



# PRAGMATIC MARKERS IN WORLD ENGLISHES

*KIND OF AND SORT OF AS A CASE IN POINT*

LUCÍA LOUREIRO-PORTO

**7** monographs

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Lucía Loureiro-Porto

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1. WORLD ENGLISHES: DIVERGENCE IN CONVERGENCE

In its recent history, the English language has undergone unprecedented changes around the world. As English has become a global language, it has encountered new contexts and communities, each leaving its own imprint on the language. This has led to a fascinating and complex phenomenon of language variation in World Englishes, with linguistic features that differ in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse. In this context, a fundamental question arises: do these different varieties of English converge or diverge? In other words, are they becoming more similar or more distinct from each other? This question is not new in linguistics and, in fact, the concepts of dialect convergence and dialect divergence have been the focus of general studies from as early as Weinreich (1954) (see also Trudgill, 1986; Auer, 1998; and Auer et al., 2005, to cite just a few).

Dialect convergence, defined as an increase in similarity between dialects (Hinskens et al., 2005: 1) implies linguistic unification, homogenization and, sometimes, simplification (Trudgill, 1986). Dialect divergence, in turn, implies a decrease in similarity, diversification and heterogeneization (Hinskens et al., 2005: 1). However antonymic these two concepts may seem, they have proven to be the two sides of the same coin in studies such as Pedersen (1999), who demonstrated that during the 19th century in Copenhagen and Stockholm, there was both a convergence of stylistically marked differences between urban dialect and the spoken standard and a divergence of socially marked differences between both systems, happening simultaneously (as cited by Hinskens et al., 2005: 1). Among the many factors that may condition the evolution of a linguistic variety along these two paths we find language contact. Thus, the effect of language contact has been usually associated with dialect convergence, in that contact varieties tend to become more similar than dissimilar through time. However, the relationship between dialect convergence and contact-induced change is not always straightforward, and the effects of contact can vary depending on a number of factors,

including the type and intensity of contact, the social context in which it occurs, and the attitudes of the speakers involved.

In this scenario, the fact that English has become a global language with a large number of fluent speakers across the world (see Crystal, 2008: 422-423; 2010: 371; 2012: 6) makes it the perfect candidate for the analysis of dialect convergence or divergence. On the one hand, English has been considered a “killer language” (Eckert et al., 2004), a “Tyrannosaurus rex” (Swales, 1997) that destroys diversity and leads to a homogeneous linguistic landscape world-wide and that has educational repercussions (e.g. Gutiérrez-Estrada & Schecter, 2018). On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence that the dispersal of English has led to a myriad of varieties that differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and also pragmatics and discourse (as seen in coinage of the word *Englishes* and the multiplicity of publications in journals such as *World Englishes* or *English World-Wide*). Thus, the phenomenon of English language variation in World Englishes has been examined from various perspectives, including its historical, sociocultural, linguistic, ideological, and educational contexts.

To begin with, the dispersal of English has been associated to different diasporas (Kachru et al., 2006: 2-3), as will be explained in detail in Chapter 4. The first diaspora took place in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, while in the second one, English was transported to settlers’ colonies in Australia, North America and New Zealand. The third one occurred in British colonies all around the globe, with a special presence in Asia and Africa. In addition, a fourth diaspora is considered to be taking place in the globalized world, with an overall presence of English all around the planet. In addition to these diasporas (e.g. Kachru, 1992; Kachru & Smith, 2008: 5), the global presence of English was modelled by Kachru (1985) as three concentric circles, namely the inner circle (including territories where English is used as native language), the outer circle (places where English is used as a second language), and the expanding circle (including all territories where English is used as a foreign language). The three or four diasporas just mentioned and Kachru’s (1985) Concentric Circles Model depict a multifaceted array of varieties of English, each with their unique background and concerns. This divergence in convergence has been discussed in detail regarding African American Vernacular English, for example, which was first claimed to have converged with other dialects of English since the American Civil War, but has been

proven to diverge from other vernacular varieties (Bailey, 1987; Bailey & Maynor, 1989; Wolfram, 2009). In fact, the most common situation is one in which varieties converge in some linguistic features and diverge in others. For example, Trudgill (1998) shows how varieties many converge morpho-syntactically (e.g. the use of the present perfect) and phonological (e.g. the expansion of rhotic dialects), although they may also diverge at the same levels (as seen in the rise of *them* as a singular pronoun in Jamaican English, or the distinct phonology of Singapore English, with features such as the use of final consonant deletion and the merger of /ɔ/ and /o/).

Another example of how an apparently converging variety may lead to linguistic divergence is found in American English itself. Thus, a variety that was initially considered much more homogeneous than British English (as seen in the coinage of the term ‘General American’ by Krapp, 1925; as cited by Schneider, 2006: 65) “appears to have transcended the stage of emphasizing homogeneity and proceeded to increasing diversification, both regional and social” (Schneider, 2006: 65). Thus, the alleged cultural “melting pot” is not taking place linguistically, since individual social groups can still be recognized by their ethnolinguistic characteristics (Schneider, 2006: 65). Despite this internal divergence, the term ‘Americanization’ is used along ‘globalization’ to refer to a world-wide cultural homogenization as a result of the global commerce whose linguistic consequences are analysed by Yunich (2006).

Global commerce, in fact, regularizes the frequent interaction of people from different regions, which can lead to the adoption of features from different varieties of English, resulting in the convergence of varieties. That would be the situation behind the emergence of English as a Lingua Franca. However, there are also factors such as regional identity that contribute to linguistic divergence. For this reason, beyond the general patterns described by globalization, the term ‘glocalization’ was coined in the field of globalization studies in order to refer to the process of adapting global products to meet local needs, resulting in increased marketability (Robertson, 1994; Sharifian, 2016; Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021: 484). This concept can also be applied to the study of World Englishes, particularly in the context of language teaching, since, although English is an international language learned all over the world, the methods that may work in a setting may not work in another one (Fang, 2018). In this sense, Xu (2013) proposed various conceptualizations of

globalization, including mobility, cultural blending, local functionality, super-diversity, and heterogeneity. Though glocalization can be studied at different linguistic levels, the discourse-pragmatic one seems particularly relevant, because given the importance of English as a means of cross-cultural communication, the areas of pragmatics and discourse may have both practical and theoretical significance, since understanding the variations in World Englishes can aid in reducing (mis)communication in real-world contexts.

Thus, pragmatic markers from historical input varieties may take on new functions in outer circle Englishes to accommodate local needs, while other pragmatic markers may be used to foster convergence between interlocutors with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, computer-mediated communication and other technological advancements have facilitated communication between diaspora members and people in their home countries, further contributing to glocalization and language change. Therefore, we must agree with Leuckert & Rüdiger (2021: 484) when they claim that the study of pragmatic markers in World Englishes, therefore, can benefit from the framework of glocalization.

## 2. PRAGMATIC MARKERS: FROM LINGUISTIC CINDERELLAS TO BLOSSOMING FIELD OF RESEARCH

The label ‘pragmatic marker’ (used, for example, by Brinton, 1996) co-exists with ‘pragmatic particle’ (Östman, 1995), ‘discourse marker’ (e.g. Schiffrin, 1987 and Jucker & Ziv, 1998), and ‘discourse particle’ (e.g. Hansen, 1998; Aijmer, 2002), as mentioned by Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg (2011: 226-227). Though there may be little differences between the terms regarding their particular scope, *pragmatic marker* is “most commonly used as a general or umbrella term covering forms with a wide variety of functions both on the interpersonal and textual levels” (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011: 227). Probably more important than the label chosen is the characterization of the items that are included in this class, since pragmatic markers have very little in common from a formal perspective. Within this class, we may find “connectives, modal particles, pragmatic uses of modal adverbs, interjections, routines (*how are you*),

feedback signals, vocatives, disjuncts (*frankly, fortunately*), pragmatic uses of conjunctions (*and, but*), approximators (hedges), reformulation markers” (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011: 227). For this reason, definitions of pragmatic markers tend to be as vague as “the connection between what a speaker is saying and what has already been said or what is going to be said,” which helps to make the structure of discourse clear (Swan, 1995: 151). Similarly, for Schiffrin (1987: 31) pragmatic markers are “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (see also Hopper & Traugott, 2003: 129). In Brinton’s (1996: 6) view, too, these items have the function of marking “various kinds of boundaries” and they can assist in “turn-taking in oral discourse.” For Degand & Evers-Vermeul (2015: 60) the main function of pragmatic markers is “to relate an utterance to the situation of discourse, more specifically to speaker-hearer interaction, speaker attitudes, and/or the organization of texts” (see also Baker, 2017: 222-223). This ability of pragmatic markers to show speakers’ attitudes is emphasized in various works. So, for Swan (1995: 151) a pragmatic marker can “indicate what speakers think about what they are saying or what others have said.” That is, pragmatic markers can show the speaker’s view, attitude or judgement “with respect to the relationship between the chunks of discourse that precede and follow” them (Onodera, 2011: 614; see also Brinton, 1996: 6; Andersen, 2001: 22; Traugott & Dasher, 2003: 152). They can even achieve the goal of obtaining “intimacy between speaker and addressee,” as Brinton (1996: 6) remarks.

Their lack of belonging to well established fields such as morphology, syntax or phonology explains why they have sometimes been referred to as *linguistic Cinderellas* (Enkvist, 1972: 95, as cited in Brinton, 1996: 1). In fact, we only have to go back to the the 1960s to find the first studies on pragmatic markers, such as Weydt’s *Abtönungspartikel* (1969), as mentioned by Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg (2011: 223), which makes them one of the last areas of interest of linguistic variation. Sometimes referred to as part of ‘Macrosyntax’ (e.g. Gülich, 1970, as cited by Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011: 223), an important motivation for the study of pragmatic markers came from the consideration that they respond to rules other than those belonging to syntax and, after a slow beginning, their study gained momentum in the late 1980s with the publication of Schiffrin’s (1987) monograph, followed by Jucker and Ziv

(1998), Lenk (1998), Andersen and Fretheim (2000), Aijmer (2002), to name just a few.

Despite the blossoming nature of this field of research, an accurate formal characterization of pragmatic markers still remains tentative, as seen in the list of formal features identified by Brinton (1996) and summarized by Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg (2011: 225):

- Phonological and lexical features:
  - a. they are short and phonologically reduced;
  - b. they form a separate tone group;
  - c. they are marginal forms and hence difficult to place within a traditional word class.
- Syntactic features:
  - a. they are restricted to sentence-initial position;
  - b. they occur outside the syntactic structure or they are only loosely attached to it;
  - c. they are optional.
- Semantic feature:
  - a. they have little or no propositional meaning.
- Functional feature:
  - a. they are multifunctional, operating on several linguistic levels simultaneously.
- Sociolinguistic and stylistic features:
  - a. they are a feature of oral rather than written discourse and are associated with informality;
  - b. they appear with high frequency;
  - c. they are stylistically stigmatised;
  - d. they are gender specific and more typical of women's speech. (cf. Hölker 1988; Jucker & Ziv 1998; Östman 1982)

(From: Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011: 225)

In addition to these formal features of pragmatic markers, their functions have been considered to belong to the following set (Brinton, 1996: 37-38): (1) discourse initiation and closing; (2) aiding the speaker in acquiring or relinquishing the floor; (3) floor management (e.g. turn-holding); (4) boundary marking (e.g. introduction of a new topic, resumption of a topic after interruption); (5) indication of information status (old or new information); (6) making conversational implicatures explicit; (7)

self- or other-repair; (8) response/reaction to previous discourse, hedging; and (9) creation of intimacy and affect between interlocutors (including politeness and face saving).

Since pragmatic markers occur mainly in interactive contexts, the most common methodological approach to their study consists in analysing corpus data. Thus, pragmatic markers have been studied in (i) corpora based on spoken material such as the *Bergen Corpus of London Teenager language* (COLT) (e.g. Andersen, 2001), the MICASE corpus (*Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English*) and the *Spoken Korean English Corpus* (SPOKE) (e.g. Rüdiger, 2021); (ii) in historical corpora such as *A corpus of English dialogues 1560–1760* (Kytö & Walker, 2006); (iii) parallel corpora that allow for comparative studies between related languages (e.g. for English-Swedish and English-Dutch, see e.g. Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2003); and (iv) corpora based on computer mediated communication, such as the *Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (DECTE) (e.g. Woolford, 2021) and the *Nordic Tweet Stream (NTS) Corpus* (e.g. Tyrkkö et al., 2021).

Nowadays, pragmatic markers are analysed from a broad range of perspectives. Thus, in addition to the contrastive studies mentioned in (iii) above, their strong cultural load has made them especially appealing for researches of translation studies, such as Matamala (2007) who has conducted research on the techniques employed in translating the interjection *oh* in English sitcoms that have been dubbed into Catalan. In addition, scholars interested in the variation between native and non-native communication have also paid close attention to pragmatic markers, such as Gilquin (2008), who has demonstrated that there are variations in the occurrence and pattern of pause fillers (such as *like, I mean, you know*) between contexts of native and non-native speakers. Likewise, pragmatic markers have been studied extensively from a diachronic perspective (e.g. Traugott, 2016), taking into account their function in spoken discourse (Pichler, 2013), and as a result of language contact situations (e.g. *lah*, an outstanding pragmatic marker in Singapore English, e.g. Wong, 2004).

From this multiplicity of perspectives, some pragmatic markers have received much more attention than others. Thus, for example, *well* holds disputably the first place, followed by *like* (and *be like*), and, at a distance, *you know, of course* and *sort of* (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011: 232). Precisely *sort of* and its related *kind of* are the subject of study of

this monograph with the aim of contributing to understanding their usage in World Englishes.

### 3. AIMS AND STRUCTURE

The aim of this volume is to provide a syntactic and semantic-pragmatic characterization of the pragmatic markers *kind of* and *sort of* in four varieties of English. These are: British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), as representative of Kachru's (1985) inner circle, and Singapore English (SingE) and Philippine English (PhilE), two outer circle varieties spoken in Asia and with different matrillects. Singapore was a British colony and the Philippines were an American one, and the varieties of English planted there have been in contact with a multiplicity of indigenous languages. The similarities and differences between the four varieties will allow us to contribute to the dialect divergence – dialect convergence discussion, by taking into account the role played by global phenomena (e.g. Americanization and globalization).

For this purpose, this book can be said to have two distinct parts. The first part reviews previous research conducted on *kind of* and *sort of* in inner circle varieties of English, as follows. Chapter 2 provides a historical description of the processes of change undergone by *kind of* and *sort of* from their nominal status (meaning 'type of') to the pragmatic marker function. The chapter guides the reader throughout the history of English (section 1) and also discusses general processes of language change such as reanalysis, metaphor, grammaticalization and pragmatization. Chapter 3 describes the current uses, meanings and pragmatic values of *kind of* and *sort of* in inner circle varieties of English, as found in the literature. This description will allow us to measure the degree to which the outer circle varieties studied in this piece of research make a full use of these expressions.

The second part of the study contains the analysis of the status of pragmatic markers in World Englishes. Thus, Chapter 4 describes the field by focusing on the different models of analysis that try to capture the reality in which English is spoken in all continents (section 1). It also positions SingE and PhilE in the context, but describing the historical socio-linguistic evolution of the status of English in those former colonies



(section 2). This chapter also presents the framework within which pragmatic markers should be studied in outer circle varieties, namely postcolonial pragmatics (section 3) and provides a summary of previous studies on pragmatic markers in SingE and PhilE (section 4). Chapter 5 comprises the largest section of the monograph as it scrutinizes the data obtained from the corpus and draws comparisons between the various varieties. Chapter 6 complements this discussion by examining the potential reasons for the similarities and differences between the varieties, as well as exploring the role of global phenomena, such as Americanization and colloquialization, in the process of dialect convergence and divergence. Finally, Chapter 7 presents a summary of the findings, draws conclusions based on them, and provides an outlook for future research.

This book contributes to the field of pragmatic variation in World Englishes by analysing the pragmatic markers *kind of* and *sort of*. After a general review of their history and current use, the book offers a contrastive study of their frequency, semantics and pragmatic values in four varieties of English, as represented in the GloWbE corpus. These are, on the one hand, the two most influential inner circle varieties of English, those spoken in the United States and Great Britain, and, on the other, two outer circle varieties spoken in former colonies of these two countries, namely the Philippines and Singapore respectively. The results strengthen the understanding of the effects of global processes such as Americanization and glocalization on pragmatic variation and illustrate phenomena of linguistic convergence and divergence across space.

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