Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages

Friday 6 Oct. 2017
Gula Villan
Stockholm University

Morning: Workshop on assessments

9:30-10:30
Elisabeth Reber:
An interactional perspective on English as a pluricentric language: High-grade assessments in post-match interviews

In my talk, I intend to present initial findings from a study which compares high-grade assessments (HGA) in post-match football interviews in the British Premier League and the North American Soccer League (NASL). The differences between educated British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) have largely been ascribed to variation in the phonology and lexicon and only to a lesser extent to morphosyntax. Notably, there are striking differences between idiomatic evaluative expressions in BrE and AmE (Crystal 2003: 310). Post-match interviews constitute a media interview genre (File 2012, 2015) across the globe, in which participants orient to assessments as the primary business of the interview (Rhys 2016, cf. also Wilton 2016). HGA, such as “brilliant”, “lovely”, “great” or “jolly good”, have been found to be functional in sequential transition and closing in English mundane and institutional interaction (Antaki 2002, Antaki et al. 2000).

Informed by Interactional Linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2001), two research questions are asked against the backdrop of this prior research: What are the linguistic structures of evaluative expressions, and especially of HGA, in the post-match football interviews in the Premier League and the NASL? How are they sequentially positioned?

The data base is compiled of two sets of videotaped interviews between native speakers of BrE Premier League) and AmE (NASL) respectively. Interviews with speakers of other varieties of English were excluded from the analysis. The discussion of the results will touch on methodological questions concerning the comparative analysis of pluricentric languages from an interactional perspective.

10:30–11:00: Coffee

11:00–12:00
Jan Lindström, Catrin Norrby, Camilla Wide, Jenny Nilsson:
Task-completing assessments in Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish service encounters

In our presentation, we examine low- and high grade positive assessments in service encounters between customer and staff. (For studies of other institutional settings, see Antaki 2002, Antaki, Houtkoop-Steenstra & Rapley 2000 on high-grade assessments, and Lindström & Heinemann 2009 on low-grade assessments.) The service interactions were video-recorded at theatre box offices and booking agencies in Sweden and Finland as part of the larger research programme Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages. We noted a recurrent pattern in the data where the participants used such assessments to receipt information provided by the other. These assessments occur in a robust sequential pattern as third-turn moves that ratify the completion of a request-compliance sequence. Such three-party structures may also constitute part of pre-closing activities at the end of an encounter. The positive meaning of the assessments – e.g. bra, ‘good’; utmärkt, ‘excellent’ and toppen, ‘great’ – fits with the satisfactory outcome of the task completion, but their function is, nonetheless, primarily pragmatic, used for segmenting the flow of task-oriented institutional interaction. Their bleached semantic content is reflected in their subdued or rushed prosodic delivery, as well as by accompanying embodied practices signalling a shift away from the other, in effect, to the next relevant task.

Our analysis of task-completing assessments also reveals differences in their interactional metric: customers produce these assessments more often than the salesperson, and their assessments are more inclined towards the high-grade end. Furthermore, there are some differences across the language varieties where Sweden-Swedish customers use more high-grade items than Finland-Swedish ones. This finding suggests that there are differing cultural preferences for how to ‘do’ assessments in this highly normative interactional environment.


Discussant: Jenny Öqvist, The Institute of Language and Folklore, Uppsala

Afternoon: Data sessions
Elisabeth Reber
14:00–15:00
Data session: Exploring high-grade assessments in English
I will present more data from my collection of HGA in post-match interviews.

15:00–16:00
Inga-Lil Grahn
Data session: Vocalisations of pain and effort in personal training sessions
The session will focus on how non-lexical items are produced in embodied activities and how they are responded to, e.g. with assessments. I would also like to discuss how the participants orientation to the vocalisations discern expressions of pain from expressions of effort in the presented sequences.

Presentations will be in English, but discussions and comments welcome in both English and Swedish