

***Offers and Offer Refusals: A Postcolonial Pragmatics
Perspective on World Englishes***
Eric A. Anchimbe (2018)

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Eric Anchimbe's *Offers and Offer Refusals: A Postcolonial Pragmatics Perspective on World Englishes* may justly be described as the definitive text on the emerging Postcolonial Pragmatics theory. Not least, it is the most elaborate presentation of the key assumptions, analytical components and procedures of the theory as well as its application to the study of offers and offer refusals in two postcolonial Englishes, namely Ghanaian English and Cameroon English.

The book has seven chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, emphasises that most of the existing pragmatic studies of discourses from postcolonial communities tend to adopt predominantly Western pragmatic theories, especially Goffman (1967) on face, Brown and Levinson (1987) on politeness and Searle (1969) on speech acts, theories developed from predominantly monolingual and monocultural Western speech communities. These models do not adequately account for pragmatic discourses from former colonised communities and, to do so, there is need for an emic pragmatic approach which would properly represent the experiences of the colonised communities. Postcolonial Pragmatics is then presented as the *deus ex machina* aimed at playing this role that the mainstream approaches have failed to play convincingly.

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Chapter 1 also explores in detail two of the analytical frameworks used in the study, namely the World Englishes paradigm and Trosborg's (1995) theory of communicative acts. The World Englishes paradigm attributes equal status to the different varieties of English spoken around the world. This approach is significant because it does not compare these varieties of English, Ghanaian English and Cameroon English with the so-called native varieties, but rather investigates them as 'norm-setting standard varieties' (p. 22). For its part, Trosborg's (1995) theory of communicative acts is useful in analysing the structures of the offers and offer refusals in the data. However, certain aspects of the theory are modified to suit the nature of the data investigated.

This chapter further presents the discourse completion task (DCT) and interviews as the data-gathering methods used in the study. One major advantage of the DCT as data-gathering technique is that it enabled the researcher to gather a large amount of data (200 responses, 100 from each country), from a balanced gender demography (50 male and 50 female in each country), with a sizeable part of the data featuring offer refusal situations, which is the main focus of the study. However, it also raises the question of whether the data is a true representation of the use of language in the communities studied. For, according to Bieswanger (2015), there are marked differences between real life data and data gathered via DCT questionnaires: while the former shows people's actual linguistic behaviour in a given situation, the latter shows what people think they are expected to do in the given situation, which makes it 'useful for research aiming to identify the expectations of a speech community concerning appropriate behaviour' (Bieswanger, 2015:544). Incidentally, the research questions of Anchimbe (2018) suggest that the author is interested in actual linguistic behaviour and not in expectations of appropriate linguistic behaviour. That notwithstanding, in the course of the analysis in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, the author indicated that the choices made by the respondents reflected the expectations of proper linguistic behaviour in these postcolonial communities.

Chapter 2 explicates the premises and analytical procedures of Postcolonial Pragmatics as against extant pragmatic theories. The major premise of Postcolonial Pragmatics is that colonialism introduced new cultures which then merged with the existing cultures of the colonized communities and resulted in hybrid cultures. The colonially introduced realities are in the form of 'languages, religions, political administrative systems, formal education, etc.' (p. 40). These new realities birthed hybrid identities and languages and new pragmatic strategies. The author, however, emphasised that these forms of hybridism were a part of the pre-colonial communities, and colonialism only added new hybrid cultures to the existing ones. The major analytical components relevant to Postcolonial

Pragmatics include ‘history, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, kinship, linguistic background, identity, social class or status and culture (i.e. collectivist cultural laws and expectations)’ (p. 44). These components could be studied from an emic perspective, individually or in combination, as determined by the pragmatic discourse under study. This is very significant as here lies a major strength of Postcolonial Pragmatics theory; most of the extant frameworks derived from studies of predominantly monolingual and monocultural communities hardly account for the pragmatic significance of these components.

Beyond explicating the thrust of Postcolonial Pragmatics, this book also demonstrates its viability by applying it to offers and offer refusal situations in Cameroon and Ghana, two postcolonial communities. This is done in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. The analysis in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are based on data gathered via DCT questionnaires on three offer and offer refusal situations. The first situation involves a senior colleague offering a drink at a bar to a junior colleague, the second entails a younger person offering their seat in a church to an old man, while the third situation has to do with a person offering food to their peer on a bus. In all three chapters, the author explored three things: 1) the vertical structure of offer-refusal sequences, i.e., the preparatory, head and supportive acts. Focus on the preparatory and supportive acts was on their types, constituent parts and pragmatic functions, while for the head acts, focus was on their internal modifications and types; 2) the strategies used in realising offer-refusal utterances, explicating the syntactic structures of the utterances and the illocutionary intents conveyed; and 3) the postcolonial pragmatic components that speakers invoke to support their illocutionary intents. The power relations (top-down, bottom-up and horizontal) between the interlocutors and the settings (informal bar situation, semi-formal church situation and informal bus situation) in the three offer-refusal situations respectively engendered different interesting results in the different situations. For instance, Situation 3 features the preparatory act of introduction which is missing in Situations 1 and 2. This was apparently meant to relax the atmosphere and build some trust before the offer was made. Similarly, Situation 2 features 189 uses of kinship terms as against Situation 1 which features only one use, and Situation 3 which features just two instances. Relocating the relationship between the interlocutors who were strangers to the family space was apparently informed by the major postcolonial pragmatic components involved (age) and the church setting.

The analysis in Chapter 6 is based mainly on the interviews and only supported in some cases with responses from the DCT questionnaire. In this chapter, the author analyses the reflections of the respondents on how the different new hybrid linguistic, ethnic or tribal, religious and social identities are relevant in their acceptance and/or refusals of offers.

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 7, summarizes the major findings of the study. One finding is that there are significant similarities in the linguistic strategies used in the postcolonial communities studied – Ghana and Cameroon – in making and refusing offers. The study also accentuates the hybrid linguistic, religious, political and social identities of members of these societies and how Postcolonial Pragmatics, in combination with the World Englishes paradigm and Trosborg's (1995) communicative acts, offers a better analytical framework for a study of such postcolonial pragmatic discourses.

One must not fail at this point to comment on the author's consistent use of the term *tribe* and its adjectival form *tribal* throughout the book. This use may be attributed to the fact that the respondents to both the questionnaires and interviews used the same terms themselves. However, many scholars have decried the continued use of *tribe* in scholarship and have called for its disuse owing to its colonial history and negative connotations (see Fluehr-Lobban, Lobban and Zangari, 1976). According to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2020), 'in contemporary contexts it is problematic when ["tribe" is] used to refer to a community living within a traditional society. It is strongly associated with past attitudes of white colonialists towards so-called primitive or uncivilized peoples living in remote undeveloped places. For this reason it is generally preferable to use alternative terms such as community or people.'

The author's use of the term in this volume becomes problematic considering the fact that the World Englishes paradigm, one of the analytical frameworks used in this book, rejects the hierarchization of the different World Englishes. Using a term that subordinates the societies that produce these postcolonial Englishes invariably contradicts the World Englishes paradigm.

That notwithstanding, Eric Anchimbe's *Offers and Offer Refusals: A Postcolonial Pragmatics Perspective on World Englishes* has indeed demonstrated the viability of Postcolonial Pragmatics as an emerging theoretical framework suited for the analysis of the nuanced pragmatic experiences of postcolonial communities. It has also demonstrated the structure of the pragmatic act of making and refusing offers in postcolonial societies. What is more, it has clearly showcased the expected norms of appropriate linguistic and indeed social behaviour in these societies. Scholars are therefore enjoined to employ this theory in studying other pragmatic phenomena in postcolonial societies, as doing this would engender a better appreciation of pragmatic discourses in these postcolonial speech communities.

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