

# Contrastivity and the pragmatic variable: Responses to thanks across English as a pluricentric language

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Contrastivity and comparability are two of the central tenets of variational pragmatic research, a field focused on the comparison of pragmatic choices across intralingual varieties. In recent years, discussions on a *tertium comparationis* in cross-varietal pragmatic studies have considered the applicability of the sociolinguistic concept of the variable (defined via semantic sameness) and the accompanying principle of accountability. The present paper takes up this debate on the actional level and considers the potential of a pragmatic variable for a cross-varietal analysis of the speech act of responses to thanks in the Lueneburg Direction-Giving (LuDiG) corpus, a corpus of naturally-occurring direction-giving exchanges with informants in Canada, England and Ireland. In addition, it also examines the pragmatic choices in responding to thanks across these regional varieties.

The analysis shows how the concept of the pragmatic variable can be applied to the speech act of responses to thanks. It highlights, however, the need for a multi-faceted definition of the variable and one which pays attention to the linguistic context. Unlike previous cross-varietal studies of responses to thanks in English, the study rejects a definition focused on position as a second pair part alone for the study at hand and instead defines the variable using the criteria of sequential position as sealing thanks, position as a second pair part and function. The findings from the cross-varietal study highlight variation on the pragmalinguistic level in preferred verbal realisations of the head and on the sociopragmatic level in uses of a zero head.