Pre-conference workshop:

Rescoping the theory and methodology of linguistic epicenters in World Englishes

Convenors:

Pam Peters (Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia),
Tobias Bernaisch (Justus Liebig University Gießen, Germany)

The most widely accepted notion of a linguistic epicenter refers to varieties that a) are Englishes in their own right, i.e. endonormatively stabilised in Schneider's (2007) nomenclature, and b) (potentially) serve as models for neighboring countries (cf. Hoffmann et al. 2011: 259). Although the concept of linguistic epicenters in the World Englishes paradigm has existed since the 1990s (cf. Leitner 1992), attention has concentrated on the evolution of individual varieties (Schneider 2007), while their interrelationships have remained on the margins of linguistic inquiry, with limited discussion in areal linguistic research (Hickey 2012) and in accounts of historical contact between closely related varieties (Millar 2016). Interest in supra-geographical contacts through the internet (Mair 2013, 2016), transnational attraction (Schneider 2014), and other extraterritorial influences (Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2020) have also diverted attention from the more localised interplay between varieties in the World Englishes paradigm. Despite recent empirical investigations into the epicentral role of Australian English for the Antipodes (Peters 2009; Peters et al. 2019), Indian English for South Asia (Hoffmann et al. 2011; Gries & Bernaisch 2016) and Singapore English for South-East Asia (Heller et al. 2017), there are many open questions in relation to epicenters and epicentral influence to be explored.

Against this background, three key areas in epicentral research are in need of further academic attention and linguistic investigation, i.e. a) theory of linguistic epicenters, b) methods and evidence in epicentral research and c) linguistic epicenters in relation to other theories of variety contact such as areal linguistics, extraterritorial influence, transnational attraction or feature pools. The questions guiding the workshop are centred around these three key areas:

Theory of linguistic epicenters

- Can epicentral influence be exercised by a regional variety on its neighbors only when it has reached endonormative stabilization?
- Does epicentral influence depend on conscious recognition and acceptance of the norms of a neighboring variety – or can it occur under the radar?
- What aspects of language should be included in scoping epicentral influence – from phonology to pragmatics? Standard and nonstandard language norms?

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icame42@tu-dortmund.de
icame42.englisch.tu-dortmund.de
twitter.com/icame42

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Methods and evidence in epicentral research

- Is diachronic evidence essential for demonstrating epicentral influence?
- How can statistical analyses contribute to identifying epicentral influence?
- Do we need sociocultural and/or historical evidence to establish the contexts for epicentral influence?

Linguistic epicenters in relation to other theories of variety contact

- Could the influence of a non-adjacent hypervariety, i.e. American English, be seen as epicentral?
- How different is epicentral influence from areal contact among regional varieties?
- Does epicentral influence tend to result in convergence/levelling of linguistic features, or contribute to differentiation?

Speakers for this workshop have already been selected, which is why abstracts are not invited at this point.

Appendix

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