

Variation beyond varieties: A micro-diachronic approach to spoken ELF interaction

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Much of present-day corpus linguistics and sociolinguistics focuses on the description of particular linguistic features in standard (or non-standard) varieties of *English in the Inner, Outer or Expanding Circle. Although research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) also often investigates a particular lexical, syntactic or pragmatic phenomenon, most ELF interactions inevitably cut across Kachru's circles and involve a range of languages beyond *English. The diversity of multilingual ELF speakers and the ad-hoc nature of ELF interactions make them extremely interesting sites for observing variation, which is explored, however, without the aim of postulating or establishing characteristics of a (new) variety of *English (see e.g. Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey 2011; Seidlhofer 2011; Mauranen 2012; Pitzl 2018a).

The situationally-emergent nature of ELF communication has recently led scholars to emphasize the importance of transience. Moving away from the more established notion of a Community of Practice (CoP), propositions concerning Transient International Groups (TIGs) (Pitzl 2018b) and Transient Multilingual Communities (Mortensen 2017) highlight the group dimension of interaction and the temporal dimension of language use in diverse groups. In order to take full advantage of these two dimensions in descriptive research, researchers are pushed to develop new methodologies that allow the in-depth investigation of particular linguistic or pragmatic phenomena in interaction across time. The micro-diachronic approach to spoken interaction introduced in this paper aims to do just that.

Drawing upon and combining a range of established research traditions (interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, discourse analysis and corpus linguistics), the micro-diachronic approach to spoken interaction seeks to develop methodological tools for the systematic (large-scale) qualitative investigation of variation in interactive synchronic data sets. The phenomenon examined in this paper is lexical variation, in particular how a group of ELF speakers shifts from an established lexical item (*tension*) to a term newly introduced in the group (*ants in pants*). This transition is examined micro-diachronically with QDA software (MaxQDA) in four consecutive transcribed weekly team meetings. Relating this example of lexical variation to broader concepts like creativity and accommodation, the paper seeks to demonstrate the relevance of the micro-diachronic approach for the study of variation in sociolinguistics and pragmatics beyond ELF.

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