

Variationist methodology in pragmatics: (how) can it be done?

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The study of pragmatic variation has been a moot point among variationists, not least because its object, the pragmatic variable, does not fit mainstream definitions of the linguistic variable. This paper investigates whether an interpretation of the linguistic variable appropriate to the study of pragmatic variation is possible, and what it might look like. Based on a survey of studies of discourse markers and speech act realization, it is proposed that these two loci of pragmatic variation are held together by expressing procedural meaning, defined in Relevance Theory as a set of instructions guiding the inferential phase of utterance interpretation.