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Theresa Neumaier. *Conversation in World Englishes: Turn-taking and cultural variation in Southeast Asian and Caribbean English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. xvi. 288 pp. ISBN 9781108936996

Review

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Turn-taking is a central topic in the theoretical framework of Conversation Analysis (CA). However, the analysis has mainly been based on British and American English, and differences can be expected if turn-taking is studied in varieties of English as suggested by anecdotal evidence. The present book, *Conversation in World Englishes: Turn-taking and cultural variation in Southeast Asian and Caribbean English* by Theresa Neumaier, sets out to fill this research gap by conducting an empirical analysis with the aim to describe, analyse, and compare turn-taking patterns in Caribbean and Southeast-Asian English face-to-face interactions. The major research questions are whether the turn-taking conventions in these two varieties correspond to those that have been established in previous work on turn-taking and whether there are differences between the varieties in terms of culture.

The book contains eight chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction where the author describes the aim of the book and states the research questions.

In Chapter 2 the author provides an overview of Conversational Analysis (CA) and of the field of World Englishes catering for the needs of scholars in both traditions. Following Sacks et al.'s seminal article (1974), turn-taking is described as a two-part mechanism consisting of a turn-constructional and a turn-allocation component. The former deals with the construction of turn-constructional units (TUs) defined on the basis of syntactic completion and a variety of prosodic and lexico-semantic devices. The allocational component is split up into three hierarchically ordered rules describing how turn-taking is locally managed through techniques such as next-speaker selection, self-selection, and current speaker selection. Although there is some evidence that turn-taking strategies differ across languages, research on turn-holding and turn-claiming has only been carried out on few languages and "the question whether the turn-taking system might be culturally sensitive is still unanswered." (p. 10). World Englishes are chosen as the ideal candidates to display if "the turn-taking system is fine-tuned to local cultural preferences" (p. 12). If there are differences in the patterns between the varieties, they will be explained as culturally conditioned, and the patterns will be compared with regard to the cluster of context-sensitive features associated with each variety.

One reason why CA and World Englishes have not been merged before has to do with "differences in their respective epistemologies" (p. 15). The CA approach calls for 'theoretical indifference' based on the observation that "anybody who looks for differences hard enough will eventually find them in the data" (p. 16). Combining "CA's fine-grained bottom-up analysis of interaction" with the study of World Englishes means that "only those contextual factors that show to be locally relevant for the interactants will be considered for the interpretation" (p. 17). Studies of World Englishes, on the other hand, are based

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on sociolinguistic theory thus seeing language as influenced by external factors. The broadening of Conversation Analysis has also been influenced by variational pragmatics (Barron and Schneider 2009). Methodologically, the latter approach is concerned with contrasting phenomena needing a pragmatic analysis in regional varieties of language which makes it interesting for the present study. However, the focus in variational pragmatic research is on sociolinguistic variables such as the age, gender, social class of the speakers in different regional varieties.

Chapter 3 describes the data and methodology. The analysis of turn-taking strategies is based on approximately five hours of unscripted face-to-face interaction taken from ACE (Asian Corpus of English) and two Caribbean components of the ICE-Corpus: ICE-Jamaica and ICE-Trinidad and Tobago.

The speakers of the ACE corpus are speakers of English as a second or foreign language. The Caribbean Corpora, on the other hand, consist of conversational data from native speakers of English (p. 25). With regard to the comparability of the speaker data, it is assumed that they are comparable since, in both data groups, "speakers are required to use a language they are proficient in but which would not be their variety of choice in everyday interactions" (p. 25).

The coding of the data is based on a qualitative analysis of turn-taking in the data guided by a fine-grained analysis of the conversations using the CA approach. The texts from the sub-corpora were re-transcribed using the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson and the norm in CA transcripts. Specific coding symbols were assigned to the different types of speaker change. In addition, different turn-taking strategies were identified and coded: interruptions, latches, overlaps, phonetic strategies, lexical strategies and syntactic strategies.

In Chapter 4, the author turns her attention to the different types of turn allocation and their realisations by the speakers in the Caribbean and Southeast Asian interactions. The findings of the qualitative analysis reveal that, in both varieties, turn-taking is an orderly and rule-governed process following the turn-taking framework described for other languages. Current speaker selects new speaker, next speaker self-selects, or current speaker continues.

Potential new speakers may also use continuers (typically *uh-huh* or *mm)* and minimal response tokens (e.g. *yeah*) with the function of encouraging and supporting the current speaker (p. 95).

Chapter 5 deals with different types of turn-claiming and turn-holding resources in the two varieties. The phenomena discussed include overlaps (two speakers speak at the same time) and latched turns (the overlaps are delivered without a gap). In both Caribbean and Southeast Asian English conversational overlaps are seen to follow regular patterns revealed in the functions and sequential placement of overlap onsets. The overlap scenarios identified in the two datasets have also been identified for British and American English. The strategies used to manipulate turn-taking are also lexical, phonetic, or syntactic. The phonetic strategies having a turn-claiming or turn-holding function in at least one of the varieties are clicks, changes in volume or pace, and rising intonation at the end of the TCU. Clicks were considerably more frequent in different positions and functions in the Southeast Asian English conversations while loudness played a more important role as a turn-taking strategy in the Caribbean interactions.

The lexical devices are 'planners' such as *er(m),* nominal and pronominal address terms and a larger category consisting of minimal response tokens (e.g. *yeah*) and discourse particles (*oh*, *so, well).* Discourse particles generally (with the exception of the response particle *ye(a)h*) were found to be more frequent in the Caribbean data. It is pointed out that the differences in frequency may be less striking if one considers the competition from variety-specific discourse particles used by speakers in the Asian countries.

Turns are not syntactically fixed units but are an on-line phenomenon produced incrementally bit for bit. Specifically, speakers "modulate syntactic patterns" (p. 180) in order to claim or hold a turn at talk. 'Recycles' (self-repairs) are, for example, used by the speakers to hold the turn in both the datasets although most examples are found in the Caribbean conversations. In this variety, 'machine-gun utterances' characterized by rapid rate of speech and overlaps are also found with a turn-claiming function (p. 190). Moreover, syntactic manipulation can be achieved "before the TRP is reached" by means of various forms of self-interruptions and cutoffs (p. 192). The upcoming TRP can also be postponed namely in cases of topicalization where a syntactic constituent is fronted. Interactants also

use strategies positioned at the TRP itself such as pivots which bridge a TRP, compound TCUs such as *if X* which project further talk and increments to an utterance (p. 204). The syntactic strategies may differ depending on the genre. In story-telling situations story prefaces (pre-announcements) are used especially by the Caribbean data group. Furthermore, tag questions at the end of an utterance are used to transfer the turn to a new speaker or "prompt turn-yielding by potential next speakers" (p. 218). The strategies described in this chapter have been attested for languages in the Inner Circle. However, the findings reveal interesting differences between the varieties.

In Chapter 6 it is shown that Southeast Asian and Caribbean speakers generally use the same set of strategies for both turn-holding and turn-claiming. The differences lie mainly in the combinations preferred by the speakers. The chapter also contains quantitative evidence supporting the observation that the two groups differ in how they exploit phonetic and syntactic devices in the conversation. It is concluded that there is support for "the notion of an underlying conversational infrastructure that is locally inflected by cultural preferences and the linguistic context it is situated in." (p. 233).

In Chapter 7 the author zooms in on the notion of interruptiveness in turn-taking (violations from the normative conventions for turn-taking). A striking finding is that interruptions are rare in the conversations from both speaker groups thus refuting earlier claims about chaotic turn-taking in the Caribbean communities and contradicting the image that the Caribbean speakers have of themselves as interruptive.

In the concluding Chapter 8 the author summarizes the findings of the study and provides a future outlook for the interaction between World Englishes, Conversation Analysis and culture.

The book is elegantly written and clearly structured with useful summaries of the findings. It will provide an inspiration both for corpus linguists interested in extending the use of corpora and corpus linguistics to turn-taking phenomena and to students of World Englishes as a model for investigating conversational interactions in different cultures.

The methodological approach is interesting for corpus linguists. It is well-known that corpora are best suited for investigating the functions of a pre-defined linguistic form which can be searched for using special corpus tools. An issue of concern for corpus linguists is, however, that they cannot search for a function in the corpora but are compelled to use corpora in an indirect way if they want to investigate how a particular function is realized. The present study contributes to this discussion by showing how one can investigate the forms and frequencies of types of speaker change based on a qualitative CA analysis of the corpus data and a fine-grained coding system of the categories.

Specifically, the book is an example of comparative corpus-based conversational analysis. Several types of comparison are carried out. First, the forms, frequencies, and context of the types of turn allocation are investigated in the Southeast Asian and Caribbean varieties of English. The turn-claiming and turn-holding patterns in the varieties are also compared with the patterns based on English spoken in the Inner Circle. The rules of turn-taking are generally taken to be universal by researchers using a CA approach. The important contribution of the present study is to show that the realizations of the speaker change strategies, their frequencies and contextual interpretations are sensitive to cultural values and norms.

References

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