Review

Elizabeth Peterson, **Turo Hiltunen and Joseph Kern (eds.)**, *Discourse-pragmatic
variation and change: Theory, innovations, contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2022. Pp. xxviii + 332. ISBN 9781108836203.

Reviewed by Lieven Buysse ⓘ, KU Leuven

Pragmatic markers have taken centre stage in many pragmatic investigations since the
1980s, because their intriguingly elusive character makes them hard to define (both as
a linguistic category and as individual linguistic forms with multiple functions) and the
processes of change that impact them tend to be complex. They are also prone to
(dis)preferential treatment by language users depending on (social and linguistic)
contexts and have been found in most languages. It should, therefore, come as no
surprise that the volume *Discourse-Pragmatic Variation and Change: Theory,
Innovations, Contact* has chosen to take 'discourse-pragmatic features' (as the
editors Elizabeth Peterson, Turo Hiltunen and Joseph Kern dub pragmatic markers)
as its focal point.

The book consists of three parts that are also reflected in the volume's subtitle –
innovations in theory and method, innovative variables in English and language
contact settings – and is enclosed by a foreword by Jan-Ola Östman and an afterword
by Heike Pichler. Östman sketches the history of the pragmatic turn in mainstream
linguistics – which saw context, function and variation added to the field as
worthwhile research foci – and zooms in on the nature of what he calls 'pragmatic
particles'. Pichler, on the other hand, uses the thirteen chapters as a stepping stone to
identify future priorities for research into discourse-pragmatic variation and change.
In their 'Introduction' (pp. 1–12), Peterson, Hiltunen and Kern aptly situate this
domain in between linguistics and pragmatics and the interactional and structural
aspects of language. This interface is indeed at the heart of each of the chapters that follow.

In chapter 1, 'Reflexes of abruptness in the development of pragmatic markers'
(pp. 15–39), Derek Denis seeks to reconcile the traditional view of pragmatic markers
having undergone gradual language change with his position that they have been
subject to abrupt change. In his aptly nuanced view, substantive grammatical change
occurs abruptly, whereas the frequency ratio of markers can evolve gradually. As a case
in point, Denis finds no evidence that *I think* and *I guess* grammaticalised further
across the twentieth century in Ontario English in spite of clear competition between
these and other variants of epistemic parentheticals.

In chapter 2, Erik Schleef and Bradley Mackay investigate the 'Evaluation of pragmatic
markers: The case of *you know*' (pp. 40–60). In surveys based on manipulated audio

stimuli, they compared how British English speech is perceived if it contains *you know* and if it does not. Respondents associated the pragmatic marker with social meanings belonging to three dimensions (prestige, solidarity and dynamism), but its social salience was found to be very low, in that none of the traditional evaluative dimensions (e.g. status, social attractiveness) yielded significant results. Still, guises with *you know* were evaluated as less formal, less trustworthy, less precise, less determined, less experienced and less professional. Schleef and Mackay convincingly argue that, although *you know* is not a non-standard language feature, as a pragmatic marker it derives its meaning and significance from its direct pragmatic contexts. Since these are typically informal, and often involve a 'context of linguistic imprecision' (p. 57), *you know* too is associated with negative values such as imprecision or lack of determination.

Chapter 3, 'Quotative variation and change in French with additional insights from Brazilian Portuguese and Italian' (pp. 61–82), traces cross-varietal and cross-linguistic trends in the quotative system. Stephen Levey, Laura Kastronic, Salvio Digesto and Mélissa Chiasson look for evidence of ongoing change in the French quotative system by comparing corpora of (rural) Acadian French, (urban) Quebec French and European French. Not only do they discover a much richer range of lexico-grammatical quotative variants than generic speech verbs, they also find traces of supra-regional change. The structure *être comme* dominates the quotative system of younger speakers of Canadian French (albeit much less so in rural speech), and is absent in European French. In spite of embryonic change attested for *tipo* in Brazilian Portuguese, the inclusion of the Brazilian and Italian data brings little added value to this otherwise excellent study.

In chapter 4, 'Cross-linguistic variation in spoken discourse markers: Distribution, functions, and domains' (pp. 83–104), Liesbeth Degand, Zoé Broisson, Ludivine Crible and Karolina Grzech set out to test Crible & Degand's (2019) functional annotation scheme for discourse markers. They analyse and annotate approximately thirty minutes of spoken, unplanned speech in English, French, Spanish and Polish corpora. Each of the 2,265 discourse marker tokens and 215 discourse marker types identified in the process was assigned to one of four discourse domains (ideational, rhetorical, sequential, interpersonal) and one of fifteen discourse functions (e.g. consequence, addition, contrast). The annotation scheme appears to be robust, although it remains to be seen how it could be applied to large spoken corpora. A cross-linguistic comparison indicates that in all four languages markers predominantly operate in the sequential domain and least often in the ideational domain. Interestingly, typological family barriers were broken down, with the Spanish and Polish data demonstrating a striking resemblance in their strong focus on interpersonal functions (contrary to the French data, for example, in spite of a shared French–Spanish membership of the Romance language family).

The second part of the volume exclusively focuses on specific case studies in English. In chapter 5, Daniela Kolbe-Hanna and Laurel J. Brinton pay attention to 'An emerging pragmatic marker: Sentence-final *is all*' (pp. 107–26). The function of sentence-final *BE all* sequences (e.g. *(that) is all*) is defined as 'asking the hearer not to infer more than what was said' (p. 113). An analysis of the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* and the

British National Corpus shows that these sequences are largely restricted to American English, where they especially surface in fictional dialogue. In their historical study, the authors find *BE all* in merely two out of seven corpora (the *Corpus of Historical American English* and *The Movie Corpus*), both reflecting American English data. The development of *BE all* can be traced back to the structure *(and/or) that/this BE all* in Early Modern English. After the loss of the initial conjunction, replacement of *this* by *that*, and verb contraction in Late Modern English (resulting in *that BE all*) – at which point it started to acquire pragmatic meanings – phonetic reduction and reanalysis resulted in the early twentieth-century form *is/was all*. This account inevitably hinges on a limited dataset, but the analysis nonetheless demonstrates how a combination of meticulous synchronic and diachronic analyses can yield interesting insights into the evolution of markers that are still emerging today.

Karin Aijmer investigates *totally* and its informal variant *totes* in British English in chapter 6, '"That is totally not my type of film": Innovations in the intensifier system of UK English' (pp. 127–49). In the *Spoken British National Corpus 2014* (BNC2014S) she attests *totally* as a polysemous marker, appearing as (i) an intensifier (maximiser) that co-occurs with bounded adjectives or verbs, (ii) an emphasiser or booster and (iii) a discourse marker, which reflect different degrees of grammaticalisation. By comparing these results with the earlier *British National Corpus – Demographic 1994* (BNC1994D), Aijmer lays bare a steep rise in frequency as well as a semantic development of *totally* from an intensifier to an emphasiser, also reflecting a shift from less to more subjectivity. Based on the sociolinguistic data, she suggests that this development is particularly driven by young females, and speculates that the marker may lose its attractiveness among young people as it spreads to older generations.

In chapter 7, entitled '*Uh*, what should we count?' (pp. 150–72), Tim Gadanidis and Derek Denis challenge Pichler's (2010) criticism of the use of normalised frequencies of individual variants to study discourse-pragmatic variables. Gadanidis and Denis advocate a combined approach that incorporates traditional variationist methods and normalised frequencies. They study oral history interviews taken from the *Earlier Ontario English Collection* to zoom in on the rise of *um* as the predominant variant of the filled pause variable, in competition with *uh*. It is unfeasible, they argue, to follow Labov's (1972) Principle of Accountability here, because that would imply involving not only all tokens of *uh* and *um* in the analysis but also all non-filled pauses. Looking at normalised frequencies, however, does teach us something about how the two most prominent filled pause forms compete. Gadanidis and Denis's fine-grained statistical analysis manages to capture the complexity of possibly relevant factors (e.g. speaker gender, speaker role, marker position in the utterance), and the transparency in methodological reporting strongly enhances the replicability potential of the study. The combination of proportional data and normalised frequency data hints at a much more complex development than anticipated, and buttresses the authors' call for approaches that are not 'axiological but [that] should rather come about in response to specific questions being asked about the specific phenomenon' (p. 172).

Chapter 8, 'Modeling listener responses' (pp. 173–89) integrates Conversation Analysis and variationist methods in analysing over 5,000 vocalised listener responses that are provided during an ongoing turn without taking over the floor. Mirjam Elisabeth Eiswirth's definition of the variable is firmly rooted in Conversation Analysis (listener responses tend to occur at transition-relevance positions (TRPs) but do not have to be produced at every TRP and their occurrence is not limited to TRPs), as is the reliance on the nature of prior talk to categorise listener responses (i.e. driven by the listener, speaker or both). She, however, additionally subjects her data to sound statistical analysis, which enables her to identify structural constraints to the occurrence of listener responses, such as the tendency for speaker-driven responses to appear less with male speakers and listener-driven responses more with male listeners.

Part III maps discourse-pragmatic features in language contact settings, starting with 'You know in L1 and L2 English' (chapter 9, pp. 193–211). Chloé Diskin-Holdaway analyses 1,511 tokens of you know in two L1 corpora of English (Irish and Australian) and two L2 corpora (Polish and Chinese L1 speakers residing in Ireland). The Polish group turned out to be more likely to use the marker than all other groups. Other variables (such as gender or L2 speakers' length of residence or proficiency in English) did not yield significant effects except for level of education: L2 speakers whose highest level was secondary used you know more often than those with tertiary-level education. The functional analysis only indicated 'near significance' (p. 206) for the L2 speakers favouring you know for coherence and the Irish English speakers preferring it for interpersonal aims. It is somewhat unfortunate that the functional analysis was not carried out for the Australian English data, which makes the basis for L1 conclusions seem less robust.

Joseph Kern studies 'General extenders in bilingual speech', such as and stuff or whatever, in chapter 10 (pp. 212–29). He scrutinises informal dyad conversations among eighteen young adults in the Midwest of the USA who are bilingual between English and Spanish. The majority of general extenders in English and Spanish performed non-referential functions but they tended to be longer in the latter than the former. Both languages preferred adjunctive (starting with and) over disjunctive (starting with or) items. The highest frequencies were noted for and stuff and y todo (eso). No differences are reported in the overall frequencies of general extender use between corpus language, gender or language dominance, nor was any code-mixing involving general extenders attested. So language contact did not seem to impact the use of general extenders in these bilinguals' speech, which differs from prior findings on pragmatic markers.

In chapter 11, 'The diverging paths of consequence markers in Canadian French' (pp. 230–50), Hélène Blondeau, Raymond Mougeon and Mireille Tremblay report on a diachronic study in two varieties of Canadian French, one from French-speaking Quebec and another from English-speaking Ontario. The corpora for both were compiled in the 1970s and the 2010s. The results demonstrate intercommunity divergence that had already begun in the earlier period. Since the 1970s there has been a tremendous growth of the English connector so in Ontario at the expense

of – especially among young speakers – *(ça) fait (que)*. This observation can be attributed to discourse marker borrowing by a minority group. In Quebec, on the other hand, *(ça) fait (que)* has seen a marked increase, as opposed to *alors*, which has known a sharp decline there and has been overtaken by *donc*. Since many French-speaking parents in Ontario send their children to French-medium schools, the standard variant *alors* can count on a standardising effect in the region so that it can keep its ground in the competition with English *so*.

In chapter 12, Gisle Andersen focuses on the question 'What governs speakers' choices of borrowed vs. domestic variants of discourse-pragmatic variables?' (pp. 251–71). In a corpus of spoken Norwegian, Andersen identifies requests realised by borrowed *please* and apologies by borrowed *sorry*, or by one of these markers' domestic alternatives. Both borrowings are used interchangeably with domestic variants, yet not necessarily in all contexts, because Norwegian variants may carry broader functional scope. *Please* occurs with a marginal frequency, but Andersen's in-depth functional analysis indicates that it exhibits greater illocutionary force (expressing the speaker's insistence and tenacity) than Norwegian *vær så snill*. *Sorry* is considerably more frequent than *please* but still outnumbered by domestic variants, and appears with a weaker illocutionary force (in less offensive situations).

The final chapter, by Elizabeth Peterson, Turo Hiltunen and Johanna Vaattovaara, is entitled 'A place for *pliis* in Finnish: A discourse-pragmatic variation account of position' (chapter 13, pp. 272–90). Using multiple datasets of computer-mediated communication, the authors reassess previous findings of the Finnish borrowing *pliis* (< English *please*) with a focus on requests. Syntactic (clausal position) and pragmatic (request types) features are craftily intertwined in the analysis, leading to novel insights: contrary to prior analyses, *pliis* is not restricted to clause-internal position and does not behave differently from the Finnish variant *kiitos*, in that the same clausal slots are available to both. The analysis confirms that position and pragmatic function 'cannot (and should not) be treated in isolation' (p. 289), and indicates that the status of *pliis* as a borrowing may be less relevant to its variance with *kiitos* than clausal behaviour of adverbial forms in Finnish in general.

The editors of this volume have compiled an impressive series of cutting-edge studies, each of which is highly focused while also carrying broader relevance to the further development of discourse-pragmatic variational research. Especially the painstaking attention paid to elaborating methodological choices and innovations – from statistical tests to corpus tools and new paradigmatic interfaces – lends itself to replication. Moreover, the creativity that has been demonstrated in attempting to overcome obstacles (e.g. to trace features of language change) will indubitably serve as an inspiration for fledgling as well as seasoned researchers in the domain.

By including contrastive linguistics, conversation analysis, syntax, sociolinguistic surveys, second language acquisition perspectives, etc., *Discourse-Pragmatic Variation and Change* showcases the wealth that this type of research has to offer to many branches of linguistics. Although English remains omnipresent in the volume (and not solely in the part that is dedicated to 'innovative variables in English'), other languages

such as Norwegian, Finnish and French are also brought into the limelight. Since many languages suffer from a shortage of sufficiently large spoken corpora, the pressing need to focus on a broader array of languages (or language varieties) persists in order to enrich our insight into discourse-pragmatic processes and features with cross-linguistic evidence. As this volume shows, also relatively small corpora can yield significant results, but it remains to be seen how the methods applied to corpora of a modest size can be transferred onto larger corpora. Importantly, all authors have taken great care in formulating adequately nuanced conclusions that reflect both the scale of their studies and the complexity of their methodologies.

The three-tier partition of the volume into innovations in theory and method, innovative variables in English and language contact settings is slightly misleading and does not do full justice to the potential that each chapter harbours. Supposedly theory-focused chapters test theoretical assumptions in empirical case studies, whereas chapters that at first glance focus on a single discourse-pragmatic feature deliver strong implications for theoretical and/or methodological frameworks. As a result, the book leaves a tightly coherent impression, which is not a mean feat for a collection of papers on such a diverse range of discourse-pragmatic items.

With their edited volume, Peterson, Hiltunen and Kern have taken stock of the current state-of-the-art in discourse-pragmatic variation studies, thereby convincingly demonstrating the breadth of the field, the robustness and creativity of methodological approaches, and the need for combined theoretical frameworks to disentangle the complexities of the issues under investigation. This constitutes a promising outlook for one of the youngest fields in linguistics.

Reviewer's address:
Faculteit Letteren
KU Leuven (Campus Brussel)
Warmoesberg 26
1000 Brussels
Belgium
lieven.buysse@kuleuven.be

References

Crible, Ludivine & Liesbeth Degand. 2019. Domains and functions: A two-dimensional account of discourse markers. *Discourse* 24, 1–35.

Labov, William. 1972. *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pichler, Heike. 2010. Methods in discourse variation analysis: Reflections on the way forward. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14(5), 581–608.