EDITORIAL

Introduction: Researching Corpus Pragmatics in Irish English

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Abstract

This Introduction to the Special Issue describes the research background to Irish English Corpus Pragmatics. It also gives a brief overview of the papers accepted for the Special Issue. These papers introduce new approaches to the field of Irish Corpus Pragmatics, allowing scholars to expand their methodological tool boxes in dealing with Pragmatics on the basis of corpus evidence.

Introduction: Researching Corpus Pragmatics in Irish English

The papers presented in this Special Issue bring together research on the Corpus Pragmatics of Irish English, using a range of view-points and a number of diverse methodologies. In so doing, they introduce new approaches to the field, allowing us to expand our methodological tool boxes in dealing with Pragmatics on the basis of corpus evidence.

Originally, research in Pragmatics tended to investigate phenomena or features without regard to differences in varieties of the investigated language; examples of this can be seen in the development of features of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice, 1989), or face and politeness theory (Goffman 1955; Brown & Levinson 1987, Leech, 1983, 2014). However, with increasing research in variationist linguistics and the development of models of World Englishes (Kachru, 1982), the investigation of differences between different languages and cultures has gained importance in Pragmatics research. Researchers have increasingly become aware of

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and interested in the study of (socio-) linguistic variation as part of the Pragmatics of languages in general, and varieties of the English language in particular (e.g. Schneider & Barron 2008) and have pointed out the growing importance of taking variety differences into account for all pragmatic research (Barron & Schneider, 2009). Especially in the study of Irish English, Pragmatics research has been playing an important role for more than a decade. Barron & Schneider (2005) brought together research on different aspects of the pragmatics of Irish English, and since then, various studies and edited volumes have increased our knowledge of the pragmatics of this variety (especially Amador-Moreno et al., 2015). Repeatedly those studies of Irish English pragmatics have also been carried out in comparison with other varieties of English, especially British English or American English (e.g. Schneider 2005, Barron in this volume).

In the research of the pragmatics of Irish English, corpus linguistic approaches have come to play an important role, drawing on varied corpus resources such as the Corpus of Irish English (Hickey, 2003), the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (Farr et al., 2004) and the Ireland component of the International Corpus of English (ICE), ICE Ireland (Kallen & Kirk, 2008). It is the aim of the field of Corpus Pragmatics to describe language use in real contexts by employing corpora (e.g. Romero-Trillo 2017: 1). By so doing, we can, amongst other benefits, respond to a desideratum that is voiced by Cameron & Schwenter (2013), namely to provide statistical analysis of pragmatic results, to ensure the verification of robustness of the results. Furthermore, Corpus Pragmatic research is particularly well placed to allow us to investigate different varieties of a language by using corpora which can be accessed from all over the globe. Corpus Pragmatic approaches also have the undeniable advantage that they draw on data which is ready for use, without researchers having to enter the community and undertake recordings or fieldwork, a point which gains particular relevance given that this volume was compiled during the Corona pandemic.

The progress in Pragmatics research during the last decade or so has not only increased our knowledge and understanding of how Pragmatics work, but it has also brought considerable advances regarding the use of varied, partly multi- and cross-disciplinary methodologies (for an overview see especially Aijmer and Rühlemann (Eds.) 2015). Progress in Corpus Pragmatic research has benefitted considerably from advances in Corpus Linguistics and tools for Corpus Linguistics. Currently, we are observing an increasingly quantitative turn, which benefits from the valuable breakthroughs that the extensive qualitative work on Pragmatics has been making. Likewise, the discipline is benefitting from the availability of corpus tools, such as WordSmith (Scott, 2020), AntConc (Anthony, 2018) or, more recently, LancsBox (Brezina et al., 2020), as well as from the preparation of new corpus resources. The Corpus Pragmatic research on Irish English especially benefits from the presence of the pragmatically annotated SPICE Ireland corpus (Kallen & Kirk, 2012), which offers detailed pragmatic and prosodic annotation and facilitates automated or semi-automated approaches to Corpus Pragmatic analysis. In the present volume, three studies use this corpus as a resource and illustrate the possibilities that the pragmatic and prosodic annotation of the SPICE Ireland corpus offers to its users. The development of comparable resources would be a highly desirable for other varieties of English as well.

Of the papers in the current volume, two take a cross-varietal perspective, whose varied results show us the huge importance of not assuming that a given pragmatic feature is used identically in different varieties of English, and illustrate that instead we have to take variety specific variables into consideration, and one paper offers an analysis of meta-illocutionary expressions.

Karin Aijmer's contribution, based on corpora from the International Corpus of English, investigates the use of one particular feature, the discourse marker *anyway*, across different varieties of English. In her comparative study, Aijmer describes the positions of *anyway* in the left and the right periphery of the sentence showing that the distribution of the marker varies considerably throughout the investigated varieties – a fact that the study of one variety alone could not have captured. The main part of her article, however, is an exhaustive analysis of the pragmatic functions of *anyway* in the private dialogues of the ICE-Ireland corpus.

Anne Barron's study is based on a purpose-collected corpus, the Lueneburg Direction-Giving (LuDiG) corpus, and investigates responses to thanks in Ireland, England and Canada. Her study shows that, whereas strong similarities exist between the investigated varieties, in particular the strong use of minimizing the favour strategies, there are also considerable variety-preferential differences in the use of the respective strategies, which are conditioned by different face needs of the speakers of the respective varieties.

Klaus P. Schneider's paper provides an exploratory study of meta-illocutionary expressions on the basis of apologies and asks when, how and why they are used. Using both ICE-Ireland and SPICE-Ireland, their frequencies and distribution are shown, and the conceptualisations underlying these speech acts are demonstrated.

Patricia Ronan's study analyzes the use of directive speech acts in SPICE Ireland, employing scales of imposition which rely on categories introduced by Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) and modified by Leech (2014). She finds that in the investigated data non-impositive strategies are favoured in public discourse, where preserving the interlocutor's face is important. In private, and particular in intimate, discourse, however, impositive strategies are frequently used.

The papers in the current volume thus open new perspectives on cross-varietal, on theoretical and on methodological approaches. The studies are based on contributions to a workshop on Irish English Corpus Pragmatics, held in Dortmund in Spring 2019.

Code Availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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