

Gender in World Englishes. Edited by Tobias Bernaisch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021 (hardback). 250 pages. ISBN: 9781108696739

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Gender in World Englishes presents a new and exciting collection of case studies that utilize corpus linguistic methods to examine different linguistic features in a range of “Outer Circle” Englishes, thereby giving prominence to varieties often overlooked in comparison to British, American, Australian, and Canadian English. Each chapter in the book, edited by Tobias Bernaisch, draws on the International Corpus of English (ICE), looking at the frequencies, dispersions, and usages of a range of grammatical features in these different varieties by speakers’ sex (despite the title of the volume, the authors conflate sex and gender, a problem I discuss later in this review).

Chapter 1 (Bernaisch) provides a succinct overview of the current literature on language and gender and draws attention to the fact that the edited collection deals with under-researched varieties of English. Chapter 2 (Beke Hansen) analyzes the quotative system in Ghanaian English, focusing on whether women are more likely to use the quotative “be like.” Hansen considers findings from previous studies and incorporates an element of diachronic analysis. She finds evidence of increasing usage of quotatives such as “say” and “be like” in Ghanaian English over time—arguing that such features, which are stereotypically associated with young female American-English speakers—might be the by-product of globalization. Chapter 3 (Robert Fuchs) examines the use of intensifiers in Indian English—taking into account the interaction between speaker’s gender, the formality of the situation, the age of the speakers, and whether the speaker is in a same-sex group. This analysis is laudable: it resembles an “intersectional” approach, which, importantly, considers how multiple identities (which are treated as variables) might interact to influence language use. Fuchs finds several interesting trends within the data, such as how, in informal registers, women use more intensifiers than men, but in formal contexts, men are more likely to use

more intensifiers. Similarly, there was some variation across age groups, with older women and men using more intensifiers than their younger counterparts. Chapter 4 (Claudia Lange and Sven Luckert) focuses on the use of tag questions in Indian English. Although there are several issues with the assumption that tag questions are a feature associated with gender (see Cameron 2007), Lange and Luckert look at the different functions of tag questions and link the use of such tag questions to stereotypes associated with men and women. Importantly, Lange and Luckert also look at the gender of interlocutors, noting that tag questions are more frequent in all-female private interactions.

Chapter 5 (Tobias Bernaisch) turns to the use of hedges within Southeast Asia (focusing on Hong Kong English, Philippine English, and Singaporean English, as well as sampling British speakers for a point of comparison). Hedges were selected because they have previously been associated with features used by American and British women (though, this assumption has been problematized previously—see Cameron 2007). Bernaisch examines the differences in speakers from the ICE sub-corpora for each variety, explores the use of eight clausal (e.g., “I assume,” “it appears”) and eight non-clausal hedges (e.g., “apparently,” “perhaps”), and investigates a variety of identities coded for speakers within each sub-corpus. Although not fully clear in how the sixteen hedges analyzed were selected, it appears most likely that such words were informed by previous investigations. Bernaisch argues that specific types of hedges are preferred within Hong Kong English, Philippine English, and Singaporean English. Bernaisch stresses the need to consider the region in which different features occur, as there are differences amongst these varieties, as well as in the frequencies at which male and female speakers whose L1 is a postcolonial variety use such hedges. Although a factor accounted for within the variables analyzed, gender is not necessarily the focus of this chapter. Instead, the emphasis is on the multiple variables considered and the relationship between multiple variables. Chapter 6 (Stefan Th Gries,

Benedikt Heller, Nina Funke) analyzes the use of *s*-genitives and *of*-genitives (e.g., the difference between *the table's legs* versus *the legs of the table*) in British English and Sri Lankan English. In order to test whether there is a preference for genitive by speaker, they run several statistical measures to examine several variables simultaneously (such as animacy, sibilancy, and gender). The authors argue that there is likely some L1 transfer in the Sri Lankan English corpus, given the prominence and impact of gender within the syntactic choices. In particular, they argue that men are more likely to use the *s*-genitive when the object possessed is longer than the possessor, but women are more likely to use *s*-genitives in all other conditions. Chapter 7 (Melanie Röthlisberger) centers on dative alteration in acrolectal Jamaican English. Röthlisberger accounts for eleven language-internal variants (e.g., recomplexity—post modification distinguished by the absence/presence of recipients/themes) and three language-external variants (e.g., gender). In this chapter, Röthlisberger finds register to be the most important language-external variant as opposed to gender. However, Röthlisberger uses mixed-effects regression models and finds that the speaker's gender did influence variation between double-object and prepositional datives, with female speakers being more likely to use the double-object variant more than male speakers.

The penultimate chapter, chapter 8 (Lucia Loureiro-Porto) looks at the degrees to which people use features associated with colloquialization and democratization in Hong Kong English and Indian English. Loureiro-Porto establishes the following features as being associated with colloquialization (and thus forming the basis of the corpus analysis): contractions (e.g., [word] + 'll), analytic *not*-negotiation, and the use of *going to*. Similarly, the following were established as features of democratization: the use of the modal *must*, gender-neutral occupational nouns (e.g., *statesman* versus *political leader*), and gender-neutral epicene pronouns (e.g., singular *they*). Loureiro-Porto finds that colloquial and

democratic features are more likely to occur in Hong Kong English than Indian English, but that Indian English appears to be in the process of becoming more colloquial and democratic. One of the strengths of this chapter is the inclusion of examining gender-neutral occupational nouns and gender-pronoun usage (discussed in more detail below). Loureiro-Porto's work also is somewhat reminiscent of earlier work in variationist sociolinguistics (e.g., Milroy & Milroy 1985), noting how it appears to be women who are leading the sociolinguistic change towards a more colloquialized variety in Indian English.

Finally, the collection ends with chapter 9 (Melanie Law and Haidee Kotze) which examines the linguistic features in writing and edited documents that use South African English. Law and Kotze's chapter is somewhat different from the others—being the only chapter to focus on written language as opposed to spoken variation. Like chapter 6, Law and Kotze investigate the use of genitive variation, but this time in Afrikaans English, White South African English, and Black South African English. Law and Kotze take into account not just the gender of the writer, but also different features of writing, such as the register. Ultimately, they argue that gender appears to play almost no visible role in the conditioning of genitive use, but stress that more work is needed.

The chapters in this edited collection utilize a variety of cutting-edge corpus statistical measures, such as random forest tests (e.g., chapter 6 and chapter 9), and multinomial logit models and conditional inference trees (e.g., chapter 5). The complexity of mathematical models implemented in this edited collection is impressive and deserves extensive applause. The findings of several chapters suggest that there are some gender differences, such as differences caused by the gender of interlocutors (e.g., chapter 3). However, there were also several chapters that found the difference created by the gender of the speaker was non-significant, required more data to confirm differences (e.g., chapter 2, chapter 3, chapter 8), or demonstrated weak associations (e.g., chapter 4, chapter 7). Bernaisch summarizes this

point in Chapter 1—noting that gender appears to be a peripheral variable with marginal impact on the language used in comparison to other factors, such as the register of the data (e.g., the difference between a conversation and a newspaper).

Something with which several chapters engage is the challenge of weaving together poststructuralist approaches to gender with quantitative variationist sociolinguistics (e.g., chapter 1, chapter 3, chapter 4). Many chapters in this collection acknowledge that gender is an entity difficult to categorize, that there is a wealth of literature that examines gender performativity, and that gender identity is not the same as sex assigned at birth. However, all chapters nevertheless consider patterns as they relate to the category of sex and use sex as a proxy for gender. While this limitation is acknowledged by many of the authors, and stems from the fact that the ICE corpus is tagged for sex as opposed to gender (discussed in chapters 1 and 2), such a conflation is problematic because it is 1) cis-normative (i.e., assumes all speakers within the data will be cisgender), and 2) does not account for the wide variety of nonbinary gender identities in the different countries where such varieties of English are used.

The above limitations link back to Eckert and Podesva's (2021) argument: the male-female gender binary in variationist sociolinguistics is a dominant, but problematic, approach to variation. Eckert and Podesva argue instead for a meaning-based approach to variation that accounts for gender without reducing it to a category which may not cause the variation under analysis. Another way around this might also have been to have taken a more discursive approach to gender in different varieties of English—through examining how topics are “gendered” or made “gender-relevant” (see, Swann 2002; Speer & Stokoe 2011). For example, it might have been interesting to compare how nouns denoting gendered/gender-neutral relational social actors (e.g., mothers, fathers, parents) differed in Indian English in comparison to Singaporean English and what such analyses might have

meant for the conceptualization of gender roles in each society. These approaches (meaning-based or discursive) were sadly missing from the collection, with the possible exception of chapter 8, where Loureiro-Porto analyzes the use of gender-neutral occupational nouns and gender-neutral pronouns – and thus that chapter somewhat explores variation in addition to the discursive construction of stances towards gender (i.e., whether certain groups orient themselves more towards gender-inclusive language).

Overall, the edited collection demonstrates novel and interesting approaches to World Englishes. A number of chapters demonstrate that gender, as construed in this book, typically has little to no bearing on variation, and so I believe this could be useful when evidencing the need for anti-essentialist approaches to language and gender research. The collection is a master class of how a variety of impressive corpus statistics can be implemented and of the wide variety of statistics available to researchers. While more work is needed to more closely weave together poststructuralist approaches to gender with both corpus linguistics and the study of World Englishes, this collection acknowledges that limitation. Future research might next look at how gender is constructed within these varieties or build specific corpora to look at explicitly gendered topics. Nevertheless, the collection deals with very complex linguistic phenomena, and the contributors do not shy away from close, detailed, and impressive grammatical analysis. This highly illuminating volume will serve as a fantastic point of reference for several complex research methodologies.

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