise a head act. Modification of this head act may be internal or external, and in turn also upgrading or mitigating. An example of the coding of an offer serves to illustrate the scheme (example taken from Barron, 2005 on offers):

(1) … *would you like me to help you with them [bags], you seem weighed down.*

- Head act strategy: *would you like me to help you with them.*
- Internal modification: *would* (conditional).
- External modification: *you seem weighed down.*

Other speech acts, such as compliment responses, cannot be adequately analysed using the concept of the head act. In compliment responses, for instance, it is not the level of directness of the head act which is interesting but rather the choice of semantic strategy and the combination of these (as well, of course, as the modification employed). A 'thanking' strategy (*Thanks*) may, for example, theoretically be combined with an 'agreeing' strategy (*It's nice, isn't it?*) (cf., e.g., Schneider, 1999).

Variation is analysed on the level of the conventions of means and form (cf. Clark, 1979). Conventions of means refer to the pragmalinguistic conventions for a realisation strategy. In example (1) above, for instance, a question wish strategy is employed. Conventions of form refer to the specific linguistic forms employed in the realisation of a particular strategy (cf. Blum-Kulka, 1989, pp. 41–45).

3.2.1. Strategies

3.2.1.1. Conventions of means. Cross-cultural pragmatic research has revealed that the choices made from the inventory of speech act strategies may differ across languages as well also as the distribution of these strategies in terms of relative

frequency.[9] Such differences pertaining to the strategy are also found in intra-lingual pragmatic research findings, although it appears that inter-lingual variation in the choice and distribution of strategy may generally be on a more super-ordinate level of description than in intra-lingual research based on macro-social factors. An intra-lingual study by Márquez Reiter (2003), for instance, which contrasts requests in Uruguayan Spanish with requests in Peninsular Spanish, finds speakers from both cultures to prefer the super-strategy 'conventionally indirect request' in the roleplay situations investigated (cf. also Márquez Reiter, 2002). The same preference for an identical super-strategy among intra-lingual varieties was found in Barron (2005), a recent study in which I contrasted offers in Irish English with offers in English English using production questionnaire data.

Remaining with this study on offers, but focusing on a deeper level of analysis, namely on the strategies which realise these super-strategies, it is found that the strategies most frequently employed by both the Irish English and English English informants are the same (the 'state ability' (*I can help*) and 'question wish' (*would you like…?*) strategies). They also have the same distribution across situations. However, regionally-based differences are also clearly identifiable in these data-sets in the choice and distribution of a number of strategies. Irish English speakers are found, for instance, to use a strategy of predication (*Will I take you to the hospital?*; *Will you have a cup of tea…?*) extensively. This convention is only used to a limited extent in the counterpart English English data. Indeed, the convention of means employed in *Will I take you to the hospital?*, a 'question future act of speaker' strategy, is not found in the English English data at all.

Similar to these findings and also those by Márquez Reiter (2002, 2003), Placencia (in press), in a contrastive study of pragmatic variation in the product requests employed in corner store interactions in Quito (Ecuadorian Spanish) and Madrid (Peninsular Spain), finds no differences on the level of the super-strategy. However, on a more sub-ordinate level, Quito informants are found to clearly prefer imperatives while Madrid speakers opt for a wider variety of strategies, preferring quasi-imperatives (i.e., elliptical forms). Also, in a later study by Márquez Reiter and Placencia (2004, pp. 134–142) on service encounters in Quito (Ecuador) and Montevideo (Uruguay), differences are found on the level of the strategy. Montevidean shopkeeps are found, for instance, to engage in a higher level of product explanations and also to personalise interactions to a greater extent than their Quiteno counterparts. Indeed, personal information is not disclosed at all in Quiteno encounters. Unlike the case of the initiating speech acts, requests and offers, research by Schneider (1999) on compliment responses shows intra-lingual variation at the level of the strategy and the super-strategy. Schneider reveals both Americans and Irish to share the same super-strategies with the exception of a strategy of 'rebuffing'

[9] Eslamirasekh (1993), for instance, using a production questionnaire, found native speakers of Persian to employ considerably more direct request strategies in all six situations under investigation than native speakers of American English (cf. also Cenoz and Valencia, 1996; House and Kasper, 1987, among others, for further examples of such cross-cultural differences).

(e.g., *What was wrong last time!* in response to a compliment on appearance). However, interestingly, unlike the case of offers and requests, the analysis of the use of these super-strategies reveals intra-lingual differences. The American informants are namely found to prefer an 'accepting' strategy (*Yeah*, *it's nice*, *isn't it?*, *I'm glad you enjoyed it*) over all other strategies whereas the Irish informants' first preference is for a 'rejecting' strategy (e.g., *Do you really like it?*, *I wasn't very happy with it*). Variation also occurs on a more sub-ordinate level, as in the studies mentioned above. A number of strategies are found, for instance, in the Irish data (e.g., thanking and denigrating, expressing embarrassment) which are not present in the American data, the Irish English data revealing a greater level of variety. In addition, the various sub-ordinate strategies are employed to differing degrees.

Put briefly, then, variation on the level of the choice and distribution of strategies employed across regional varieties of a language appears to exist on a superordinate level for responding speech acts. In inititating speech acts, such variation is on a subordinate level, if it occurs at all. These observations, however, require further testing given the early stage of research.

3.2.1.2. Conventions of form. Intra-lingual variation is also found to characterise realisations of head act strategies on the level of form. Some forms are, for example, found in one data set but not in another in the same situations. Barron (2005), for instance, finds forms, such as *You'll have* NP? (realisation of a 'question future act of hearer' strategy) and *I better* VP (realisation of a 'state obligation' strategy), to occur in the Irish data but to be absent from the English data. Intra-lingual differences have also been found on the level of the relative distribution of particular forms. The lexeme *love*, for instance, is employed more often in American English compliments than in New Zealand English compliments in sentence structures of the form *I* V *your* N (e.g., *I love/like your hairdo*). *Like* is instead favoured by New Zealanders (cf. Kasper, 1990, p. 199 for an overview).

Interesting differences have also been found in the range of forms employed. Márquez Reiter and Placencia (2004, p. 128) note, for instance, that Ecuadorian speakers in Quito employ a wider range of offer formulae than Uruguayan speakers in Montevideo. Also, Barron (2005) shows that a wider level of formal variation characterises the realisations of head act strategies in the Irish offer data relative to counterpart English English data. This same trend towards a higher level of variation in form in Irish English is also found by Schneider (2005), a paper analysing thanks minimisers in Irish English, English English and American English using production questionnaire data. However, Schneider notes that this level of formal variation is limited.

In sum, then, the formal realisation of strategies may differ across intra-lingual variety due to macro-social factors. Differences may be on the level of the existence of a particular form, on the relative preferences of use of a particular form, and finally, on the level of the relative range of forms employed to realise a particular strategy.

3.2.2. External modification

Differences are not generally found between regional varieties in the range of external modifiers available to speakers or indeed in the types of external modification

chosen. A study by Márquez Reiter (2003), for instance, finds speakers of both Uruguayan Spanish and Peninsular Spanish to show a preference for the use of grounders (i.e., justifications, explanations) and disarmers (i.e., external modifications used to 'disarm' the hearer) as a means of external mitigation in requesting (2003, p. 175). Similarly, explicit conditionals (i.e., external modifications which underline the conditional nature of the offer, e.g., *if you want*) and grounders are found to be the main types of external modification used in offering in both Irish English and English English (cf. Barron, 2005).

On a formal level, however, important differences do occur. Márquez Reiter (2003), for example, shows a higher degree of explicitness to characterise Uruguayan grounders relative to Peninsular grounders. Also, differences are found in Barron (2005) between the Irish English and English English data on the level of form, with the conventionalised explicit conditional form *if you like* used frequently by the Irish informants, but not at all by English informants.

Finally, the level of external modification employed may vary by regional variety. Schneider (2005), for instance, shows his Irish informants to engage in a considerably higher level of external modification than his English English and American English informants. This finding is reflected in Barron (2005), with the Irish informants also found to employ significantly more external modification over the situations analysed than speakers of English English.

To summarise, then, differences have been found between intra-lingual regional varieties on the level of use of external modification and on the form such modification takes. The choice of external modification in a particular situation appears, on the other hand, to be rather similar across varieties.

3.2.3. Internal modification

Similarities have been found in the choice of internal modifiers in different intra-lingual regional varieties (cf. Márquez Reiter, 2002). On the other hand, however, the use of internal modification across regional varieties appears to reveal differences in the overall level of use. Márquez Reiter (2002), for example, finds Uruguayans to use internal modifiers to a higher degree than Peninsular Spaniards, making the requests of Spaniards less tentative than those of Uruguayans. Similarly, differences in levels of use of internal modification are also found in Schneider (2005), Schneider's Irish informants are found to employ internal modification to a greater extent when minimising thanks than either the English or American informants in the situations investigated. Also, Muhr (1994), using production questionnaire data, finds Austrian German apologies to be more strongly upgrading than German German apologies.

The range of modifiers used may also vary. Placencia (in press), for instance, finds a larger level of variation in the internal modifiers used in requests for products in Quiteño Spanish relative to Madrileño Spanish. In addition, speakers of Quiteño Spanish are shown to use multiple downgraders in a single request.

In sum, then, it seems that internal modification does vary across intra-lingual regional varieties on the level of the frequency of use in particular situations and in the range of modifiers used in a single situation.

3.2.4. Summary – Parameters of intra-lingual regional pragmatic variation

Similar to inter-lingual pragmatic variation, findings at this early stage of research point to the fact that intra-lingual pragmatic variation does not generally affect the inventory of strategies nor the modification devices available for use. Also similar to inter-lingual pragmatic variation is the fact that the choices made from the inventory of strategies and the distribution of these in terms of relative frequency may differ by variety. However, these differences appear to be at a deeper level for initiating speech acts than is the case in inter-lingual variation. On the level of external and internal modification, differences are found in the overall levels of use although it could be shown for external modification that the relative preferences towards the favoured type of modification seem to be shared across variety. Finally, intra-lingual regional differences occur in the range of modifiers employed in a particular situation and in the particular linguistic forms used to realise an individual strategy or type of modification. Needless to say, a word of caution must be uttered at this early stage as further research, ideally using comparable corpora, is needed to provide further data on these parameters (cf., Barron, 2005 on this point).

Other parameters not dealt with in the present paper, but which may also prove fruitful for the study of intra-lingual variation, include the analysis of sequential aspects of language use (cf., e.g., Placencia, in press). In addition, sociopragmatic aspects of intra-lingual variation are also ripe for analysis. This latter aspect has only been touched on to date. In Barron (2005), it was suggested, for instance, that offers in situations characterised by a high social dominance (S < H) and a low obligation to offer are more face-threatening in Irish English than in English English and, therefore, require a more extensive use of negative politeness strategies. Also, the Irish informants produced more forceful offers in a hospitable situation, pointing perhaps to a lower face threat in the situation. This was suggested to relate to a higher obligation to offer in this situation in the Irish culture given the fact that it is extremely impolite not to offer a guest a cup of tea or coffee. Placencia (in press) also notes that differences in the perception of the corner shop service encounter may explain intra-lingual pragmatic differences found. Specifically, she shows that the larger use of internal and external modification employed by the Quito informants relative to those from Madrid may be due to the preference of the former group for a higher degree of personalisation in service encounters. Language use in Madrid, on the other hand, is suggested to exhibit a stronger task-orientation.

4. Classroom implications

Even at this early point in variational pragmatic research, it is clear that the findings of the research into intra-lingual regional pragmatic variation discussed, and also previous research findings focusing on the relationship of language use conventions and other macro-social variables, indicate that pragmatic variation within language is not limited to situational and contextual variables (cf. Kasper, 1995, p. 72–73). Rather, conventions of language use differ across macro-social variables within a particular language.

But, what does this mean for foreign language teaching? What would an upsurge in research findings on the effect of such macro-social variables mean for the foreign language classroom? Kasper (1995, p. 74), speaking on the general lack of attention paid in pragmatics to macro-social factors notes "*Ob die so ermittelten pragmatischen Normen angemessen für nichtmuttersprachliche Sprecher sind, bleibt dabei freilich unbeantwortet.*" (whether the pragmatic norms determined in this way are appropriate for non-native speakers remains, of course, unanswered). Let us pose this question here: Should learners be expected to acquire an in-depth competence in all possible varieties of a particular language? No, this is, of course, an impossible task. Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991, p. 5) rightly note with respect to situational variation that "It is impossible to prepare students for every context, or even all of the most common situations they will face in natural language settings." This statement is all the more true if we talk of preparing students for every context with every possible macro-social constellation. Not only is the vastness of the task impossible, adoption of these norms will, realistically speaking, never be complete. More importantly still, learners may not even value an L2 pragmatic norm (cf., e.g., Cook, 2002, p. 6).[10] The links between language and identity are often too strong. As Kachru and Nelson (1996, p. 89) put it:

> If a typical American has no wish to speak like or be labelled as a British user of English, why should a Nigerian, an Indian, or a Singaporean user feel any differently?… In any case, most learners of English in Outer Circle and Expanding Circle contexts never have any serious contact with an Inner Circle speaker…

English does not represent a special case here. Rather, the same can be said of Outer Circle learners of most languages – where the adoption of L2 speech patterns goes against once identity, these patterns are not likely to be adopted.[11]

Variational pragmatics research should, therefore, not be seen as placing unrealistic demands on learners since such research is not meant to provide numerous norms for L2 learners. Rather, it is suggested that a variational perspective be taken in the classroom context to promote an awareness of variation in pragmatic conventions. One particular L2 model of language use may well be chosen for the classroom. However, learners can be made aware that the chosen variety is only one possibility and that macro-social factors will influence language use conventions. In this way, learners can be equipped with a sensitivity towards variation. They can be taught to assume an emic perspective and learn not to judge other's language use using their own conventions. Indeed, given the well established fact that pragmatic failure is a prominent feature of intercultural communication, developing an awareness of

[10] cf. also Firth and Wagner (1997); House and Kasper (2000), Judd (1999, pp. 160–162), Kasper (1995), Kasper and Rose (2002, pp. 292–303), Kramsch (1998), Thomas (1983) among others, on the controversy around the status of the native speaker in the teaching and research of pragmatics. Coulmas (1981) and Rampton (1990) also represent interesting discussions on the issue.

[11] In other words, learners may see their own language use patterns as part of their identity and so be unwilling to adopt different L2 practices (cf., e.g., Barron, 2003; Siegal, 1995, 1996).

different conventions of language use and a strategic competence to solve communication difficulties seems to be the only solution worthy of suggestion. As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998, p. 89) put it: "Certainly, there are many shared language-use conventions across varieties of American English, but there are also important differences among groups that can lead to significant misunderstandings across regional and social dialects…" Equipping learners with a recognition that variation exists within one language furnishes them with an appreciation, expectance and acceptance for differences in language use norms within cultures (cf. Kachru and Nelson, 1996, pp. 95–96).[12]

Kachru and Nelson (1996, p. 97) give some examples of 'hand-on experience' exercises designed to examine variation in discourse patterns across region. They suggest tasks such as the identification and discussion of conversational discourse markers in fiction or the comparison of obituary notices in American, British, and Outer Circle newspapers. It is suggested that the parameters of intra-lingual variation highlighted above may be used as a general guideline for possible classroom tasks. It is conceivable, for instance, that learners might be set to do field work and collect intra-lingual data. This could be analysed on the level of the type and frequencies of the strategies employed or indeed on the level of the type and frequencies of the external or internal modification used. Alternatively, film, or indeed, literature represent suitable data to analyse using a variety of such parameters (cf. Rose, 2001).

To conclude then, let us not blinker L2 learners into seeing only the homogenous entity of L2 language use but rather extend their perspective to appreciate the many levels of pragmatic variation. The Kellogg's Cornflakes box needs to be re-examined and updated!

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[12] Meier (2003, 195–196), in this context, also makes a plead for learners to develop their strategic competence in the areas of, e.g., inferencing and the use of clarification strategies, metapragmatic statements, paraphrase, expansion and analogy, to enable them to deal effectively with communicative breakdown (cf. Dornyei and Thurrell, 1991).

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