1. Introduction

It is frequently acknowledged and fundamentally accepted that while there is indeed a common thread of mutual intelligibility throughout the many existing varieties of English throughout the world today, differences do also exist between such varieties (hence, indeed, the very term ‘varieties’). These differences are usually characterised by both professional and lay observers of the English language(s) *sociolinguistically*, that is, the differences are characterized primarily in terms of variation perceived and identified in accents, syntactic structures and lexical choices. Recent calls for more attention to be paid to differences in *pragmatics* across varieties of English, however, whilst muted, have been heard within the emerging, nascent fields of variational pragmatics (Barron, 2005; Barron and Schneider, 2005; Schneider and Barron, 2008) and ethnopr pragmatics (Goddard, 2006).

At the interface of pragmatics with sociolinguistics, variational pragmatics examines the impact of various macro-social factors on language use in interaction (Schneider, 2010). It is assumed that at least five factors are relevant, namely, region, social class, ethnicity, gender and age. No claims are made, however, that this list is exhaustive. For instance, recent work on compliment responses in Ghanaian English has shown that religion may also play a role (Goeritz, 2011). In empirical work on the influence of such factors, while it may initially be advisable to actually concentrate on sex and not gender for practical reasons and to enhance comparability across studies (Barron and Schneider, 2009), ultimately researchers in variational pragmatics are interested in gender and not in sex, in ethnicity and not in race, in psychological age and not in chronological age, and so on. In other words, the primary interest is in *identities* and not in biological or geographical, etc. facts per se.

That we reject variationist essentialism does not mean, however, that in this special issue we subscribe without reservation to constructionist ideas, as constructionist analysis of, e.g., gender requires serious ethnographic work involving a high investment of time and other resources (Cheshire, 2002). As an alternative, we would like to advocate an emic first-order approach to macro-social factors. Social class, for example, which has played a crucial role in the development of sociolinguistics, has been criticized for being heavily undertheorized (Ash, 2002). Lay persons, on the other hand, have a more or less intuitive notion of what social class is, at least in the English-speaking world (Trudgill, 1974). In everyday life, individuals are categorized in terms of family background, education, occupation, looks and behaviour as members of a particular social class. Similarly, individuals may display e.g. a working class or middle class identity without being a member of the respective class by any sociological parameters (Schneider, 2011). In more general terms, then, we would like to treat all macro-social factors as identities as they are displayed and perceived by participants (in the emic sense) in an interaction.

Participant practices in a broader sense are the focus of a large body of work in conversation analysis, interactional linguistics and related fields. Characteristically, the analysis concentrates on local phenomena and minute detail, thus providing deep insights into the discourse at hand. It is, however, sometimes difficult to arrive at any generalisations which go beyond the specific nature of the given situation. This also applies to recent discursive work on im/politeness, as also pointed out by Terkourafi

(2005). It is, therefore, our aim in this special issue to enable generalisation in a non-essentialist way, which is clearly not a trivial task for the analyst. In regards to work on im/politeness within the framework of variational pragmatics, not much has been done in this area to date. Studies on varieties of English have mostly dealt with pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic differences in, e.g., the use of discourse markers or the realisation of speech acts, which so far have not, as a rule, been analysed in terms of im/politeness (Schneider, in press).

In early work on politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) attempted to capture differences between Standard American English and Standard British English (in addition to other languages) through their distinction between positive and negative politeness. However, the explanatory power of this binary distinction decreases when one considers *other* varieties of English across and within their ‘host’ cultures, and the kinds of im/politeness that can arise within them. For instance, how is im/politeness understood and communicated within *other* varieties of English, for example, Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian English, Irish English, Singaporean English, Indian English, South African English, Scottish English, Welsh English and so on? The picture becomes increasingly complex when one starts to consider possible regional differences in im/politeness (Northern Irish English vs. Eire English; Northern and Southern English dialects in the UK), and also how im/politeness may vary across the various “social strata” within each variety. In emphasizing universality, then, Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness, whilst an invaluable and insightful ‘way in’, has not allowed sufficient space for researchers to explore variation in im/politeness *across* Englishes.

Recent developments in im/politeness research over the past decade, however, have opened up new possibilities for investigating such questions. First, there has been an important move to studying not only politeness, but also impoliteness (Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield and Locher, 2008; Culpeper, 1996, 2011; Eelen, 2001, amongst others). Second, there has been a shift to theorizing im/politeness as evaluations of self (group)/other (group), which draw from expectations about (in)appropriate behaviour “shared” across speakers (Eelen, 2001; Haugh and Hinze, 2003; Mills, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Watts, 2003). Third, there has been a shift to studying im/politeness (evaluations) as they emerge in (different types of) interaction (Arundale, 2006; Bousfield, 2008; Haugh, 2007; Locher and Watts, 2005). Finally, im/politeness research has increasingly drawn from larger corpora of interactions, opening up the possibility for generalizations across speakers and situations to be made with greater confidence (Holmes and Schnurr, 2005; Terkourafi, 2005; Usami, 2006). In light of these emerging trends in im/politeness research, we believe the groundwork has been laid for researchers with a particular interest in English to explore *sociopragmatic* variation in im/politeness across Englishes.

This special issue, which has developed out of a panel presented at the 11th International Pragmatics Conference in Melbourne, Australia in 2009, explores politeness and impoliteness norms and practices across different regional and national varieties of English. We focus, in particular, on what might be loosely termed “Anglo” Englishes (cf. inner circle Englishes), namely, British English, Irish English, American English, Australian English, and New Zealand English. In doing so, we aim to promote the importance of taking an emic perspective on these varieties of English, treating them as an object for empirical investigation, rather than as simply an unmarked background for theorisation as has arguably often been the case in politeness research (see O’Driscoll [2011: 156] for a similar point in relation to face research). Our focus on Anglo varieties of English is also motivated by the relative

paucity of studies of im/politeness *in* those varieties (as opposed to theories that draw *from* those varieties), and where work has been done it has been done in isolation (for instance, the large body of work on im/politeness in New Zealand English by Holmes, Marra and others) or in comparison with other languages. Studies of intra-lingual variation in im/politeness are few and far between. It is to this emerging body of studies that investigate variation in im/politeness across Englishes that this special issue aims to further contribute.

In exploring such norms and practices, the papers in this special issue draw from cross-cultural, intercultural and intracultural perspectives on variation in im/politeness in order to elucidate what is often, as Holmes, Marra and Vine (this issue) put it, “taken-for-granted” by speakers of those varieties of English. There is a particular focus on contrast, either between national or regional varieties of English, or across ethnicities, age or gender in those national varieties. In doing so, the relative advantages and disadvantages of appealing to various data sources, including a range of different types of corpora (spoken and written corpora, web as corpus, experimental corpora), as well as collections of recordings of conversational data and naturally-occurring email, are explored. These different data sources also lend themselves to the analysis of im/politeness in different situations, including institutional, interpersonal and public settings, which is arguably another fundamental dimension to consider in the analysis of im/politeness norms and practices (Haugh, Davies and Merrison, 2011). We would also suggest that this focus on im/politeness in a wide range of settings across different varieties of English allows us to see beyond the traditional politeness-impoliteness dichotomy, and thereby explore types of relational work that do not necessarily fit comfortably under either, as Locher and Watts (2005) have previously pointed out.

2. Overview of papers

In the first paper, “Appropriate behaviour across varieties of English”, Schneider takes up this issue in some detail, presenting a framework for studying intra-lingual variation in appropriateness that is founded on his earlier work in establishing variational pragmatics. He argues that appropriateness is a more encompassing and therefore suitable term for studying intra-language variation in im/politeness or relational work, particularly for studies taking a first-order perspective, and draws from evidence in a range of different types of corpora that *in/appropriate* occurs much more frequently than *polite*, *rude* and *impolite*. Another key argument is that norms of appropriate behaviour can be established through data generated from production DCTs, because such data is consistent with the principles of empiricity, contrastivity, and comparability that necessarily underlie any work in variational pragmatics. Whether or not people would actually behave in this fashion in real-life is a separate empirical question, but through such analyses researchers can explicate notions of appropriateness against which actual behaviour would be judged. He then illustrates the utility of such an approach in analysing differences and similarities in sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic norms of appropriate party small talk between strangers getting acquainted across three national varieties of English (American English, Irish English, and English English), and across gender and age groups (namely, early teens versus young adults). Schneider argues that differences in sociopragmatic norms are indicative of diverging understandings of what is expected and considered appropriate in party small talk between strangers in those national varieties, and across gender and age within a national variety.

The second paper by Goddard, “‘Early interactions’ in Australian English, American English, and English English: cultural differences and cultural scripts”, continues to focus on societal norms of appropriateness, but this time through the lens of cultural scripts formulated through the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). These cultural scripts centre on intra-lingual variation in the underlying values and attitudes that underpin practices of getting acquainted in three national varieties of English, with evidence drawn from corpus data, participant observation, as well as a review of secondary literature. Goddard argues that cultural scripts formulated through the NSM provide a way of articulating norms underlying getting acquainted interactions, thereby highlighting more clearly intra-lingual variation, in which he finds there are both differences and similarities in the norms underlying appropriate talk between strangers. According to his analysis, the key differences between these three national varieties are that in Australian English getting acquainted revolves around projecting solidarity and social equality, while in English English there is a concern with social difference and projecting reserve. In American English, in contrast, getting acquainted involves an emphasis on individual differences and on projecting liking or approval.

The next paper, “‘*It’s rude to VP*’: The cultural semantics of *rudeness*” by Waters, continues the emphasis on societal norms, but this time with a particular focus on impoliteness. Waters illustrates how an analysis of the semantics of *rude* in particular collocates can inform our understanding of such norms. NSM is once again drawn upon, but this time it is used in formulating semantic explications for *rude* in the collocations *It’s rude to VP* and *rude word*. These explications are presented with reference to Australian English data, including use of the collocates identified through Google searches (web as corpus) and ethnographic observation, as well as informant views on utterances/expressions containing *rude*. Waters first argues that semantic explications using NSM provide a transparent, non-circular, non-ethnocentric and translatable definition of cultural keywords, an argument that is especially pertinent to the emic focus of this special issue. She then justifies her choice of *rude* as a cultural keyword in pointing to its (relative) non-translatability, frequency and collocational productivity. She next argues that the semantic core of *rude* lies in that it involves a behaviour where “someone else can feel something bad” (i.e. feelings of offence, hurt, or resentment), and that this person “can think something bad about this someone” (i.e. disapproval, criticism, in other words, evaluate the behaviour negatively) because of this. She then extends this to the analysis of two collocates, *It’s rude to VP* and *rude word*. The former involves negative feelings and evaluations arising due to the behaviour (whether linguistic or not) of someone, in cases where this disapproval is assumed to be shared (“other people can think the same”). The latter involves negative feelings arising due to using words associated with parts of bodies (or what one can do with those parts of the body) in certain situations (“at many times”).

The focus on societal norms is continued in the fourth paper by Holmes, Marra and Vine, “Politeness and impoliteness in ethnic varieties of New Zealand English”. This time, however, such societal norms and (sociopragmatic) practices of politeness are inferred with reference to interactional data, namely, face-to-face interactions from a large specialised corpus of workplace interactions in New Zealand. An emic approach to analysing intercultural interactions and a focus on Māori norms helps the authors identify taken-for-granted norms and practices amongst Pākehā/European (or Anglo) New Zealand speakers of English, as well as illustrate how Māori norms and practices are influencing these norms and practices. Holmes, Marra and Vine argue that a key societal norm underpinning New Zealand English is egalitarianism, echoing

Goddard's claims in relation to Australian English. They claim, however, that this value has two distinct roots in New Zealand society. Amongst Anglo [Pākehā/European] New Zealand speakers of English the roots of this are a belief that social standing should depend on achievement and not on birth, and that such achievements should be assessed by someone else, not oneself. Amongst Māori New Zealanders, on the other hand, egalitarianism arises from the subjugation of the individual to the group and the high value placed on *whakaiti* ('being humble, modest'). They ground their claims about the importance of egalitarianism in an analysis of a number of sociopragmatic practices amongst Anglo New Zealanders, including the deployment of small talk in formal contexts, self-deprecating humour (particularly in response to praise or compliments), and the increasing use of the pragmatic particle *eh* (originally a feature of colloquial Māori English) to index an informal, friendly stance. The taken-for-granted norms of relative informality in meeting openings and expectation for silent attention when others are talking are also identified as key 'egalitarian' practices, in part through their contrast with the Māori norms of formal openings and background murmuring and comment while others are talking.

In the fifth paper, "Getting stuff done: comparing e-mail requests from students in higher education in Britain and Australia", by Merrison, Wilson, Davies and Haugh, there is also a focus on societal norms of politeness (or appropriateness more broadly), in another institutional setting and mode of interaction, namely, the use of e-mail in higher education. This paper involves a comparative analysis of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms in a small specialised parallel corpus of e-mail requests from students in universities in Britain and Australia. Two key strategies found in common across both datasets are doing accounts (i.e. personal excuses and environmental circumstances) and but-justification (i.e. admitting fault but claiming good standing nevertheless). It is argued that these two strategies illustrate the underlying orientation of students (and implicitly lecturers) to issues of equity and equilibrium relative to the entitlement (to make requests) in this institutional setting. It is further argued that while British students orient to a high level norm of deferential dependence, particularly through address terms, apologies), Australian students orient to a high level norm of interdependent egalitarianism (i.e. egalitarianism of manners) through displaying geniality (closeness, well-wishing, and claiming personal common ground).

The contrast between British and Australian English continues in the sixth paper by Haugh and Bousfield, "Mock impoliteness, jocular mockery and jocular abuse in Australian and British English", although this time there is a particular focus on a regional variety of English spoken in the North West of England. Haugh and Bousfield undertake a comparative analysis of two practices, jocular mockery and jocular abuse, in interpersonal interactions amongst males in (North West) Britain and Australia, exploring how they are manifested, co-constructed and manipulated for social bonding purposes, as well as similarities and differences in the target topics of such mockery and abuse across the two datasets. It is argued that jocular mockery and jocular abuse occasion sociocognitive evaluations of mock impoliteness, that is, evaluations of potentially impolite behaviour as non-impolite, rather than evaluations of politeness or impoliteness per se, and that these evaluations arise from a shared ethos which places value on "not taking yourself too seriously". It is also suggested that evaluations of mock impoliteness are cumulative and differentially distributed in multi-party interactions. In this way, it is proposed that politeness researchers can go beyond the politeness-impoliteness dichotomy in the analysis of interactional data.

The focus on ostensibly impolite behaviour that is treated as not-impolite is extended to public settings in the seventh paper, “Inequity in the pursuit of intimacy: an analysis of British Pick-Up Artist interactions” by Hambling-Jones and Merrison. The focus of their analysis is the initial stages of recordings of interactions between unacquainted Pick-Up Artists (PUAs) and women in which the PUAs are pursuing intimacy through face-aggravating strategies (i.e. that might appear impolite) rather than face-enhancing (i.e. polite) behaviour. Their analytical focus, similar to that of Haugh and Bousfield, is on participant actions along with perceptions that are constitutive of the way in which people respond to action, and consequently they emphasise the participants’ construal of these behaviours (as expressed through their talk). They first argue that the incipient acquaintedness in pick-up talk goes beyond “getting acquainted” in constituting a form of “pursuing intimacy”, where intimacy refers to an accelerated reduction of social distance and intimate forms of interactional involvement rather than intimate relationships in traditional sense of friends, family, partners and so on. They suggest from close analysis of the interactions that talk between unacquainted individuals where they are actively engaged in getting along can nevertheless involve behaviours which might appear ‘impolite’. In doing this kind of “inequity” the PUA frames later intimate kinds of work (affiliation, compliments, displays of affect) as rightly occasioned and ritually proper rather than being open to evaluation as “sleazy”.

The final paper in this special issue is an epilogue by Culpeper, which weaves together the themes across these papers as well as indicating possibilities for future work.

And it is on this note that we conclude by saying that while we have focused in this special issue on im/politeness across Anglo varieties of English, there is, of course, much more work to be done expanding this focus across the numerous national and regional varieties of English, as well as across further exploring socio-economic, ethnic, gender and age variation. Indeed, the meeting of the variational pragmatics paradigm with im/politeness research is likely, we believe, to be a long and fruitful avenue of research. We would also add that studies of im/politeness in historical pragmatics is clearly another complementary avenue of further research, particularly, in tracing the possible origins of current variation in im/politeness norms and practices across Englishes. This special issue, we hope, will seed further research along these lines.

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