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'Early interactions' in Australian English, American English, and English English: Cultural differences and cultural scripts

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Abstract

This study applies the techniques of contrastive ethnopragmatics to communicative style in initial conversational interactions in three varieties of Anglo English: Australian English, American English, and English English. It proposes for each variety a distinctive suite of cultural scripts concerning matters such as presumed stance in relation to sameness and difference, degree of attention to accent and speech style, expected degree of interest in personal information about the interlocutor, expressions of accomplishments and ambitions, and 'phatic complimenting'. Evidence is drawn from personal testimonies about cultural cross-talk, sociological and cultural studies, and contrastive corpus data. Different communication styles pertaining to initial self-presentation have implications for mutual misperception, negative evaluation and stereotyping.

Keywords: Cultural scripts; Communicative style; Variational pragmatics; Impoliteness

1. Introduction

Australian English, American English, and English English can be regarded as three macro-varieties of ''Anglo English'', and as such they obviously have a great deal in common, including in their pragmatics, as well as lexis, phonology, and grammar.[1] This does not mean, however, that there are no significant differences in preferred communication style between them. Using the techniques of contrastive ethnopragmatics (Wierzbicka, 2003; Goddard, 2006c), this study aims to identify for each variety a distinctive suite of cultural scripts that characterise the preferred or expected communication style between interlocutors who do not know each other well, i.e. roughly speaking, during the ''getting to know you'' stage of interaction. Evidence is drawn from personal testimonies about cultural cross-talk, sociological and cultural studies, and contrastive corpus data. The cultural scripts capture different shared expectations across the three national varieties regarding the appropriate or typical conversational moves and conversational tone during early self-presentation. The differing scripts carry with them implications for mutual misperception, miscommunication, and negative evaluation and thus fall within the ambit of impoliteness studies, as broadly conceived (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Haugh and Schneider, 2012). The focus of the present study, however, is not on miscommunication as such but rather on the problem of how to characterise and understand the expected communication styles of each variety in terms of cultural scripts.

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[1] In using the term English English, and in describing it as a ''national variety'', I am following Schneider (2008, 2012). By nature any such terms (American English and Australian English included) are approximate and somewhat idealised. The impulse behind the term English English, as opposed to British English, is to avoid any implication that the discussion is necessarily applicable to Scottish English, Welsh English or Irish English.

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The term 'cultural scripts' can be used in either broad or a narrow sense. In the broad sense, it refers to ''representations of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society and are reflected in the language'' (Wierzbicka, 2007:56). In this sense, cultural scripts can be compared with what are known in the ethnography of communication research tradition as 'norms of interaction' and 'norms of interpretation', i.e. widely shared assumptions about how – and why – it is good or bad to speak in certain culturally construed situations. Obviously not everyone in a given speech community necessarily agrees with or conforms to such shared understandings and, indeed, speakers are not necessarily consciously aware of them in normal interaction. Nevertheless, they form a kind of interpretive backdrop to everyday interaction.

In a more technical sense, the term 'cultural script' refers to a particular technique for articulating cultural norms and values in a fashion that is clear, precise, translatable, and accessible to cultural insiders and cultural outsiders alike (Wierzbicka, 1996a, 2002, 2003, 2006a, 2012; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1997, 2004; Ameka, 1999; Goddard, 2009a; Hasada, 2006; Travis, 2006; Wong, 2004; Ye, 2004, 2006; Nicholls, 2009:Ch. 6; Levisen, 2010). This outcome is possible because cultural scripts in this sense are formulated in a highly constrained metalanguage of semantically simple words (semantic primes) and grammatical patterns which appear to have equivalents in all languages. This metalanguage, which has been independently derived from extensive studies in cross-linguistic lexical semantics conducted by researchers in the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) approach, cannot be dealt with in any detail here (Wierzbicka, 1996b; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2002; Peeters, 2006; Goddard, 2008). The inventory of semantic primes is tabulated in Appendix A. For present purposes, the key point is that cultural scripts are composed in combinations of simple words, such as, for example: 'many people think like this', 'this someone is someone like me', 'if I don't know someone well, it can be good if I don't say much to this someone', and so on. No technical terms, and no other words known to lack exact semantic equivalents in other languages, are allowed in cultural scripts. Because the wording is so simple, the scripts should be intuitively very clear in meaning and can plausibly be taken as representing something that is conceptually real for ordinary speakers, notwithstanding that using a small vocabulary sometimes creates a stylistically unusual effect (and that some NSM expressions, such as 'this someone', are not particularly idiomatic). One of the key goals of the cultural scripts methodology is to capture and represent the perspectives of cultural insiders.

The scripts to be proposed in the present study concern matters such as presumed stance in relation to sameness and difference, degree of attention to accent, word choice and speech style, expected degree of interest in personal information about the interlocutor, expressions of accomplishments and ambitions, and 'phatic complimenting'. Differences like these between varieties of the one language readily give rise to what Carbaugh (2005) has termed ''invisible misunderstandings''.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that there is tremendous overlap in values and cultural norms between the three countries whose national Englishes are the subject of this study. A good reminder of this, which at the same time alerts us to certain differences that will be relevant later, is to consider the data displayed in Table 1. This shows the rankings of the USA, Australia, and the Great Britain on three value dimensions in Hofstede's (1987, 2001) well known questionnaire-based study of 53 countries. It can be seen that the three countries occupied the first three places on Hofstede's Individual/Collectivism scale, and, furthermore, that they are close to one another on two other scales as well: Power Distance (roughly, how accepting people are of wide differences in power and status) and Masculinity (roughly, how 'tough minded' people are).

I would be among the first to acknowledge that Hofstede's studies incurred certain methodological problems,[2] and also to highlight that the dimensions of comparison being employed ('individualism/collectivism', 'power distance', 'masculinity'), being technical terms from social science, cannot shed much light on culture-internal perspectives of the societies being described. Nonetheless, the closeness of the scores bears witness to the fact that Australia, USA and Great Britain are very similar to one another, when compared with countries like France, China, Malaysia and Costa Rica.

The most striking result is of course the Individualism figure. At the same time it is interesting that on this very dimension, social psychologists have also detected a significant difference between Australia and the USA. This concerns so-called 'horizontal' vs. 'vertical' individualism: Australia is notable for its horizontal individualism, as compared with the vertical individualism of the USA. Based on questionnaire responses from a series of studies, Triandis (1995) and colleagues have concluded that in societies characterised by the vertical pattern, as in the USA, ''people often want to become distinguished and acquire status, and they do this in individual competition with others'' (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998:119). In societies characterised by horizontal individualism, on the other hand, it is regarded as preferable that ''people should be similar on most attributes, especially status'' (Triandis, 1995:44). In such societies, according to their own self-reports at least, people ''are not especially interested in becoming distinguished or in having high status'' (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998:119).

[2] For example, problems have been raised about the representativeness of the samples (which were drawn from employees of the IBM company in the various countries), and about the design and translation of the questionnaires (cf. McSweeney, 2002).

Table 1
Ranking on three of Hofstede's (2001) value dimensions (out of 53 countries in all).

Country	Individualism (I/C)	Power distance	Masculinity
USA	1	38	15
Australia	2	41	16
Great Britain	3	42/44	9/10

2. Sameness, difference, and 'stance' in early interactions

For reasons that will become apparent, it is convenient to begin by comparing Australian English and English English, before turning to American English.

2.1. Australian English and English English

It is widely accepted in the social science and cultural analysis literature that ''egalitariarism'' is an important Australian cultural ideal. Ethnopragmatic and semantic studies of Australian English (Wierzbicka, 2001, 2002; Goddard, 2006a, 2009b; Béal, 1992, 1993; Peeters, 2004; Mullan, 2011) concur and have devoted some considerable effort to capturing the portfolio of social assumptions that give Australian egalitarianism its particular cultural flavour, so to speak, as well as to tracing the implications for interactional style. Building on this work, I would like to suggest the cultural script given in [A], which presents presumed social similarity and social equality as high-level Anglo-Australian cultural ideals.

[A] *Anglo-Australian cultural script valuing presumed social similarity and social equality*
many people think like this:
it is good if people can think like this about many other people:
''this someone is someone like me
I am not someone above this someone, this someone is not someone above me''

The idea that Australians tend to endorse the stance that 'this someone is someone like me' (and to assume that this will be appreciated by an interlocutor) originated in Wierzbicka's early treatments of Australian culture, e.g. Wierzbicka (1997:Ch. 5). The script as given above adds a component concerning presumed social equality: a preference for a ''horizontal'' society, so to speak. Script [A] underpins many aspects of the preferred communication style of Australian English, which is characterised by a very high degree of 'informality', in the sense of ''purposeful rejection of any overt show of respect, with implications of familiarity, friendliness and equality'' (Wierzbicka, 2003:150).

Historian Hirst (2006:301) says that an ''egalitarianism of manners'' has long been a part of Australian social life. Importantly, lest this be misunderstood, the claim is not one about objective social structure, in terms of differentials in power, status and wealth, but rather about ''the feel of Australian society''.

> Some people claim that Australian society is not egalitarian because there are wide differences of income, which may now be getting wider. This misses the point of Australian egalitarianism. It is the way *Australians blot out differences when people meet face to face. They talk to each other as if they are equals and they will put down anyone claiming social superiority*. (Hirst, 2006:301; emphasis added)

Backing up this point, Hirst observes that the egalitarianism of manners was already apparent to outside observers in the 1850s, when differences in social standing and income were much greater than in recent times. Some social historians trace its origins back to the first 50 years of the convict settlement at Sydney where a ''levelling'' attitude entrenched itself in the new society dominated by formerly lower class individuals (Smith, 2008).

The interactional implications of script [A] are spelt out in the closely related script [B], which is focussed specifically on personal interaction ('when I am with someone'). It implies that as a speaker it will be valued if I can project the impression of thinking that I regard my interlocutor as someone similar to me and as a social equal.

[B] *Anglo-Australian cultural script for projecting presumed social similarity and social equality in interaction:*
many people think like this:
when I am with someone, it is good if this someone can know that I think like this:
''this someone is someone like me
I am not someone above this someone, this someone is not someone above me''

This script is consistent with a range of solidarity features displayed in typical Australian interactions, such as reciprocal preference for first-name address and/or use of 'matey' epithets such as *mate* (from men, and younger women) and *love*

(from older women), solidarity routines and request formulas (cf. Béal, 1992, 1993), and the early use of jocular irony and jocular mockery (Goddard, 2006a; Haugh, 2010, 2011; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). In relation to forms of address, it is worth noting that Australian English goes even further than American English in favouring first-name address; for example, at Australian universities many students spontaneously address their lecturers by their first names from the time of their first meeting.

Another Australian English script with implications for early interactions is given in [C] below. In effect this discourages people from seeming to want to attract the admiration of other people, in as much as this would convey the implication that one wants to be seen as 'someone very good' and as 'not like other people' (cf. Peeters, 2004; Goddard, 2006a). (It would also likely incur retaliatory ''deflationary'' speech-acts, such as *taking the piss*/*mickey*.) As we will see later, script [C] runs counter to certain American English cultural scripts that encourage display of one's achievements and distinctive qualities in initial interactions.

[C] *Anglo-Australian English cultural script discouraging wanting other people's admiration*
many people think like this:
it is bad if someone thinks like this:
''I want other people to think about me like this:
'this someone is someone very good, this someone is not like other people'''

Overall, the assumptions of social similarity and social equality and related features (such as a preference, not dealt with here, for projecting the appearance of being in a 'good mood') add up to an attitude according to which early interactions do not seem very complicated or challenging. Newcomers to Australia often comment on the easy attitude Australians adopt with each other and on the willingness with which they speak with strangers (attitudes that can also be seen as, for example, naïve and/or overly familiar). For example, British-born travel writer Sharp (2001:19) describes Australians' ''willingness to talk to strangers in the street, on the bus, anywhere'' as ''delightful''. American Bill Bryson (2000) found in Australia ''a lack of reserve, a comfortableness with strangers'' (p. 373) that was predicated, he felt, on a ''spirit of shared understanding'' (p. 373).

In England, by contrast, things are more complicated. A wide range of evidence suggests that consciousness of social distinction and something like social hierarchy remain a predominant part of the social landscape. One of a suite of interrelated cultural scripts associated with *class* (as the English term it) can be stated as shown below. Needless to say, *class* in this sense is not to be understood in terms of objective socioeconomic facts but as a ''social meaning'' that can participate in construals of identity.[3] In Rampton's (2010:3) words, it means ''a *sensed social difference* that people and groups produce in interaction and there is struggle and negotiation about who's up, who's down, who's in, who's out, and where the lines are drawn'' (emphasis added).

Note that script [D] is not a 'values script', as one might describe script [A] above, i.e. it does not spell out a shared assumption about how it is good to think or to do things. Rather it spells out certain shared assumptions about how many people actually do often think.[4] First and foremost, it recognises as a ''social fact'' that many people often assess other people as different ('not people like me') and, furthermore, as belonging to a higher stratum of society ('people like these people are above people like me'). Likewise, it recognises as a social fact that some people may at times assess others as different and as belonging to a lower stratum of society.

[D] *English cultural script capturing consciousness of social difference and potential perceptions of social superiority*
many people think like this:
at many times many people think like this about some other people:
''these people are not people like me
people like these people are above people like me''
at some times some people think like this about other people:
''these people are not people like me
people like me are above people like these people''

It may be noted that the phrasing of script [D] suggests a more ''collective'' perspective than its Australian counterpart.

[3] From a sociological point of view, the English ethnoconcept of *class* is more about status and exclusivity than about income (cf. Milroy, 1987, 2001; Rampton, 2006:Ch. 6). Needless to say, *class* is a complex and highly ramified concept for social life in England – a cultural key word of English English. The script given in [D] alludes, as it were, to the concept, but it is not an explication of the meaning of the word *class*. To explicate *class* in full would require a dedicated study of its own.

[4] The distinction between what are termed here ''values scripts'' and ''social fact scripts'' corresponds somewhat to Eelen's (2001) distinction between moral norms and empirical norms. Moral norms concern what people think should occur, while empirical norms concern what people think is likely to occur.

As numerous commentators have observed, initial perceptions of social difference in England are overwhelmingly connected with one's way of speaking. Social anthropologist Kate Fox (2004), talking about English ''dis-ease'' – roughly, expected awkwardness – in initial conversations, puts it as follows:

> One cannot talk about English conversation codes without talking about class. And one cannot talk at all without immediately revealing one's own social class. ... there are two main factors involved ... terminology and pronunciation – the words you use and how you say them. ... Class in England has nothing to do with money, and very little to do with occupation. Speech is all-important. (Fox, 2004:72, 82)

Mugglestone (2003) is a book-length study of the historical development since the late 18th century of ''accent'' as a marker of social status in British language ideology: ''Like class itself, accent was, in effect, to become a major national obsession over this time'' (p. 5). A distinctive aspect of this development was the ideal of a supra-regional elite variety (RP or Received Pronunciation) ideologised as a standard (see Milroy (2001) for a contrastive analysis with the USA). To be sure, RP is no longer an uncontested standard: it may now be seen more as ''talking posh'' than as ''talking proper'' (Mugglestone, 2003:280; Agha, 2003). Nonetheless the point remains that, in England, accents and ways of speaking in general remain a highly salient locus for social construal and evaluation. For not only does one's speech invite judgements of sameness, difference, and status, it also invites potential disapproval and negativity in its own right. Commenting on Britain's great variety of identifiable accents, the popularist cultural critic Gil (2004:43–44) has said that ''every single one of them makes someone else laugh or wince, or scowl ... You can mock an accent with impunity, and everyone does. ... Accent and pronunciation are a never-ending source of subtle snobbery and fury for the English''. I would not suggest that someone like Gil is always a reliable source, but on this score his comments echo those of many others.

The two scripts below attempt to capture some of the relevant attitudes, which can be seen as part of the folk pragmatics of English English (Niedzielski and Preston, 2000, 2007). Script [E] concerns interpreting speech differences as indicators of social difference, and script [F] concerns the possible negative evaluations both of word choice and of pronunciation (cf. Cook, n.d. on lexical markers of 'class').

[E] *English English cultural script recognising speech differences as indicators of social difference*
many people think like this:
at many times when someone says something, if someone else can hear it,
this someone else can think about it like this:
''this someone says things not like I say things
because of this, I know that this someone is someone not like me''

[F] *English English cultural script for awareness of possible disapproval about word choice and pronunciation*
many people think like this:
at many times when someone says something, if someone else can hear it,
this someone else can think about it like this:
''it is not good if someone says words like these words
it is not good if someone says words like/as this someone says words''

Note that these scripts suggest that many people may feel potential anxiety or apprehension associated with speaking to someone they don't know well, on account of not knowing how their way of speaking will be received by the interlocutor.

As many observers have noted, initial interactions in English English are often characterised by a degree of 'reserve'. Sharwood-Smith (1999) explains that interpersonal encounters with ''strangers'' should be treated ''with caution'' (p. 62): ''You should assess whether someone wants to be left alone or wants to engage in conversation and react accordingly'' (p. 66). A little later, he has this to say:

> The British are by no means unfriendly but it is unfortunate that some of their behaviour, particularly in southern and southeastern parts of England, does strike outsiders as reserved, sometimes even as cold. ... the motive is ... a concern not to impose on other people, a concern not to demand attention and friendship from other people who may prefer to be left alone (Sharwood-Smith, 1999:70).

As this quotation suggests, the origins of English 'reserve' are complex, deriving in large measure from a cluster of values connected with classic English ideals of 'non-imposition', 'non-intrusion', and 'privacy'. For reasons of space we cannot explore these in any detail here (but see Wierzbicka, 2006b). From an interactional behavioural point of view, however, one of the consequences can be spelt out as in script [G].

Table 2
Distribution of move types (left-hand column) across the 30 opening turns in three varieties of English (after Schneider, 2008, Table 8).

	English English	American English	Irish English
Greeting	93.3% (28)	96.7% (29)	76.7% (23)
Self-Identification	13.3% (4)	70.0% (21)	3.3% (1)
Request identification	6.7% (2)	43.3% (13)	–
Appreciative comment	13.3% (4)	13.3% (4)	100.0% (30)
Compliment	10.0% (3)	–	–
Other	3.3% (1)	3.3% (1)	–

[G] *English English cultural script for 'reserve' in speaking with people one doesn't know well*
many people think like this:
when I am with someone, if I don't know this someone well,
it can be good if I don't say much to this someone

Script [G] encourages individuals not to want to say too much when speaking with unfamiliar people. There is evidence for an additional set of scripts that constrain the kind of topics and interactional moves that are felt to be appropriate. Fox (2004) explains at length that, although English interlocutors are often curious about the social details of their interlocutors, they feel strongly inhibited to inquire directly about them, in line with the powerful cultural injunctions to 'mind one's own business', 'to keep ourselves to ourselves' and, above all, not to 'pry' (p. 42). According to Fox, in many contexts this extends to avoiding direct questions about what one's interlocutor does for a living, and even to a direct inquiry about his or her name. The culturally endorsed attitude can be stated as in script [H]. As Fox emphasises, the attitude concerns the impression one wishes to convey. In reality, people are often intensely interested in obtaining information about someone they have newly met, but they feel obliged to proceed in an indirect fashion.

[H] *English English cultural script for avoiding the appearance of being ''intrusively'' interested in people one doesn't know well*
many people think like this:
when I am with someone, if I don't know this someone well,
it can be bad if this someone thinks that I want to know something about this someone
if this someone thinks this, he/she can feel something bad because of this

From the point of view of Americans and Australians, the canonically English attitude being described by Fox (2004) seems quite peculiar:

> [Y]ou do not go up to someone at a party (or in any other social setting where conversation with strangers is permitted, such as at a pub counter) and say 'Hello, I'm John Smith', or even 'Hello, I'm John'. ... The 'brash American' approach, 'Hi, I'm Bill from Iowa', particularly if accompanied by an outstretched hand and beaming smile, makes the English wince and cringe (Fox, 2004:38–39).

Though there may be an element of overstatement in Fox's formulation, there is other evidence, quantitative in nature, that supports the claim that there are significant differences among Anglo Englishes in relation to exchange of names, occupational, and other personal information. Schneider (2008) studied the preferred opening turns of small talk at parties, via a dialogue production task undertaken by a sample of teenage respondent speakers of English English, American English and Irish English. Table 2 below shows the distribution of 'move types' represented in the data obtained for each variety of English. Essentially it represents what speakers of these varieties report would be the most likely conversational exchange at a party, upon speaking for the first time with someone that one does not already know. The preferred pattern is markedly different in each variety. Of relevance to the present study is the finding that both self-identification and request for an addressee's name are strikingly less frequent in the English English data, than in the American English data; cf. also Schneider (2012).

Speakers of American English almost always volunteered their name along with the greeting, and often asked the interlocutor's name at the same time. For example: *Hi, my name is Nikki. (What's yours?)*. Speakers of English English, in contrast, only rarely offered their own names, and even more rarely requested the other person's name. That is, the typical pattern is: A: *Hi*. B: *Hi*. As Schneider (2008:127) notes: ''it appears that requests for further information about the interlocutor are avoided completely in EngE party small talk''. Schneider's (2008) study did not consider Australian English, but it is interesting to observe that the data from Irish English exhibit a radically different pattern from both English

Table 3
Frequency figures for two occupation-related questions in Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNY-BYU) (Davies, 2004, 2008).

	COCA per million words	BNC-BYU per million words
'What do you do?'	2.12	1.18
'What do you do for a living'	.13	.07

English and American English. In Irish English, the preferred pattern in the data involved almost no use of names whatsoever (even less, that is, than English English). On the other hand, the initial greeting was invariably followed by an 'appreciative' comment, which was reciprocated. Typical pattern: A: *Hi! Great party, isn't it?* B: *Yeah. (Great music)*. The pattern can be interpreted as mutual exchange of messages of solidarity. Though data of this kind must be handled with care in view of their normative nature, small sample sizes, etc. they are highly suggestive.

Fox's (2004) claim that direct information-seeking about a new interlocutor is dispreferred in many contexts in English English is also supported by contrastive corpus analysis. Table 3 reports frequency figures per million in the Corpus of Contemporary American English and British National Corpus for the questions 'What do you do?' and 'What do you do for a living?'. Various sources on American English (e.g. Lanier, 2005; Renwick, 1980) state that such questions are often among the earliest in getting-to-know-you conversations in the United States. Though a large-scale comparison like this is by nature a very rough measure, the figures seem to confirm that there is a substantial difference between the two varieties.[5]

Comparing the proposed English English and Australian English scripts so far, it can be seen that some of the general attitudinal scripts appear to be more or less converse to one another: the English scripts focusing on social difference, hierarchy, and a degree of reserve, and the Australian scripts rejecting social difference and presuming equality and solidarity. This would be congruent with the observation of many historical commentators that traditional Australian social ideology defined itself to a large extent by its rejection of the traditional class, status and authority structures of England (cf. Thornhill, 1992; Hirst, 1998).

2.2. American English

When we turn to the USA, however, the most general attitudinal scripts appear to be constructed on a rather different basis. There is, I suggest, a strong consciousness of social diversity in the community but it is not particularly linked with presumptions of hierarchy or equality, i.e. it is not connected with an ''above/below'' perspective, as it were. Rather the predominant conceptualisation is in terms of a multiplicity of different ''kinds of people'' who may or may not have much in common with oneself. Incidentally, this is consistent with Milroy's (2001) argument that language ideology in the USA has been historically constituted in terms of ethnic groupings and race, rather than in terms of class.

[I] *Anglo-American cultural script expressing consciousness of social diversity*
many people think like this:
there are many people in the place where I live
these people are people of many kinds
some of these people are people like me, some of these people are people not like me

Moving on to American style in initial interactions, I believe that Carbaugh (2005) has captured some of the most salient features, as seen from an insider perspective, in the following description:

> This peculiarly American character can speak a lot about almost anything, but seems especially fond of the ''self''. The cultural preference or rules for this kind of conversation revolve around the belief that one can and should speak, that one can and should speak about the ''self'', its history, experiences and opinions . . . In a country where

[5] Though large corpora have brought new rigour and replicability to many areas of linguistics, the prospects for variational pragmatics, though far from bleak, are not as good as one would wish. First, large standard corpora are heavily weighted to written texts. Second, from a variationalist point of view, even corpora of 100 million words have been shown to be too small to enable systematic comparisons of regional lexical markers (Mair, 2007). Many pragmatic phenomena may fare better, of course; for example, conversational routines such as complimenting, thanking, and apologising. Third, except for British and American English, accessible corpora of other national Englishes are relatively small. It would not be possible, for example, to compile figures comparable to those in Table 3 from available corpora of Australian English. For examples of how 'Web as corpus' methods can be used for contrastive pragmatics of Australian English, see Goddard (2009a,b) and cf. Wierzbicka (2009).

> everyone is presumably different, on personal and other levels, it is incumbent on each to say what they have to say, so that some common life can be woven out of these threads of difference. (Carbaugh, 2005:22)

What I find particularly insightful about these remarks is the way that Carbaugh at once characterises a particularly American stance (''that one can and should speak about the 'self''') and at same time links this with broad assumptions about society (''. . . in a country where everyone is presumably different, on personal and other levels''). Of course, such a compact formulation necessarily leaves implicit some of the intervening steps in the cultural logic. For example, it seems implicit in Carbaugh's formulation that talk about oneself serves, as the same author has put it elsewhere, as ''a means of self creation and display'' (Carbaugh, 1988:67–8). Furthermore, such self-display can be expected, in normal conditions, to be mutual or reciprocal, i.e. both parties in an initial interaction will display some picture of their ''history, experience, and opinions''. In the process, then, each party will be able to make an assessment of the other, to decide whether they have enough in common to make further interaction promising or interesting, and to identify any exceptional qualities in the other person.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Before moving on from the general framing of self-display or disclosure, I would like to draw attention to one further aspect which seems important to characterise the overall settings. This relates to timing, to pace, to the desirability of getting through the mutual social display quickly, thus enabling what Lanier (2005) calls ''fast assessment''. Consider script [J].

[J] *Anglo-American cultural script for self-disclosure and 'fast assessment' of new people*
many people think like this:
when I am with someone, if I don't know this someone well,
it is good if after a short time this someone can know some things about me
at the same time it is good if I can know some things about this someone
if this someone is someone like me, it is good if I can know this after a short time
if this someone is someone not like many other people, because people can know very good things about this someone, it is good if I can know this after a short time

Note that the first part of script [J] is phrased in such a way as to suggest that interlocutors are likely to volunteer or display 'information' about themselves, without much prompting or questioning being necessary.

Assuming then that one of the goals of initial American English conversational interaction is self display, the question arises: How is this done? What counts as one's ''self''? Drawing again on Carbaugh's work, I suggest that what self display means in this context is articulating, i.e. saying clearly and effectively, what one's goals, ambitions and capabilities are – because in this way one can delineate a combination of personal choices and qualities that make one different to other people.

The script in [K] attempts to spell out, from a first-person perspective, the configuration of assumptions involved: that it is valued to one see oneself as 'not like many other people' but rather as 'me'; that it is valued to be consciously aware of one's personal intentions, goals and capabilities; and, furthermore, that it is valued to be able to verbally articulate all these things (cf. Wierzbicka (2010:Ch. 5) on the semantics of English expressions based on the word *sense*, including *sense of self*). Needless to say, this script goes a lot further than simply motivating the impulse to introduce oneself in early interactions: it also goes to the content and detail of the self-presentation.

[K] *Anglo-American cultural script for valuing having and being able to articulate a clear 'sense of self'*
many people think like this:
it is good if someone can think like this:
''I am someone not like many other people, I am me
I know that I want to do some things, I know that I want some things to happen to me,
I know that I can do many things
I can say what these things are''

One aspect of script [K] is the implication that it is a valued personal attribute, in the American English cultural context, to think about oneself 'I know that I can do many things', and furthermore, to be able to identify these things. From an English English and Australian English point of view, statements about one's personal abilities are liable to violate cultural proscriptions favouring maintaining the appearance of modesty and cautioning against the possibility of being seen as 'blowing one's own trumpet', having a 'big head', being 'up oneself', a 'wanker', etc. (cf. Peeters, 2004; Stollznow, 2004; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). In the American cultural context, however, identifying one's own achievements and abilities – and seeking out and recognising those of others – is expected and accepted in many contexts.

In his cross-cultural study of Australians and Americans, Renwick (1991[1980]:21) identified the reluctance of Australians to speak up about their status and accomplishments as one of the most important sites of misunderstanding: ''Americans, in contrast, emphasize the identification and regard of exceptional qualities . . . to develop such qualities and to look for and respect them in others''. Comparing American and Japanese communication styles, Yamada (1997:101) points out that: ''Recognition is an important ritual in American interaction . . . a standard way for Americans to recognize each other is through praise''. These comments indicate the existence of a suite of American English cultural scripts connected with, roughly speaking, an individual's entitlement to have and to project a positive self-image, on the one hand, and the obligation to recognise and respect the achievement and status of one's interlocutors, on the other hand. Space prevents us from exploring these aspects here (but see Goddard, 2012) though they have important consequences for mutual misperceptions in early interactions between Americans and speakers of other varieties of Anglo English.

3. '**Positivity**' and '**phatic complimenting**' in American English

As a coda to the present study, and an invitation to further research, I would like to provisionally identify one additional difference between early interactions in American English and other varieties of Anglo English, and to propose associated cultural scripts. The phenomenon is what I will term 'phatic complimenting', which qualitative evidence suggests occurs at a much higher rate and in a more ''effusive'' fashion in American English than in other Anglo varieties. In my experience, it is one of the most stereotyped and most disfavoured features of American English interactional style, so far as speakers of English English and Australian English are concerned.

Before coming to the complimenting behaviour, however, it is important to recognise that the practice fits into a broader story about aspects of American English speech culture which, for reasons of space, can only be sketched here. These include the generally higher level of 'positivity' in American English interaction in general, the greater importance in Anglo-American speech culture than in other Anglo varieties for displaying that one is feeling something good most of the time, and the fact that the general Anglo preference for 'understatement' is much less prominent in American English than in other Anglo varieties. These matters have been explored in a number of Anna Wierzbicka's works (for example, Wierzbicka, 1999:Ch. 6), from which the following scripts are derived. See also Ehrenreich (2009).

[L] *Anglo-American cultural script favouring feeling good in general and showing it in general*
many people think like this:
it is good if someone can feel something good at many times
at many times when someone feels something good, it is good if other people can know it

[M] *Anglo-American cultural script for projecting good feelings in verbal interactions*
many people think like this:
at many times when I say something to someone else,
it is good if this someone thinks that I feel something good at this time

Coming now to 'phatic complimenting', consider the following set of quotations from linguist Lynne Murphy's blog ''separated by a common language'', which is chiefly dedicated to differences between British and American English [http://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com]. In an exchange in June 2008, respondents were discussing different 'complimenting' practices in British English and American English. A British respondent (John B.) stated (with a critical tone) that he finds American compliments such as the following to be ''insincere'' and ''highly exaggerated'':

You're so intelligent.
You play the guitar so beautifully.
You're the best employee we have.

Not so, responded two American bloggers:

> I am an American and I very deliberately and consciously do what you've described. Especially when I encounter someone I don't have a lot in common with, I deliberately seek out something about them I like to compliment them on. . . . I didn't realise that other cultures might see this as insincere – it's not. [Robin 11 June 21:27]

> John B, I find it curious that you find those compliments highly exaggerated. I don't see any of them as exaggerated. [Ellen K 12 June 21:34]

Two other Americans with intercultural experience made contributions that help bring the American culture-internal perspective to light.

> As an American living abroad . . . I do miss compliments! They may seem meaningless, but they're such a part of our culture that frequent meaningless comments become a sort of baseline. [Kel (11 June, 18:15)]
>
> We are so used to it, that we crave it even from strangers. I live in northern Germany, where people . . . do not engage in small talk with strangers. They do not give compliments to create some sort of social connection. [Judy Wyatt 13 June 21:34]

From an Anglo-Australian point of view, it is hard to see how compliments such as those under discussion can seem other than insincere, if they are taken literally, but to take them literally would be missing the point. From an American English perspective, the point of 'compliments' like these is to show good feelings towards the interlocutor – as respondent Judy Watt says, ''to create some sort of social connection''. From this point of view, such compliments can be 'sincere' if the feeling being expressed is genuinely felt; cf. Pinto (2011) on American ''rapport-based sincerity''. I would therefore advance script [N] below.

[N] *American English cultural script for* '*phatic complimenting*' *to show good feelings towards an addressee*
many people think like this:
at many times when I am with someone,
if I feel something good towards this someone, it is good if this someone knows it
this someone can know it if I say something good about this someone
to this someone at this time

I am not sure that the form of this script is entirely optimal, but it seems important to draw attention both to the general 'positivity' of American English interactional style and to the difference in 'complimenting' behaviour that so often attracts comment from non-Americans.

4. Discussion

As noted at the onset, the study of contrastive pragmatics across English varieties lags far behind the contrastive study of lexis, pronunciation, and grammar. Only a few years ago, Schneider and Barron (2008:3) could observe that ''Recently published overviews of some of the (regional) varieties of English . . . do not consider the pragmatic level of language at all''. The situation is of course changing and the present Special Issue is one indication of this (cf. Schneider, 2010; Haugh and Schneider, 2012).

In the present study I have sought to apply the methodology of cultural scripts, already well established in the cross-linguistic arena, to the contrastive pragmatics of ''early interactions'' in three Anglo Englishes. This study has been incomplete and tentative in some respects, partly on account of difficulties with obtaining cross-dialectal data of comparable quality to that available for cross-linguistic comparisons and partly because we are attempting to characterise communication style differences at a greater level of subtlety than with comparisons across entirely different languages and cultures. Nevertheless I believe that the methodology of cultural scripts has a great deal to offer cross-dialectal pragmatics, both at the level of description and at the level of explanation. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the fact that cultural scripts provide a medium for formulating integrative interpretations and explanatory hypotheses about data of many different kinds. The present study has drawn mainly on personal testimonies about cultural cross-talk, sociological and cultural studies, discourse production tasks, and contrastive corpus data. Other potential data sources include contrastive lexical semantic analysis, micro-analysis (CA style) of recorded interactions, questionnaires and surveys of various kinds, examination of ''critical incidents'' of cross-cultural misunderstanding, interviews, focus groups and the like, and others.

As the field of variational pragmatics opens up, exploring these and other data-gathering techniques is an important priority, as is accumulating more and more empirical studies. In this environment it is important not to lose sight of the fact that data as such is not the main game. Before generalisations and explanatory hypotheses can be formed, data from any given source has to be interpreted and data from various different sources has to be integrated into some common framework. As this proceeds, emergent generalisations and hypotheses begin to guide and to focus the investigative process. Cultural scripts provide an extremely versatile, yet at the same time highly constrained, technique for interpreting and integrating data about sociolinguistic and pragmatic phenomena from many different sources, just as the larger paradigm of ethnopragmatics (Goddard, 2006b) provides an overarching alternative to the still dominant neo-Gricean pragmatics.

Above all, in cross-dialectal pragmatics, as much as in cross-linguistic pragmatics, an explanatory account can only emerge from methodologies that allow us to tap into insider perspectives on the speech practices in question, linking them with the values and attitudes of the people concerned.

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Appendix A. English exponents of semantic primes

I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	Substantives
KIND, PART	Relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	Determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW	Quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	Evaluators
BIG, SMALL	Descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	Mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	Speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	Action, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING),	Location, existence, specification,
HAVE (SOMETHING)~BE (SOMEONE'S)	possession
LIVE, DIE	Life and death
WHEN ~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME,	Time
A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	Space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	Logical concepts
VERY, MORE	Intensifier, augmentor
LIKE~AS~WAY	Similarity

Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes). Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes. They can be formally complex. They can have language-specific combinatorial variants (allolexes, shown with ~). Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

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