
You're a true Vulgarian, aren't you? Inter-speaker variation in the use of expressivity in German complaints

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Inter-speaker variation in the expression and use of expressivity within a language has not been studied systematically. From a socio-pragmatic perspective, the framework of variational pragmatics (e.g., Schneider & Barron 2008) provides a beneficial resource for investigating intra-language variation in more detail. Variational pragmatics empirically contrasts varieties of the same language by testing the effect of macro-social (e.g., age, region, or gender) and micro-social factors (e.g., interpersonal relations) in comparable situations. However, variational pragmatics has not yet considered expressivity in depth.

From an onomasiological perspective, the speech act of COMPLAINT lends itself to analyzing the direct expression of emotion. According to Decock & Depraetere (2018), a COMPLAINT situation consists of four constitutive components: (A) the COMPLAINABLE, i.e., a past or ongoing incident, (B) the DISAPPROVAL of the complainable, (C) the assumed agentive involvement of the COMPLAINEE, and (D) a REQUEST FOR REPAIR. Apparently, component (B) proves to be the most interesting in terms of expressivity. Within this category, expressive meaning may be conveyed by various linguistic means, e.g., expressive adjectives (e.g., Gutzmann 2019: 69-123). The frequency and function of linguistic means may vary extensively among different speakers.

(1) Verfickte Scheiße, deinetwegen is jetzt mein Display im Arsch!

‘Fucking hell, you’ve fucked up my display!’

(VariPrag_wDCT_SA13_1817)

In our talk, we will present results from an online study with more than 2,000 German-speaking participants from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Discourse completion tasks were used to elicit eight different COMPLAINT scenarios. The data were manually annotated for the expression of emotion (e.g., via lexical expressions as in example (1)). In addition to the COMPLAINT data, rich socio-demographic data is available for each participant (e.g., age, gender, mobility, or personality traits). These data will be investigated for inter-speaker variation. For instance, our data indicate that the expression and use of expressivity are not age-stable overall, potentially reflecting apparent time change or age-grading effects.

References: • Decock, S. & I. Depraetere (2018). (In)directness and complaints: A reassessment. *Journal of Pragmatics* 132, 33-46. • Gutzmann, D. (2019). *The grammar of expressivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. • Schneider, K. & A. Barron (2008). *Variational pragmatics: A focus on regional varieties in pluricentric languages*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins.