

Norms and Conventions in the History of English

EDITED BY
Birte Bös
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NORMS AND CONVENTIONS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

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Volume 347

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Table of contents

Linguistic norms and conventions: Past and present <i>Birte Bös and Claudia Claridge</i>	1
Usage guides and the Age of Prescriptivism <i>Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade</i>	7
“Splendidly prejudiced”: Words for disapproval in English usage guides <i>Don Chapman</i>	29
Paradigm shifts in 19th-century British grammar writing: A network of texts and authors <i>Beatrix Busse, Kirsten Gather and Ingo Kleiber</i>	49
Promotional conventions on English title-pages up to 1550: Modifiers of time, scope, and quality <i>Mari-Liisa Varila and Matti Peikola</i>	73
What can we learn from constructed speech errors? Mrs Malaprop revisited <i>Lucia Kornexl</i>	99
The proverbial discourse tradition in the history of English: A usage-based view <i>Claudia Lückert</i>	129
Testing a stylometric tool in the study of Middle English documentary texts <i>Martti Mäkinen</i>	149
Pragmatic and formulaic uses of <i>shall</i> and <i>will</i> in Older Scots and Early Modern English official letter writing <i>Christine Elsweiler</i>	167
Studying dialect spelling in its own right: Suggestions from a case study <i>Göran Wolf</i>	191
Index	213

Linguistic norms and conventions

Past and present

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Norms are manifested and constructed in discourse. Historical data, despite the much-described patchiness, thus provide us with a wealth of reflections *of* and reflections *on* linguistic norms and conventions of the past. Yet, the notion of norms is fuzzy and extremely complex. Following Koch's (1988) seminal discussion of language-norm relations, historicity and alterity prove important universals in their conceptualisation.

In this vein, languages can be considered as linguistic traditions of an external historicity (in the case of individual languages) and an internal historicity (on the level of varieties within a particular language). These traditions, or language norms, Koch (1988, 330) points out, are socio-historically determined and of limited validity.¹ A further level of historicity, which proves particularly important in the context of this volume and is elaborated in detail in Oesterreicher (1997) and Koch (1997), is that of discourse traditions. Discourse traditions relate to the discursive norms which go beyond specific linguistic realisations on the level of individual discourse events, and cover register- and genre-specific norms, stylistic preferences, etc., which again are open to change.

The notion of alterity draws our attention to the fact that languages, their varieties, and discourse traditions are instantiated by the communicators in interaction, based on their expectations, and expectations of expectations. They are bound to specific (implicit or explicit) social norms which regulate the scope, selection and specific use of linguistic means. These conventions require a certain linguistic behaviour and the social adaptation of language users (Koch, 1988, 332). In that

1. Standard varieties are discussed as special cases by Koch (1988, 332), as they thrive on the 'fiction of their unlimited validity' ("Fiktion der unbegrenzten Gültigkeit") and thus seem to be freed from historicity to a certain extent.

respect, norms provide ‘social control in the sense of an orientation of the speaking subject in a complex social reality’² (Koch, 1988, 332).

Based on the assumption that “language users in the past also displayed community behaviour” (Jucker & Kopaczkyk, 2013, 4), changes of norms and conventions have to be considered in the context of the communities where specific linguistic practices are used, developed and negotiated. Depending on the research focus, such communities can be conceptualised in different ways. Social network analysis allows for insights into the structure and content of the relationships between network members, and might thus help to reconstruct the paths certain changes have taken (cf. Jucker & Kopaczkyk, 2013, 5, drawing on Milroy & Gordon, 2003). The notions of discourse community and community of practice take up a stronger focus on shared or common (linguistic) practices. While the community of practice is typically characterised by the components of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire of its members (Wenger, 1998, 73), the discourse community “transcends the need for emergent social practice in time and place” (Watts, 2008, 54). Thus, Watts (2008) demonstrates, the latter allows for an acknowledgement of the common practices of communicators, who are connected by common goals and interests, but not necessarily by regular personal contact; and this is a useful conceptualisation for constellations of communicators who draw on the works of their predecessors and relate to the works of their contemporaries, as often found in historical discourse.

All these issues are taken up by the contributions in this volume, which discuss sociocultural conditions and specific discourse traditions interacting with more universal pragmatic principles and structural aspects of language (cf. Kabatek, 2015, 215), and pay attention to the communities where norms and conventions are displayed and shaped in verbal interaction. The first three contributions (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Chapman, and Busse, Gather & Kleiber) focus on usage guides and grammars, covering data from the 18th to the 21st century, a long, flourishing period in the production of such works. The language material investigated provides insights into negotiations of what, depending on the position on the prescriptive – descriptive continuum (cf. Yañez-Bouza, 2016, 165), was perceived as usage problems or variants of language use. The three chapters share with that by Varila & Peikola their strong focus on metalinguistic commentary and thus evidence of the authors’/publishers’ specific perspectives on their own (and their competitors’) works.

The contributions in this compilation furthermore reveal how the socioculturally conditioned experiences and expectations regarding discourse-specific,

2. “soziale Kontrolle im Sinne der Orientierung des sprechenden Subjekts in der komplexen sozialen Wirklichkeit”

functional variation guide language users – be it in their use of proverbs (cf. Lückert), modals (cf. Elswiler), or genre- and register-specific spelling variation (cf. Mäkinen). Clearly, normative expectations can also be violated, e.g. as means of literary characterisation (as in the case of the malapropisms discussed by Kornexl) or political and ideological positioning (e.g. by the use of Ulster Scots spelling variants, as elaborated by Wolf).

The volume opens with Ingrid **Tieken-Boon van Ostade**'s contribution on usage guides. There, she argues that it is, in fact, the 21st century that can be considered the "Age of Prescriptivism", and not (as commonly assumed) the 18th century, which can be characterised as the "Age of Codification" instead. Her investigation of terms like *prescriptive*, *prescriptivism*, *proscriptive*, and *proscription* indicates that prescriptivism (in contrast to prescription) apparently started as an American phenomenon. Based on a case study on the treatment of irregular verbs in the *Hyper Usage Guide of English* (HUGE, 1770–2010), Tieken-Boon van Ostade shows that the treatment of usage problems is often guided by personal preferences. She furthermore observes that while strongly pre- and proscriptive attitudes still prevail, there has also been a tendency towards a more assuaging, reflective approach.

Using the same data base as Tieken Boon van Ostade and an additional corpus of 29 usage guides (1770–2003), Don **Chapman**, in his study on "Words for Disapproval in English Usage Books", also investigates expressions of prescriptive attitudes. From the two corpora, a set of 113 terms of popular metalanguage referring to disapproved constructions, the language characterised by such constructions, and the people who use such constructions was extracted. Ranking the most frequent labels, investigating their developments, and laying open authorial preferences, Chapman shows that whereas correctness terms have remained in frequent use, judgmental terms have become less frequent, and the judgments demonstrate an increasing awareness of the complexity of variation in language.

(Meta-)linguistic developments are also the focus of the contribution by Beatrix **Busse**, Kirsten **Gather** & Ingo **Kleiber** on 19th-century British grammar books, especially those of the scholarly tradition. The authors' innovative network analysis, combined with corpus-based historical linguistics, demonstrates how 19th-century grammarians interacted, e.g. by onomastic references, and the use of labels like *prescriptive* (in an increasingly critical vein), *descriptive*, *comparative*, *historical*, etc, which allow for conclusions on the linguistic approaches favoured. Their visualisation of the chronological network indicates a paradigmatic change around 1850 from an authority-based system (with frequent reference to 18th-century grammars/grammarians) to a focus on grammar itself (with fewer references, and those mostly to contemporary works).

The (critical) positioning of grammar writers in relation to other grammars and their authors certainly played an important role as a means of 'product

differentiation'. The same is true for the linguistic strategies found on early English title-pages. Mari-Liisa **Varila** & Matti **Peikola** examine the formative period of promotional conventions on English title-pages from the 1480s to 1550. They find that the changing modes of production increasingly required the use of marketing strategies. Thus, publishers would highlight the positive traits of their works by attributive adjectives, advertising, for example, their novelty (but occasionally also their antiquity), their scope (either as broad, or, in line with the common 'modesty topos', as brief), and their quality (e.g. their truthfulness, which was often contrasted with negative evaluations of their competitors' works).

Another kind of usage problem is discussed by Lucia **Kornexl**, who revisits the concept of malapropisms, going back to the original material produced by Sheridan's character Mrs Malaprop. Kornexl carves out terminological challenges of this concept, which, in modern English speech error typology, often designates a broader range of errors than the originally relatively narrow definition of 'errors of ignorance'. Her (re-)investigation of Malaprop's errors or norm violations, which focusses on wordhood, word-class, and linguistic microstructure, shows that the degree of deviation of Mrs Malaprop's from natural speech errors is not as great as sometimes assumed. Furthermore, Kornexl argues for an inclusion of semantic similarity as an additional feature, which has so far often been excluded from the conceptualisation of malapropisms.

Claudia **Lückert** combines phraseological, psycholinguistic and discourse traditional perspectives in her usage-based investigation of proverbs. While in modern English, the proverbial tradition is no longer prevalent, or is even parodied, proverbs used to function as important moral guidelines (especially to the illiterate) in medieval and Renaissance times and thus were a quasi-normative genre. Outlining her "dual-layer storage model", the author argues that, especially in those earlier periods, salient content words of proverbs were specially marked in the mental lexicon of the speakers and thus triggered the identification, production and spontaneous co-activation of proverbs. For modern users, in contrast, the relatively infrequent exposure has led to a weaker mental presentation of proverbs, which can, for example, result in production errors and proverb blends.

Martti **Mäkinen** demonstrates the benefits and challenges of applying Stylo, a stylometric script for R originally developed for authorship attribution, in an analysis of Middle English Texts. He uses the tool to extract and compare unique sets of character n-grams for selected texts from the *Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD). Stylo helps to map groups of texts in a linguistic space based on diatopically or functionally conditioned (or otherwise influenced) spelling variations. Different forms of visualisation (multidimensional scaling, dendrograms, and consensus trees) reveal certain dialectal affinities of the texts analysed. Yet, even more clearly, they show functional variation, clustering genres and registers

with their specific norms and conventions, and elucidating effects of not just local origin, but also scriptorium style, topic, and authorship within a specific genre.

In her contribution, Christine **Elsweiler** also considers functional variation in two geographical varieties, focussing on the impact of letter-writing conventions and pragmatic motivations on the use of *shall* and *will* in Older Scots and Early Modern English official letters. She takes a qualitative approach and investigates speaker-based certainty, i.e. certain vs. non-certain usages of the modals. Her data reveal a strong preference for *shall* for certain predictions in the first half of the 16th century in both Scots and English letters. After that, the Scots letters took the lead in employing both *shall* and *will* for certain predictions, a usage that only started to appear in the 17th century in the English letters. Whereas, after that, *will* strongly gained ground in all contexts in the English letters, *shall* was preserved in Scots letters in commissive speech acts. Thus, pragmatic function appeared to be the decisive criterion for the choice of the modal auxiliary there.

Finally, Göran **Wolf** argues for a more systematic consideration of dialect spelling in historical linguistics. Based on a case study of Ulster Scots texts from the 18th to the 21st century, he sketches links of selected phonological non-standard forms and graphemic variants. Wolf's study indicates that Ulster Scots gradually developed its specific spelling conventions in the 19th century, which are preserved, e.g. on ideological grounds, with even higher density rates in the modern data. Concluding, the author develops a multidimensional framework, including linguistic, social, historical and pedagogical aspects, which promotes a comprehensive approach to the study of dialect graphy.

Summing up, this volume provides a multifaceted approach to the study of changing norms and conventions in the English language, as displayed in a broad range of historical data from more than five centuries. It is enriched by systematic terminological clarifications, interdisciplinary approaches and the introduction of new methods like network analysis and advanced analytical tools and forms of visualisation into the diachronic investigation of historical texts.

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Usage guides and the Age of Prescriptivism

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Questioning the traditional association of the Age of Prescriptivism with the 18th century, this study distinguishes between prescription as a late stage in the English standardisation process and the subsequently arising prescriptivism, with possibly stronger roots in America than the UK. The typical product of prescriptivism is the usage guide, published in increasing numbers over the years and enormously popular today. Irregular verbs are used as a case study to demonstrate how usage guides treat usage problems, and to bring to light their essentially idiosyncratic nature. Results from a survey conducted to try and assess the effects of prescriptivism in the eyes of the general public showed that currently a form of anti-prescriptivism is developing, though this does not actually seem to herald the end of English standardisation as such.

Keywords: prescriptivism, prescription, usage guides, usage problems, the English standardisation process, irregular verbs, anti-prescriptivism

1. Introduction

Linguists don't consult usage guides. This was one of the results of a survey for a paper I gave in 2008 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Henry Fowler (1858–1933), the author of *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926). *Modern English Usage* is probably the best known English usage guide, and “Fowler” has developed into an English household name (Finegan, 1998, 578). Linguists are also reluctant to fill in language attitude surveys, as I discovered when trying to collect data for a study of usage problems, such as the question of the placement of *only* (*I only had/had only one chapter to finish*): in a survey held in 2012, linguists made up only 10% of the survey population (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2013, 8), despite having been specifically targeted as contributors.

Usage guides (manuals that offer practical advice on matters like spelling, word choice and grammar) and usage problems (items showing variable usage that are dealt with in such manuals) belong to the realm of prescriptivism, and

prescriptivism, according to Cameron (1995, 3–5), has a negative connotation for linguists, both in being considered “bad or wrong” in its own right and in suggesting a binary opposition with descriptivism, the – often explicitly stated – primary concern of modern linguistics. Lyons’s *Language and Linguistics* (1981), for instance, includes a section called “Linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive”. As Leech et al. (2009, 263) explain,

for most linguists ... any attempt to prescribe correct usage (or proscribe incorrect usage) is a throwback to earlier generations, when doctrinaire linguistic attitudes (often ill-informed) were rife, and understanding of language and language change was obscured by bigotry.

Instead of using the term “prescriptive” in their chapter, they therefore propose “the fairly neutral term ‘language prescription’”, a term which is indeed used by Milroy & Milroy ([1985] 2012, 22–23) for the final stage in the English standardisation process, following the stage when the language was codified into grammars and dictionaries.

It is during the 18th century that we see an enormous increase in the publication of these grammars and dictionaries – primarily grammars and particularly during the second half of the century (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2000, 2012a), a process which continued during the 19th century (Michael, 1991 and 1997; Beal, 2004, 121–122; Anderwald, 2012). These were normative grammars, “favoring”, as Vorlat (1979, 129) puts it, “the language of one or more social or regional groups and [being] more than once written with a pedagogical purpose”. During this period, the effects of the Industrial Revolution were already making themselves felt, producing socially mobile speakers in need of guidance to new norms of usage (cf. Fitzmaurice, 1998). Though the 18th century is often called the Age of Prescriptivism (e.g. Beal, 2004, 105; Yáñez-Bouza, 2006; Auer, 2008), it should therefore more properly be designated the Age of Codification, as it is the *codification* of the language that characterises the period, not the effects of prescriptivism, or even prescription, the final stage in the standardisation process according to Milroy & Milroy ([1985] 2012). Prescription took off in earnest only during the final decades of the 18th century, with its most outstanding product being the usage guide (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2010).

If “prescription” is defined as the – final – stage in the English standardisation process, following upon the codification stage as a result of which “speakers ... have access to dictionaries and grammars, which they regard as authorities” (Milroy & Milroy, ([1985] 2012, 22), I believe that “prescriptivism”, with its widely perceived negative connotation as signalled by the suffix *-ism*, represents yet a further stage in this process, during which there is an excessive focus on the question of what is correct usage. While the prescription stage saw the publication of the usage guide,

a new type of reference work that is neither a grammar nor a dictionary (Busse & Schröder, 2009), an increasingly large number of them are published today, either as books or online in the form language advice fora (and at times as both), and more often than not by writers who are not linguists. Their contents frequently show little evidence of the more descriptive approach to language that has come to characterise the discipline of linguistics since the late 19th century. For all that, new titles come out virtually every year, with an increasing number of publishers trying to pick a share of a market for popular language advice that has developed since the 1980s (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2012b, 72). All this suggests to me that the Age of Prescriptivism is *now*, and that we find ourselves right in the middle of this further stage in the English standardisation process. This stage is very much alive in the general public's consciousness, as appears from interactive comments found on language advice fora and other online publications that deal with usage problems or questions of linguistic correctness (see Lukač, 2018; Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *forthc.*). For all that, as I will show below, it is beginning to show cracks providing evidence of the rise of a kind of “anti-prescriptivism”, possibly inspired by the abundance of language advice literature that is available, allegedly offering guidance to the insecure speaker or writer.

In this paper I will illustrate the nature of the usage guide as a text type, and I will do so by analysing, by way of a practical case study, their treatment of irregular verbs. Irregular verbs, or strong verbs as they are often referred to as well (cf. Harris, 1993),¹ have been steadily decreasing in number in the course of time (see e.g. Lieberman et al., 2007). During this process, many of the old strong verbs acquired regular past tense and past participle forms (i.e. ending in *-ed*) that are in a number of cases used alongside the old strong forms. Since variable usage is something on which many people seek guidance by consulting usage guides, irregular verbs are a staple item in such works. Irregular verbs are also a staple item in dictionaries (such as the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*) as well as in grammars from the Age of Codification onwards (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2011; Anderwald, 2016). In this paper, however, I will focus on usage guides only, and in doing so I will draw on the Hyper Usage Guide of English (HUGE) (Straaijer, 2014), a database of selected usage guides and usage problems that has been constructed precisely for the purpose of this kind of research. Before embarking on my case study, I will consider the terms “prescriptivism” and “prescriptivist” as well as “prescriptive”,

1. While the term “strong verbs” hails back to the distinction in Old English between strong and weak verbs, both of which showed regular patterns of verb declension, this regularity is today no longer easily recognised. The term “irregular verbs” thus generally designates the old strong verbs, though also including *have*, *be* and *do* and the modal verbs.

“prescription” and “proscriptive”, “proscription”² (*proscriptivism* and *proscriptivist* do not appear to exist) as described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)³ to try and find evidence of where and when the negative notion of prescriptivism may have originated – in other words, when prescriptivism as an additional stage in the English standardisation process may have begun.

2. On the rise of prescriptivism

The origin of prescriptivism is commonly associated with Robert Lowth’s grammar published in 1762, and while it is true that his grammar for the first time systematically lists grammatical errors made by established English authors (which was one of the reasons for its immediate popularity), it had not been Lowth’s aim to write a prescriptive grammar as such (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2011). In fact, if his grammatical rules are analysed carefully, it can be seen that he often took a descriptive approach to language, the errors listed in the footnotes to his section on syntax serving to back up his grammatical rules. Lowth’s grammar was one of the main sources of Lindley Murray’s phenomenally popular *English Grammar* (1795), which in adopting Lowth’s rules made them more prescriptive. To Lowth’s description of double negation, for instance, Murray added “But **it is better to** express an affirmation by a regular affirmative than by two negatives” (1795, 121), while he corrected Lowth’s tongue-in-cheek example “This is an Idiom **which** our language is strongly inclined **to**” (1762, 127–128) in the section on preposition stranding into “This is an Idiom **to which** our language is strongly inclined” (1795, 122) (emphasis added in bold, here and elsewhere).

Murray’s changes reflect the increased interest in a prescriptive approach to language of the final decades of the 18th century, which was also the period which saw the birth of the English usage guide (see Section 3). The term “prescriptive”, however, used in relation to language use, is of a much later date. The OED only deals with the word in a general sense, so we cannot say when the word was first applied in a linguistic context, but the following quotation from the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1860–1943) suggests that this may have been in the 1930s:

- (1) 1933 O. JESPERSEN *Essent. Eng. Gram.* i. 19 Of greater value, however, than this *prescriptive* grammar is a purely *descriptive* grammar.

2. On the use of these terms in 19th-century grammars, see also Busse, Gather & Kleiber, this vol.

3. All entries analysed have been updated as part of the general revision process of the OED.

The quotation, moreover, contrasts the two approaches to linguistics discussed in Section 1, illustrating the preference among linguists for a descriptive study of language. In the entry on *prescriptivism* the *OED* does distinguish a linguistic use, citing a first relevant quotation from 1948, from the Czech linguist Ivan Poldauf (1915–1984):

- (2) 1948 I. POLDAUF *On Hist. Probl. Eng. Gram.* 118 **Prescriptivism** is the form of authoritarianism characteristic of the English, not Scottish, grammarians of the latter half of the 18th century.

Strikingly, this quotation, too, links prescriptivism to the period of normative grammar writing, the 18th century (see Section 1), while it also explains one word in *-ism* with another, “authoritarianism”, which likewise has a negative connotation. Poldauf, in his book, regularly refers to Jespersen, a well-known English historical linguist at the time. But because Jespersen, in *Essentials of English Grammar* (1933), which is listed in Poldauf’s bibliography, did not himself use the word *prescriptivism*, the term was possibly coined – for English anyway – by Poldauf.

The next *OED* quotation for *prescriptivism* is the following:

- (3) 1953 *Mod. Lang. Notes* 68 580 Linguists..object not so much to **prescriptivism** per se..as to those **hoary handbook prescriptions** which have no basis in actual cultivated usage.

Surprisingly, the author is not mentioned, but checking the source of the quotation shows that this was Thomas Pyles (1905–1980), an American linguist who published *Words and Ways of American English* (1952) and *The Origins and Developments of the English Language* (1964). Searching for Thomas Pyles in the *OED* produced seven quotations that do supply his name, all of them from *Words and Ways of American English*. One of these illustrates the first instance of the noun *prescriptivist*, so it is interesting to see that Pyles is associated with the early usage of both *prescriptivism* and *prescriptivist*:

- (4) 1952 T. PYLES *Words & Ways Amer. Eng.* xi. 272 He is likely not to see any reason why absolute uniformity, the desideratum of the **prescriptivist**, should be any particular concern of the student of language even if it were possible of attainment.

The quotation in (3) is from a review Pyles wrote of *British and American English since 1900*, by Eric Partridge & John W. Clark (1951), but the reference is to Clark’s part of the book, not Partridge’s. Partridge was of course the author of *Usage and Abusage* (1942), a work whose contents might well fit the description “hoary handbook prescriptions” in (3) that “[l]inguists..object to”. But if usage guides are placed

in a negative light here, it is illuminating to read the only quotation in the *OED* for the word *prescription* that has any linguistic relevance (*OED*, s.v. *prescription* n.1, II. *gen.* 4):

- (5) 1968 J. LYONS *Introd. Theoret. Linguistics* i. 43 In distinguishing between description and prescription, **the linguist is not saying that there is no place for prescriptive studies of language.**

The word *proscription* – *proscriptive* has no linguistic quotations in the *OED* – has only one quotation in the *OED* entry with a linguistic reference (s.v. *proscription* n, 2.a.)

- (6) 1928 *Eng. Jرنl.* 17 659 We teach it [sc. the etiquette of language behaviour] as we teach any other etiquette, by means of prescriptions and **proscriptions**, of rules and drills.

Again, the author, V. C. Coulter, is left unspecified; the instance, moreover, provides a much earlier quotation for the word *prescription* than the (only) one currently supplied by the *OED* (see Example (5)). Since the *English Journal*, the source of the quotation in (6), is issued by the National (i.e. American) Council of Teachers of English (NECTE) and the American linguist Pyles is among the first users of the negative terms *prescriptivist* and *prescriptivism*, these data suggest that the interest in prescriptivism is evident more with American than British linguists. If prescription as such arose in the UK, with the first usage guide (as I will discuss below) being an English publication, prescriptivism as the next stage in the standardisation process appears to have started as an American phenomenon.

3. The earliest English usage guides

The first English usage guide was Robert Baker's *Reflections on the English Language* (1770) (Leonard, 1929, 35; Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, 2010). As the book's subtitle, *In the Nature of Vaugelas' on the French*, shows, it had been inspired by a similar work published for the *Académie française* in 1647. We know next to nothing about the author. From the preface, however, we learn that he had lived in Paris as a young man (1770, xxv); that he "quitted the School at fifteen" but that in his view this need not "incapacitate a Man for writing his Mother-tongue with Propriety" (1770, ii); that he had never heard of Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) until just before the *Reflections* would be published (1770, v) – Lowth's grammar was only brought to his attention after the publication of his book, as he wrote in the preface to the second edition (Baker, 1779, xxiii) – so that the work may be justly claimed to be "entirely my own" (1770, iv). The first American

English usage guide that I have been able to locate (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2015), Seth T. Hurd's *Grammatical Corrector, or Vocabulary of the Common Errors of Speech* (1847), is completely different in this respect. The book opens with three pages of "Authorities consulted", comprising English and American dictionaries, glossaries and grammars, including Johnson's dictionary and Lowth's grammar (but not Baker's *Reflections*).⁴ The author, about whom we likewise know nothing apart from the information in the preface, thus claimed with confidence that "[n]o list of the common errors of speech in this country ... has ever been published" (Hurd, 1847, v). Hurd identifies himself as "a public lecturer upon the Grammar of the English Language", in which "capacity he visited ... almost every section of the United States". In doing so,

[t]he common errors and peculiarities of speech, which were found to prevail in different communities, were carefully noted down, and preserved not only as a source of amusement to himself, but for the purpose of correction and comment in the lecture-room. (Hurd, 1847, v)

Another difference between Baker and Hurd is that Hurd at least appears to have been somewhat of a professional. Baker, by his own admission, was a non-expert on language, and the titles of his other books suggest that he was a hack writer (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2010, 16), whose idea for publishing a usage guide simply came at the right time.

The publication of usage guides subsequently got off the ground, as may be inferred from Leonard's comment about "those handbooks of abuses and corrections which were **so freely produced** in the nineteenth century" (1929, 35), both in the UK and in the US. As the graph in Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2012b, 72) shows, based on work done by Ulrich Busse and Anne Schröder, there was a peak (in absolute numbers) in usage guide production in the UK during the 1980s. This peak may be interpreted as a reaction to the changes in the British school curriculum during the 1960s and 1970s, when grammar ceased to be taught as a formal subject (see Cameron, 1995). This produced so-called "grammarless" speakers (see Ebner, 2017, citing Keith, 1990), people who are unfamiliar with grammatical concepts like prepositions or auxiliaries. It is primarily these people who, from a strong sense of linguistic insecurity, turn to usage guides for advice on what is correct usage, since they lack the kind of formal linguistic instruction which should have been offered in school. Complaints to this effect were voiced by informants participating in my survey from 2012 (see Section 1), eliciting speakers' attitudes to three usage problems, the placement of *only*, variation between the use of *likely* and *very likely*

4. A detailed discussion of the referencing practices of 19th-century grammar writers is provided in Busse, Gather & Kleiber, this vol.

(*these errors will likely be in their use of style words*), and the use of *could of* for *could have* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2013). The latter sentence, inspired by the account of a colleague in linguistics of his sixteen-year-old-daughter's shock at discovering that *of* in *she could of gone to a party* was an auxiliary and not a preposition, provoked the following comment from one of my informants, a British teacher of 35, with an MA in English literature:

I don't know whether this study will be researching educational trends, but I'd argue that **scrapping the systematic teaching of grammar in UK state schools in the 1970s** was the beginning of the end, and there's no way we can ever recover from that... my generation onward have essentially learned English by ear, and in my view the sample sentence in question is a prime example of that.

This linguistic insecurity led to an increase in usage guides to cater for the grammarless – as well as no doubt for the hyper-critical language user – but it continues to be fed by a never-ending stream of usage guides published by different publishers, who, like those bringing out grammars in the 18th century, all wish to have a share in a booming market. As Ulrich Busse put it, insecurity sells (Busse & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2011).

4. Irregular verbs: A case study

In the previous section, Robert Baker was quoted saying that he “quitted” school at fifteen. *Quit* is listed in the *OED* with two variable past tense and past participle forms, *quit* and *quitted*, which raises the question of whether it represents a usage problem: usage problems usually comprise two or more variants of a form or construction one of which is considered incorrect, either because it reflects non-standard usage (*ain't* or double negation) or because it is considered a genuine mistake (*imply/infer*). To test whether *quit* is indeed a usage problem, I consulted the HUGE database. The database comprises a selected number of English and American usage guides, 77 in all, published between 1770 and 2010, and 123 (mostly grammatical) usage problems, taken from these usage guides. Variable forms of irregular verbs, which would include *quit*, are not listed as a separate category (unlike for instance split infinitives or the placement of *only*), but the database also allows for full-text searches, and *quitted* as a variant of *quit* proved to occur in two usage guides: the anonymous *Live and Learn* (1856?) and Weiner & Delahunty (1994). While *Live and Learn* mainly presents the variant forms in a List of Irregular Verbs (1856?, 34–40), Weiner & Delahunty note that the past tense and past participle of *quit* is *quit* but that “*quitted* is also occasionally found” (1994, 37–39). (In the first edition of the book, published by Weiner alone, past tense and past participle *quit* was labelled as American English; 1983, 24).

Quit is one of the verbs included by Lieberman et al. (2007) in their analysis of the relationship between the rate of frequency of irregular verbs and their projected disappearance. Irregular verbs, the authors note, “obey antiquated rules (sing/sang/sung) or, in some cases, no rule at all (go/went)” (2007, 713; see also Harris, 1993, 151; Cheshire, 1994, 116). The tendency in the history of English has been for verbs to become regular by acquiring the weak verb suffix *-ed* to form past tense and past participle forms (Harris, 1993, 152), and this is indeed the pattern found with new verbs like *to google* or *to exit*. For *quit* to have adopted the weak variant *quitted*, a form which “makes its appearance only in C17” according to Peters (2004, 453)⁵ while past tense *quit* is considerably older, is therefore not unexpected, but for the verb to have retained the original form *quit*, even at the expense of the regular new form, as Peters notes, is unusual. According to Lieberman et al., with a frequency of 6.88 instances per 100,000 words (Suppl. Information, 2007, 12), the form is in no immediate danger of disappearance, unlike past tense/past participle *wed* (2007, 715). Lieberman et al., moreover, write that “[i]f the current trends continue, only 83 of the 177 verbs studied will be irregular in 2500” (2007, 715).

The development described by Lieberman et al. applies to Standard English; non-standard varieties of English show a different pattern altogether, because the regularisation of the old strong verb pattern propounded by the 18th-century normative grammarians affected the standard language only. This led to strong stigmatisation of speakers of (British) dialects which do not normally distinguish between past tense and past participle forms of irregular verbs (Edwards, 1993, 221). Consequently, despite the greater general acceptance of non-standard varieties of English today, using non-standard verb forms like *done* for *did* (*I done that*) in formal contexts that require standard English – such as writing letters of application (see e.g. Ebner, 2017) – is a great risk. It appears to be for this reason that there is a list of “[s]ome of the most common ‘mistakes’ made by non-standard speakers” in the appendix to *English Grammar for the Natives* (Ritchie, 2013).

Ritchie (2013) includes another appendix comprising a list of 244 irregular verbs, considerably more than the 177 verbs Lieberman et al. (2007) identified through their historical corpus search. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978 edition) includes 253 irregular verbs (modals not counted). Since irregular verbs are a closed class, the question arises how many there are, as well as how many of them represent usage problems in the light of their variability in past tense and past participle forms. As said, it is the aim of usage guides to offer guidance to users uncertain about such questions as which forms to use when irregular verbs have variable forms. Should it be *blest* or *blessed*, for instance, *hanged* or *hung*,

5. See also Lieberman et al., who found no evidence of the form in Old or Middle English (Suppl. Information, 2007, 12).

learned or *learnt*? Not all variable forms, however, need be usage problems or are perceived as such. Whether they are or not can even differ across national varieties of English: Viktorija Kostadinova and I, for instance, found that *I have went* (for *gone*) is a usage problem in American English but not in British English, where it is merely a dialectal variant (Harris, 1993, 153, Miller, 1993, 107; Beal, 1993, 193; Tieken-Boon van Ostade & Kostadinova, 2015). Good examples of usage problems in this respect are *lie/lay* and *fly/flee*, already dealt with by Lowth in 1762 (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2011, 117), but while *lie/lay* is discussed in as many as 60 of the 77 usage guides in HUGE, between 1770 and 2010, *fly/flee* occurs in only four of them: *The Vulgarities of Speech Corrected* (1826 [1829]), *Live and Learn* (1856?), Peters (2004) and Fogarty (2008) – two British and two American ones.

Irregular verbs are treated in different ways by usage guides. Ten of the 77 usage guides in HUGE do not deal with them at all, while others either provide lists (e.g. *Vulgarities of Speech Corrected*, 1826; Carter & Skates, 1988), include brief sections on the topic (e.g. Fogarty, 2008 and Heffer, 2010), or present a combination of both. The list in Garner (2009),⁶ which illustrates the latter category, includes 174 verbs, only one of which shows any variant forms (*waked/woken*). It includes *quit* (past tense and past participle *quit* only), but not *acquit*, which tends to take the *-ed* ending:⁷ presumably, verbs not on the list are expected to take the regular forms. The most comprehensive treatment of the topic is found in Peters (2004), though it seems too elaborate for people who consult usage guides just for quick usage advice. Peters (2004, 292–293) is also the only usage guide in the database to mention the verb *wed* (see Lieberman et al., 2007 cited above), placing it into a category of “verbs showing ongoing change” in this respect: *bet*, *knit*, *shit*, *sweat*, and *wet* as well as *light* (*lit* → *lighted*), *shear* (*shore*, *shorn* → *sheared*), *shine* (*shone* → *shined*), *shoe* (*shod* → *shoed*), *speed* (*sped* → *speeded*), *strive* (*strove*, *striven* → *strived*) and *weave* (*wove*, *woven* → *weaved*). The verbs *bet*, *shit*, *sweat* and *shoe* are not included in the list compiled by Lieberman et al. (2007), but (apart from *wed*) none of those from Peters’ list which they do mention appear to be in any immediate danger of undergoing regularization (i.e. acquiring *-ed* forms) based on their current frequency.

Peters also notes that for some verbs the different past tense forms have developed different meanings. Though she mentions the verbs *shine*, *weave* and *strive* as examples of this process, the verb *hang* is perhaps the best known instance. After *lie/lay* (see above), *hang* is indeed the irregular verb that is most frequently dealt with in the usage guides in the HUGE database (32 out of 77 works). The difference in meaning between the two forms is usually explained

6. HUGE only includes the first edition of 1998.

7. Older instances of past tense and past participle *acquit* are also recorded in the *OED*.

through memorable phrases like “People are hanged; pictures and the like are hung” (Bryson, 1984, 72) and “People used to be *hanged*; pictures and meat are *hung*” (Taggart, 2010, 71).⁸ *Hanged/hung* is found in usage guides published between 1856 and 2010, but though it is a typical example of a usage problem, it is remarkable that Swan (1980, 347), who lists some forty irregular verbs, does not discuss the issue. *Hanged/hung* would definitely qualify for his recommendation that “[i]f you have difficulty with irregular verbs, it might be a good idea to learn these ones by heart”.

After *lie/lay* and *hang*, the next most frequently discussed irregular verbs in the HUGE database are *beat*, *dive*, *prove* (in 18 works), *light*, *go*, *sneak* (14) and *drink* (13). Of these, the verb *sneak* is perhaps the most interesting one, since, as Peters (2004, 292–293) notes, the form is unusual in the sense that the irregular form *snuck* is the newer one: as explained above, the process usually runs in the opposite direction. A similar case, discussed by Horslund (2014), is *drag*, which has two past tenses, *dragged* and *drug*. Both *snuck* and *drug*, according to Horslund, are stigmatised, though *snuck* more so than *drug*; yet, both are used increasingly, especially by younger speakers. *Drug*, too, is discussed by usage guides, though by no more than four in the HUGE database. Krapp (1927) and Ebbitt & Ebbitt (1939 [1978]) call it a dialectal form, while Garner (1998) notes that it is particularly common in the south of the US. Vermes (1981) includes *drug* in her list of “incorrect” verb forms. Horslund’s data show a first peak for *snuck* in the 1970s. Since frequency of usage, according to Ilson (1985, 167), is an important condition for variable features to draw the attention of usage guide writers, this explains why *snuck* entered the usage guide tradition after the 1970s: Morris & Morris (1975), Ebbitt & Ebbitt ([1939] 1978),⁹ *The Written Word* (1977), Vermes (1981), Gilman (1989), *The New York Public Library Writer’s Guide* (1994), Garner (1998), Brians (2003) and the *American Heritage Guide* (2005) – all of them American publications. From the late 1980s onwards we also find *snuck* in British usage guides (Greenbaum & Whitcut, 1988; Burchfield, 1996; Peters, 2004 and Butterfield, 2007), so usage had clearly spread to British English by that time and was equally stigmatised. The variant forms very likely existed alongside each other, and *snuck* and *drug* may have been ousted from the standard through the normative grammarians’ efforts. The increase

8. Cheshire (1994, 117) illustrates the different meanings of *shined* and *shone* with the sentences *I shined my shoes* and *the sun shone all day*. Garner (1998) provides almost identical examples, but none of the other usage guides in HUGE that deal with *shined/shone* do so. It is hard to see how users would be able to distinguish between the two uses unless such illustrations are provided.

9. Since we did not have access to the first edition of Ebbitt & Ebbitt (1939), I cannot claim with certainty that *snuck* actually made its appearance in usage guides from the 1970s onwards. In any case, it had already drawn the attention of Krapp in 1927, who labelled *snuk* [sic] dialectal.

in frequency of these forms, but also of the equally stigmatised past tense *done*, can be explained according to Cheshire (1994, 123) by a general preference for /ʌ/ plus nasal and/or velar consonant. As yet, however, the increase in usage has not yet led to a greater acceptance of these nonstandard verb forms in formal Standard English.

What verbs the usage guides include is largely a matter of personal preference, in line with what determines the contents of usage guides generally (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *forthc.*); this is evident from the lack of consensus on what variable verb forms actually constitute usage problems, as the example of the absence of *hanged/hung* in Swan (1980) demonstrates. Consequently, we see an enormous discrepancy between the number of irregular verbs discussed in the usage guides in HUGE, ranging from only two (Baker, 1770 and 1779: *go* and *lie/lay*) or three (Turck Baker [1910] 1938: *light, dive, prove*) to as many as 220 verbs in *Live and Learn* (1856?) – two-thirds of the irregular verbs dealt with in all the usage guides together (329). Another usage guide with a very large number of irregular verbs is the British *Vulgarities of Speech Corrected* (1826): the work treats 104 of them, 102 for the first time. These verb forms are designated by the author as “vulgar”, “the greater number [of which] we may hear every day among the careless, the thoughtless, and the half educated” (1826, 35–39).¹⁰ Like Swan (1980) long after him, he “recommend[s] a careful perusal of the whole table, to fix the correct words in the memory” (1826, 35–39). The list suggests a general fear of the old strong verbs, like *beat, bite, catch, cast, come, cut, eat, read, send* and many others, becoming weak (*beated, bited, catched, casted, comed, cutted, eated, readed, sended*), and reflects an attempt to preserve the old standard forms.

Searching for these weak forms in Joseph Wright’s *English Dialect Dictionary* (1905) showed that they are all dialectal variants, existing alongside the standard forms. As an example of the category “regularisation of irregular verb paradigms”, eWAVE, the Freiburg electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English, shows that verb forms like *catched* are attested for British English in East Anglia, the North, South-East and South-West of England (see also Elmes, 2005, 28), as well as for different varieties spoken in North America, such as Appalachian and Newfoundland English and South Eastern American enclave dialects, but also in a variety of non-indigenous Englishes. The phenomenon, in other words, is widespread, but not characteristic of standard English usage. After *Vulgarities of Speech Corrected* (1826), *catched* is not discussed in any later British English usage guides, nor is it treated in many American usage guides, in any case no longer after the 1978 edition of Ebbitt & Ebbitt (1939). Looking for its occurrence in the 100-million-word *British National Corpus* (BNC, 1980s–1993) I found five instances only, three

10. Chapman (this vol.) provides a detailed discussion of terms of disapproval in usage guides.

of which were categorised as conversation (1992, 1993), while one was unclassified and the remaining one proved a meta-linguistic reference to a PhD study on text recognition (“... there are a number of morphologically irregular words in English which will require explicit statement in the lexicon (e.g. children instead of childs, caught instead of catched)”). The quotation is of interest here in identifying non-standard weak verbs like *catched* for *caught* as instances of overgeneralization that are typical of children’s language. In American English *catched* is not very frequent either: a search in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, ca. 520 million words, 1990–2015) produced six instances, five of them classified as fiction, possibly used as a means of stereotyping the users in question, and one as spoken usage, while COCA’s historical counterpart COHA (*Corpus of Historical American English*, ca. 400 million words, 1810s–2000s) showed an overall decreasing frequency of occurrence with a peak for the 1830s and usage eventually petering out in present-day American English.

The form *casted*, also from the above list, presents a different story, particularly in its form *forecasted*. After *Vulgarities of Speech Corrected* (1826), *casted* is dealt with only in Garner (1998), who condemns it as “[g]enerally speaking incorrect”. Garner does allow for *cast* meaning “to supply with a lineup of actors”, as in “Klepper recently **casted** the feature film ‘Thinner’” (1998, 110). Fowler (1926), Vallins (1951), Ebbitt & Ebbitt ([1939] 1978), de Vries (1991) and Weiner & Delahunty (1994) only deal with the forms *broadcast* and *forecast*. Vallins notes that *broadcasted* “now and then appeared even in B.B.C. journals; but *broadcast* has prevailed, on the model of the simple verb *cast*”, thus expressing surprise at this alleged guardian of correctness using an apparently disfavoured verb form, while according to Ebbitt & Ebbitt the verb has “acquired regular forms in addition to [its] old ones”. Fowler (1926) greatly disliked the newer form *forecasted*, expressing the hope that “we may ... thankfully rid ourselves of the ugly *forecasted*”. Over six decades later, we see that De Vries and Weiner and Delahunty respectively allow for both forms for *broadcast* and *forecast*. Ugly or not, usage of *broadcasted* and *forecasted* has increased, in American English anyway, as a search in BNC, COHA and COCA indicates (Table 1):

Table 1. Frequency of occurrence of *forecasted* and *broadcasted* in BNC, COHA and COCA (raw figures, normalised per 100 million words)

	BNC (n/100 million) 1980s–1993	COHA (n/100 million) 1810s–2000s	COCA (n/100 million) 1990–2015
<i>Broadcasted</i>	2 (2)	18 (4.5)	45 (8.7)
<i>Forecasted</i>	14 (14)	30 (7.5)	140 (26.9)

As for *casted* itself, I found only one instance in the BNC, i.e. *well crafted and well casted*, suggesting that the form was possibly prompted by the preceding *crafted*, and four instances in COHA, in the 1930s, 1960s, 1970s and 2000s. Searching COCA produced 29 instances, or 5.6 instances per 100 million words – much less than in the case of *broadcasted* or *forecasted* (see Table 1), but nevertheless evidence of an increase compared to the overall occurrence in COHA. The COCA instances were found in different categories: SPOKEN (12), NEWS (4), MAGAZINES (3), FICTION (1) and ACADEMIC prose (9). Three of the academic instances occurred in the combination *casted cadence*, possibly, therefore, a technical term. *Casted*, along with its compounded forms *broadcasted* and *forecasted*, is clearly there to stay, irrespective of the contrary advice of several usage guides.

5. The effects of prescriptivism

If it is the role of usage guides to maintain standards of correctness, it is perhaps surprising to see how little effect they had. Fowler's condemnation of *forecasted*, discussed above, did not lead to a decrease in usage, for all his status as a well-known authority – far from it. Another example of where Fowler's usage advice proved ineffectual, for British writers in any case, is his recommendation to use *that* with restrictive relative clauses, as in *Each made a list of books that had influenced him*, and *which* with non-restrictive ones (*I always buy his books, which have influenced me greatly*) (Fowler, 1926, 635). Today, Fowler's prescription is a strict rule of usage in American English, as we can see in the third edition of Strunk & White's *Elements of Style* ([1959] 1979, 59): "*That* is the defining, or restrictive pronoun, *which* the nondefining, or nonrestrictive". Grammar Girl's slightly more simplified advice, "use *that* before a restrictive clause and *which* before everything else", still comes down to the same thing.¹¹ The rule has produced a veritable phobia among American writers, resulting in what is often referred to as "*which* hunting".¹² According to Denison & Hundt (2013, 141), however, the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses is not a straightforward one, but it is interesting to see that the feature has led to a divide between British and American users, with sometimes absurd consequences (Cameron, 1995, 50–51).

The actual effect of prescriptive rules of usage guides is, however, not easy to measure. Morana Lukač and I, for instance, found that the highly stigmatised but

11. See <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/which-versus-that-0> (accessed 27 January 2017).

12. See e.g. <http://www.grammarphobia.com/blog/2010/04/which-hunting.html> (accessed 27 January 2017).

commonly used form *thusly* barely occurs in the 110-million-word *TIME Magazine Corpus*, something which we attributed to the possibility of editorial intervention (Lukač & Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, *forthc.*). Albakry's (2007) failure to find many instances of functional shift in his corpus of American newspapers, i.e. of nouns being turned into verbs as in *to task* or *to timeline* (Pinker, 2014, 237), is possibly similarly due to the influence of the newspapers' style guides: as the cartoons reproduced by Pinker illustrate, conversion of nouns into verbs is a much criticised phenomenon, despite the fact that it has been found since the days of Shakespeare (Crystal, 2008, 149). Editorial correction, following the newspapers' style guides, is a factor Albakry should have reckoned with in his study. Another effect of prescriptivism is the over-zealous application of prescriptive rules, as in the advice found in Strunk & White ([1959] 1979, 18–19) to “[u]se the active voice”. In practice, Pullum (2009) argues, this has not only led to an undue “bias against the passive”, but also to teachers thinking that every instance of *be* potentially signals a passive, consequently advising students to rephrase the sentence in question – a *be*-hunt, in other words. Usage advice that is uncritically adopted is liable to produce bad English, and this is also found in cases when the advice against the use of the split infinitive, despite widespread acceptability today, is followed too closely, producing sentences like “At a computer-security conference in 2015, researchers demonstrated **how wirelessly to hack** a car made by Jeep” (Pullum, 2016).¹³

To return to *thusly*, Morana Lukač and I found that this form, despite strong condemnation by usage guides, is on the increase, particularly in the language of young people. Another discovery we made is that informants, when asked for their pet peeves, mentioned (alongside particular usage problems) prescriptivism itself, as well as the insistence on *avoiding* usage problems:

- (7) Me and Lee was delighted to see you. Between you and I and **all PEOPLE who object to hopefully as a sentence adverb**
- (8) **Insistence on applying rules of Latin grammar to English grammar**, e.g. Up with which I will not put! Language is fluid and changes constantly. You only have to read a book that was published 30 years ago to see just how much has changed in just one generation.
- (9) **Linguistic prescriptivism ;)** – but it would be disingenuous to pretend that spelling the possessive determiner or pronoun “its” with an apostrophe doesn't bother me. As does using “prank” as a verb.

We thus witness here the rise of what might be termed “anti-prescriptivism”. Hypercorrect usage, too, as an undue side-effect of the insistence on the correct use of

13. Thanks to Oliver Kamm for drawing our attention to this.

pronoun forms like *I* or *whom*, has become the object of criticism among members of the general public, as the comment in (10) illustrates:

- (10) Hypercorrect use of “X and I”! The house belongs to my husband and I. This is a picture of my mother and I. I understand why people use it, because they’re always told that it’s not “Me and X” but “X and I”, but the form with me is sometimes the right form so they shouldn’t be afraid to use it! :)\ Also **when people don’t know how to use “whom” and just put it anywhere** to make the text sound better, even though it’s wrong.

Another example, also on the use of *whom*, is from feedback I received on a blog-post requesting information about speakers’ attitudes to usage problems in general:

- (11) The use of whom. It’s fine to use it if you are in the objective case and are trying to sound like a snob, but otherwise say who. I won’t say who directly after a preposition, but I do re-write sentences to avoid being in that position. It’s lovely to have that as an option for when you do (for whatever reason) want to sound like a snob, but only then.

The informant is a 40-year old educated American woman, whose list of features included people saying “hung” when referring to actions involving nooses (cf. Section 4). Noting that the usage makes her “twitch”, she added that “on the other hand it makes more sense and part of me assumes that’s the natural course of the language and the sooner we get there the better”. The realization that language changes, or “evolves”, is something informants put forward as well (“Language is fluid and changes constantly”; “But you can’t stop language from evolving and you have to get used to such things”; “... I get irritated by business jargon but, on the other hand, find the constant changes in language delightful”). All this is clearly another form of the new anti-prescriptivism: instead of the mere and at times uncritical application of particular prescriptive rules, users are becoming aware of the futility of trying to stick to an antiquated set of rules of correctness. This awareness resulted in the publication of Harry Ritchie’s *English for the Natives* (2013), which argues that native speakers should not let themselves be intimidated by usage guides and their pre- and proscriptions (though, as mentioned above, the book still includes a list of “mistakes” to be avoided). The recent publication of the usage guide *Accidence Will Happen* by Oliver Kamm (2015) takes the same perspective, as does Steven Pinker’s *The Sense of Style* (2014). However, despite a more lenient approach to usage problems which characterise English usage guides over the years (Tiekens-Boon van Ostade & Ebner, 2017), the old tradition still continues, resulting in strongly pre- and proscriptive publications like Simon Heffer’s *Strictly English* (2010) and its alphabetical version *Simply English* (2014) and Gwynne’s *Grammar* (2011) that are enormously popular. These works produce quick and ready usage

advice, and even though the nature of the advice is often linguistically inaccurate, it is this kind of publication that the general public, when uncertain about a particular usage, is apparently happy to consult.

6. Conclusion

Despite some of our informants' criticism of prescriptivism and its effect on the language as well as the publication of usage advice literature that is no longer strictly prescriptive, we cannot conclude that prescriptivism, as a further stage in the English standardisation process, has come to an end (see also Chapman, this vol.). We can, however, see that it appears to be entering a different phase, characterised by the fact that people have become weary of having to obey the old rules of correctness, but also, as Hielke Vriendorp (2016) discovered, from a focus on different issues that show variable usage: analysing a substantial number of online publications on usage, he found that the most frequently discussed usage items were the incorrect use of commas and apostrophes and the spellings *affect/effect*, *it's/its* and *you're/your*. Though none of these are actually new, they are instances of spelling and punctuation only; there appears to be less concern with the issues of grammar that used to be part of usage discussions in earlier days. Former usage problems like *casted* (*forecasted*, *broadcasted*), *thusly*, *who/whom*, the split infinitive and, as the informant quoted in (11) wrote, *hung/hanged*, no longer seem to inspire widespread criticism. While prescriptivism as such has therefore not come to an end, its focus seems to be changing, and in the light of Vriesendorp's findings, it will be of great interest to follow ongoing developments on the internet closely in order to see what direction the prescriptivism stage is likely to take in the immediate future. Contrary to the claim made by Joop van der Horst in his book called *Het Einde van de Standaardtaal* (2008), I therefore do not believe that the English standardisation process has come to an end.

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“Splendidly prejudiced”

Words for disapproval in English usage guides

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This paper examines terms used for disapproval in usage guides during the 19th and 20th centuries. Two corpora are used for this investigation: the *Hyper Usage Guide of English* database (HUGE) and a corpus of 29 usage guides representing nearly all decades of the 19th and 20th centuries. The terms of disapproval fall into four groups: terms emphasizing correctness (*wrong*, *error*), communication (*confusing*, *awkward*), varieties of English (*variant*, *slang*), and social judgments (*silly*, *ignorant*). The examination shows that terms emphasizing correctness are most dominant today and have predominated over time. In contrast, judgmental terms have declined over time, while variation and communication terms have increased. The paper further notes that for shibboleths – prescriptive rules with high salience for “some readers” – a common formulation is that “some writers” or even “many writers” use the disapproved term, thus paralleling the “some readers” who notice the shibboleths.

Keywords: prescriptivism, usage guides, shibboleths, correctness, Standard English, terms of disapproval, popular metalanguage

This paper takes its title from an entry in the third edition of *Fowler’s Modern English Usage*:

Fowler (1926) wrote a splendidly prejudiced piece about the misuse of *clever*, ‘especially in feminine conversation’ in the sense of ‘learned, well read, bookish, or studious’. It is sufficient perhaps just to recognize that *clever* is normally a term of approbation. (Burchfield, 1996, s.v. *clever*)

Splendidly colorful terms of disapproval like these pepper the usage guides, and it would be fun to collect them. Here are a few (emphasis is added in each):

- (1) a. Avoid this use [to go = to say] except jocularly; it has become a *cliché*, the *badge of gum-chewing youth*. (Wilson, 1993, s.v. *go*)

- b. To say 'I graduated college' ... is to be a *language slob* and a *discredit* to whatever *learning factory* mailed you a diploma
(Safire qtd. in Ebbitt & Ebbitt, 1990, s.v. *graduated*)
- c. To use *went* as a straight-faced past participle is to engage in low *DIALECT* that isn't appropriate even in the *sports pages* (Garner, 2003, s.v. *go*)

But the purpose of this paper is not to look for the most colorful terms, as such, but instead at the most used terms. In particular, this paper will examine terms for three areas of disapproval: (1) disapproved constructions like “cliché” as a characterization of *to go* for *to say* or *to graduate college* or *have went*; (2) language characterized by such constructions, like *low dialect* or *sports pages*; and (3) people who use such constructions, like *gum-chewing youth*, *language slob*, and *a discredit to whatever learning factory mailed you a diploma*. This paper represents both a diachronic onomasiological study of one domain – prescriptivism – and the study of a metalanguage, albeit popular metalanguage, in the history of the English language. For some time, I have had a hunch borne from reading many usage manuals that over time the writers of usage guides have become less harsh or judgmental in their disapproval, but that they have still relied on a fundamental binary of right and wrong variants. It has seemed to me that “prescribers” (Garner’s term) have absorbed some things from the 20th-century challenges to prescriptivism – mostly that they should not be offensive – but they have still adhered fairly tightly to a “correctness” view of language. After examining terms of disapproval in 77 usage guides, this paper will argue that such terms have indeed changed over time, particularly toward less judgmental terms, while still preserving the fundamental notions of correctness (see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade, this vol.).

The underlying model for terms of disapproval is a simple one: for most people consulting usage guides, a variant is either right or wrong. No matter how sophisticated they may be, writers of usage guides must eventually signal, in some way, which form is the “correct” one and which the “incorrect”. For my part, I prefer the terms “prescribed” and “proscribed” to capture this binary, since they avoid a commitment to correctness in describing the binary. I can speak of *to go* meaning *to say* as a proscribed form, without agreeing that it is somehow wrong or incorrect. But it is just such commitment to correctness that people using usage guides seek, and the usage-guide writers must oblige them somehow, hence the terms of disapproval examined in this study.

The principal method of this paper is to search for terms in two different corpora of usage guides and to look for any trends over time. The searches in each corpus largely consist of high-level string searches, instead of close inspection of individual contexts. There undoubtedly will be occurrences of terms like *improper* or *wrong* that are not applied to prescriptive judgments, but I have made no effort to identify and exclude such occurrences. I am counting on such uses to be relatively

infrequent and relatively uniform from term to term so that the overall distribution of terms for disapproval will remain roughly the same.

The first corpus that I have used for these terms consists of 29 usage guides published from 1770 to 2003. They were selected from the bibliography in Garner, 2003 to represent at least one guide per decade where possible. 23 of these guides were published in America and six in the United Kingdom, though none of the searches have divided the corpus by place of publication. This corpus will be referred to as the *Complete-handbook Corpus* (CHC), since the entire handbook was included in each case. The composition of the corpus is given in Appendix A.

The second corpus used in this study is the *Hyper Usage Guide of English database* (HUGE) compiled at Leiden University. This corpus consists of 77 usage guides, again split between the United Kingdom and America in their place of publication. 15 usage guides are included in both corpora. The HUGE database does not include every entry of the usage guides, but instead focuses on approximate 100 prescriptive rules deemed to be particularly salient (*Hyper Usage Guide of English* 2017). The prescriptive rules in HUGE generally treat grammatical issues (e.g. case in *it is I* vs. *me*) instead of word meaning (e.g. *healthy* vs. *healthful*), spelling (*adapter* vs. *adaptor*) or other issues. The counts given for HUGE are the number of entries that contain the search term, not necessarily the number of tokens of the search term. For that reason, normalized token figures cannot be given for this corpus.

I identified search terms by first extracting terms of disapproval from the first usage guide (Baker 1770). I then looked for collocations of these terms to find other terms of disapproval, for which I then recursively searched for still more collocations. As I came across any new term of disapproval, I added it to the pool. In the end, I came up with 113 terms given in Appendix B.

When we look at the corpus as a whole without gradations of time, the top ten most used terms for each corpus are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Ten most used terms (Terms common to both lists are in bold.)

CHC Rank	CHC Term	CHC Tokens	HUGE Rank	HUGE Term	HUGE Entries
1	<i>wrong</i>	2704	1	<i>wrong</i>	605
2	<i>variant</i>	1551	2	<i>informal(ly)</i>	451
3	<i>error</i>	1528	3	<i>incorrect</i>	418
4	<i>slang</i>	1401	4	<i>error</i>	383
5	<i>colloquial</i>	1223	5	<i>mistake</i>	350
6	<i>confused</i>	985	6	<i>colloquial</i>	256
7	<i>confusion</i>	950	7	<i>confusion</i>	248
8	<i>informal(ly)</i>	903	8	<i>awkward</i>	240
9	<i>incorrect</i>	885	9	<i>fault</i>	169
10	<i>false</i>	881	10	<i>fail</i>	133

As the table shows, the most-used term in both corpora is *wrong*, which suggests that notions of correctness have predominated the tradition. Other terms in the top ten reinforce this notion: *error*, *incorrect*, *mistake*, and *false*. But we also see other kinds of terms represented. *Variant*,¹ *slang*, *colloquial*, and *informal*, for example, all refer to a variety of English, while *awkward*, *confused*, and *confusing* appeal to the claim that prescriptive rules somehow improve communication.

When we look at the distribution of these top ten terms over time, things become more complicated. The distribution of *wrong* in CHC, given in normalized figures (per 100,000 words), shows one large spike dominating, as seen in Figure 1.

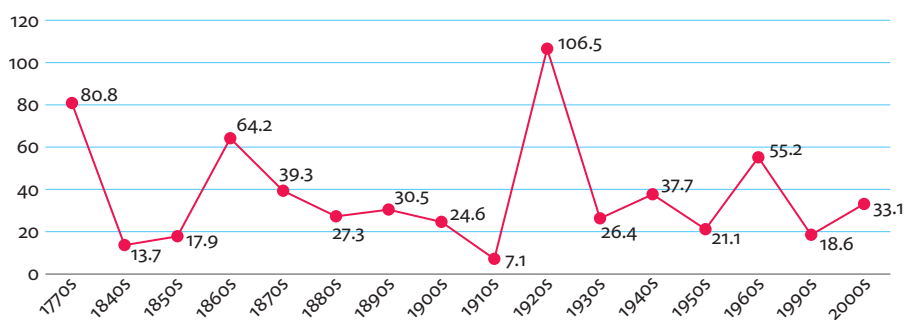


Figure 1. Normalized tokens of *wrong* (per 100,000 words) in CHC for each decade

A closer look shows that three writers – Fowler 1926, Hadida 1927, and Woods 1932 – account for 45% of all tokens. So does *wrong* have such high showing in the overall corpus mainly because of these three writers? This spiky distribution underscores the idiosyncratic nature of individual usage guides. There could be several reasons for writers to use *wrong* less than others. Perhaps some writers simply do not like the word. Perhaps others have avoided the simple binary. Or it could be that some writers do not use *wrong* as much because they do not use any metalanguage as much. Indeed, when we look at the total number of tokens for all terms, we see that the normalized figures vary widely among authors, from 23.4 in Canby 1920 to 129.4 in Woods 1932. It is entirely possible – in fact fairly common – for writers to use the right/wrong binary without ever using any explicit metalanguage, as Bierce, 1909 does in this passage: “‘The regiment had less than five hundred men.’ Less relates to quantity, fewer, to number” (s.v. *less for fewer*). Here Bierce does not use any label for the proscribed meaning of *less* or *fewer*. In

1. The term *variant* is likely the most neutral term included in this study, but it is still frequently used to label proscribed forms, as in “Dissyllable is a misbegotten variant form” (Garner, 2003, s.v. *dissyllable*).

fact, he just leaves the proscription to be inferred. But it is quite clear that Bierce is promoting a right and a wrong view, nonetheless.

So maybe a simple count of terms will not be sufficient for identifying trends over time. We would be safer if we had some way of telling how much individual authors preferred a given term among all the terms that the writer uses. For that measurement, we can use the percentile ranking for each term. In other words, for the terms that any author does use, how does a given term, like *wrong*, rank? Figure 2 gives the distribution of *wrong* as a percentile ranking for each writer.

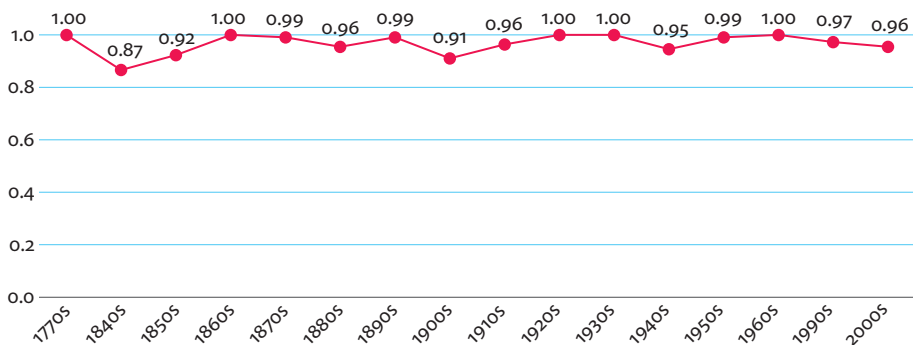


Figure 2. Percentile of *wrong* compared to all terms for each decade in CHC

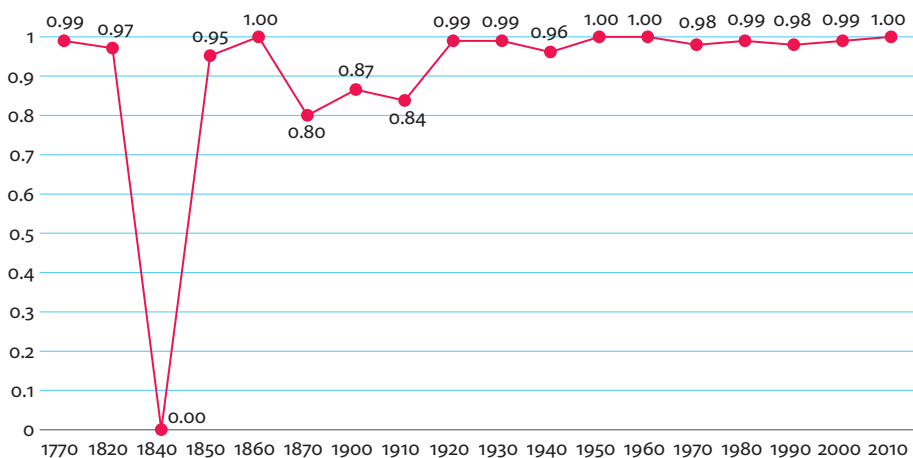


Figure 3. Percentile of *wrong* compared to all terms for each decade in HUGE

In these figures, the percentile of *wrong* is given with respect to all the words examined. Thus for Figure 2, *wrong* is in the 86th percentile of all words in the 1840s,

while it is in the 99th percentile for the 1950s. The advantages of using percentiles should be clear – we can tell how popular a term is for each writer, regardless of how much or little that writer uses metalanguage. Using percentiles, we see much more coherence for *wrong*. Nearly all writers heavily favor the term *wrong* among their terms of disapproval, and the line in both figures stays above 90% for nearly all decades.

We can compare terms with each other by taking the average of each percentile for all usage guides. The average percentile ranking for *wrong* in the CHC, for example, is 95.4. This is clearly the highest ranking, as we see in Table 2.

Table 2. Top-ten terms ranked by average percentile (Terms common to both lists are in bold.)

Ranking in CHC	Word	Average percentile	Ranking in HUGE	Word	Average percentile
1	<i>wrong</i>	95.4	1	<i>wrong</i>	83.7
2	<i>error</i>	92.7	2	<i>incorrect</i>	79.7
3	<i>fail</i>	89.5	3	<i>error</i>	76.7
4	<i>informal(ly)</i>	88.3	4	<i>mistake</i>	73.4
5	<i>incorrect</i>	87.2	5	<i>confusion</i>	71.9
6	<i>slang</i>	84.1	6	<i>awkward</i>	69.4
7	<i>fault</i>	83.9	7	<i>fault</i>	59.1
8	<i>colloquial</i>	82.4	8	<i>informal(ly)</i>	53.5
9	<i>mistake</i>	81.2	9	<i>colloquial</i>	52.4
10	<i>vulgar</i>	81.2	10	<i>fail</i>	50.1

The similarity between the two corpus rankings is reassuring: eight of the terms are common to both lists. We can be fairly confident that these eight are indeed favored by writers of usage guides. A comparison with Table 1 shows that the ranking by average percentile is close to the ranking by tokens, but there are a few meaningful differences. One difference is that the correctness terms stand out even more when ranked by average percentile. Not only have *error* and *incorrect* moved to a higher ranking, when compared with their ranking using total tokens, but terms like *fault* and *mistake* have joined the top ten for both corpora. Another difference is that the number-two term in CHC when ranked by number of tokens, *variant*, becomes number 43 when ranked by average percentile. This is unusual. The rest of the top ten by token count are also in the top 15 in average percentile. A look at *variant* over time helps us see the discrepancy, as given in Figures 4 through 6.

When we look at the token count over time, we see that the large number of tokens have come in more recent usage books. And when we look at the percentile ranking of *variant* over time, we see that a large number of writers did not use the

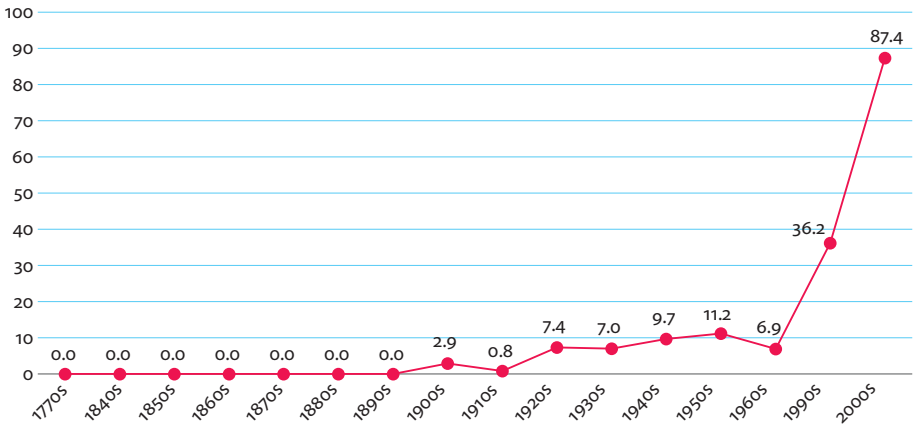


Figure 4. Tokens of *variant* by decade in CHC (per 100,000 words)

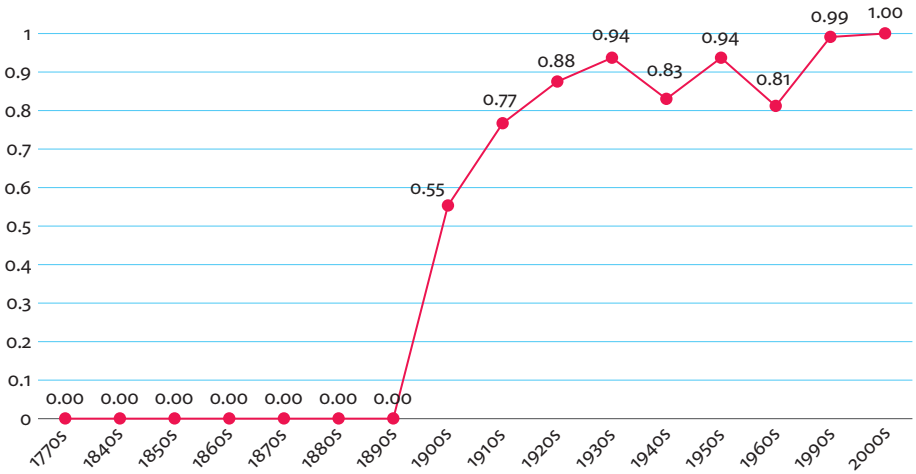


Figure 5. Average percentile of *variant* by decade in CHC

term at all until fairly recently. Except for the spike in the 1850s and the dip in the 1940s in HUGE, the two corpora show a similar trend, namely that the term *variant* seems to have increased significantly over time.

So far we have seen two patterns for change over time. With *wrong*, we saw that a term stayed fairly even over time, in this case, even at a high rate. Other words from the top-ten list that behave like *wrong* are *error*, *informal(ly)*, *incorrect*, and *slang*. With *variant*, we have seen that a term that was not initially popular became more popular. Some other words that increase in use over time are *vague*,

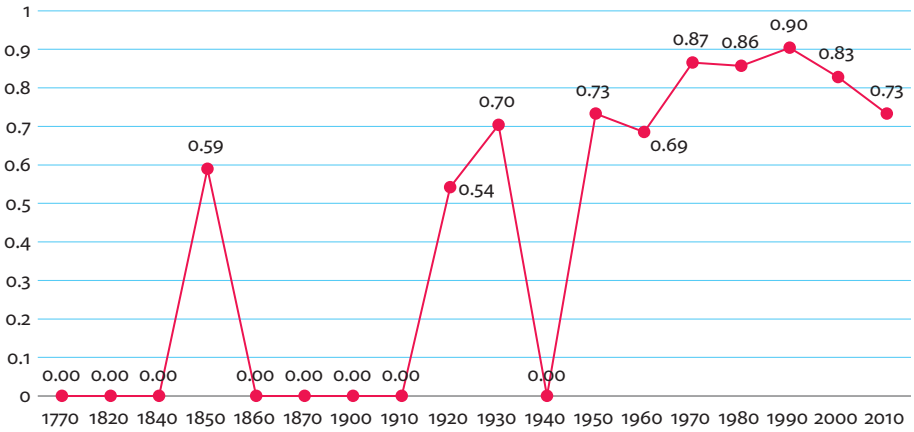


Figure 6. Average percentile of *variant* by decade in HUGE

dialect, dialectal, jargon, jargonistic, misspell, jocular, unidiomatic, nonstandard, substandard, and problematic. We should expect to see the converse of the *variant* pattern, as well, namely that a term that was relatively popular at the start became less popular over time. That is what *vulgarism* does, as shown in Figures 7 and 8.



Figure 7. Average percentile of *vulgarism* in CHC by decade

The dips in the 1870s, 1940s, and 1990s in Figure 8 make it harder to see, but like the line in Figure 7, there seems to be a general trend down in the use of *vulgarism*. Other terms behaving like *vulgarism* are *vulgar, careless, vile, impropriety, no such word, pleonastic, bad English, depraved, illiteracy, unpardonable, false grammar, and ignorant.*

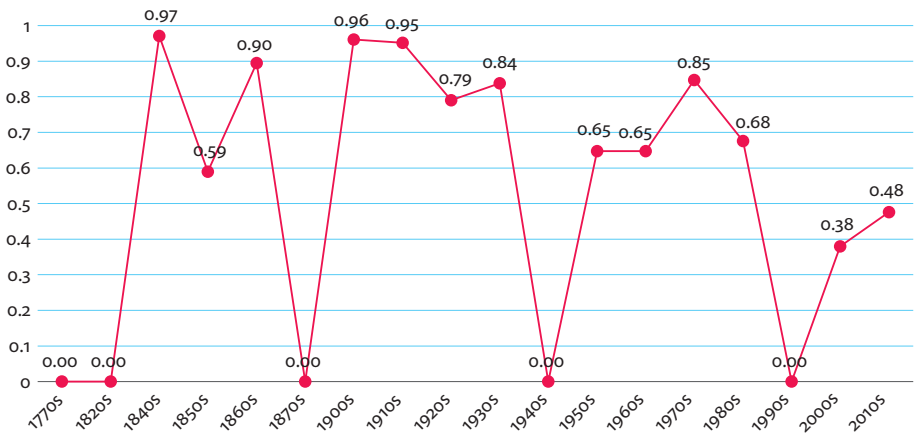


Figure 8. Average percentile of *vulgarity* in HUGE by decade

There is yet another pattern among the data, and that is that there is no coherent trend in popularity. The term simply varies in popularity from writer to writer. We see this trend with *pedantry* in Figure 9.

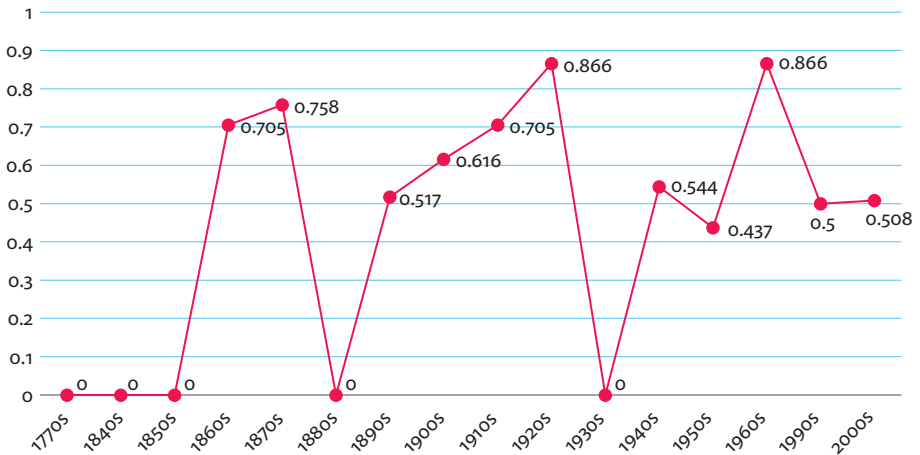


Figure 9. Average percentile of *pedantry* in CHC by decade

Some other terms that behave like *pedantry* are *fallacy*, *slovenly*, *awkward*, *neologism*, *incorrectness*, *bad grammar*, *bad taste*, and *bad diction*.

For nearly all the figures, and especially for Figure 9, spikiness is a problem. Spikiness comes about because some writers do not use a term at all, while other writers use it a fair amount. The single most obvious trend in the data examined so far is that writers do not use the same terms, and there is no real uniformity for

terms of disapproval. But what if they use similar concepts, and mainly differ in the terms they use to express those concepts? What if we looked at groups of terms, rather than individual terms?

I was able to sort the terms into four main groups. Obviously there will be some overlap in the categories, and some terms were harder to fit into just one group than others, but for the most part, the terms fit well enough into these four groups. The most numerous group contains terms that express a negative judgment about the speaker/writer or the construction. These are terms like *silly* or *ignorant*. To a degree all terms of disapproval express a judgment, but for this category, the terms tell how others might judge the person who uses the proscribed form or how the use of the proscribed form reflects poor qualities of the speaker/writer. The second group consists of terms depending on a “correctness” view of language. These are terms like *wrong* and *error* and *no such word* that view language as somehow being reified and prior to speakers; speakers are viewed as missing the target or getting the language wrong if they use the proscribed form. The third group consists of terms that key on supposed problems in communication if the proscribed form is used. These are terms like *awkward*, *misleading*, *obtuse*, and *clumsy*. The final group consists of terms that signal some kind of mismatch between the term and the setting. The proscribed form is not so much wrong or bad or clumsy, but it is more typical of a given variety than the one that the speaker/writer may want to use. These are terms like *informal*, *jargon*, and *commercialese*. The classifications are given in Appendix B, with J referring to judgmental terms, R to terms dealing with correctness, C to terms dealing with communication, and V to terms dealing with varieties.

When we look at the distribution of these groups over time, some general trends become a little more apparent. The proportions of the total tokens for each category are given for each decade in Figures 10 and 11.

In both figures, it is clear that terms with a correctness view towards language have always predominated, especially in the 19th century. It is also clear that judgmental terms were used in fairly high proportions until the 1910s, but have been declining since then and are the lowest proportion by the end of the survey. Terms treating proscribed forms as either a question of a variety or of communication have both been increasing since the 1900s. These numbers confirm my initial hunch that judgmental terms were becoming less used, while correctness terms were remaining frequently used. It is interesting to see, as well, that usage-guide writers have increasingly made their judgments in terms that would be more respectable to those who have challenged prescriptivism in the past, namely that proscribed forms simply correspond to another (not necessarily wrong) variety or that they hamper communication.²

2. On the development of prescriptive and descriptive perspectives, see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade (this vol.).

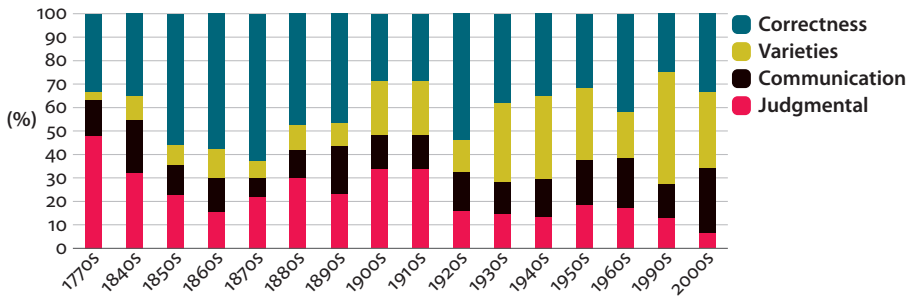


Figure 10. Proportions of terms in each category in CHC

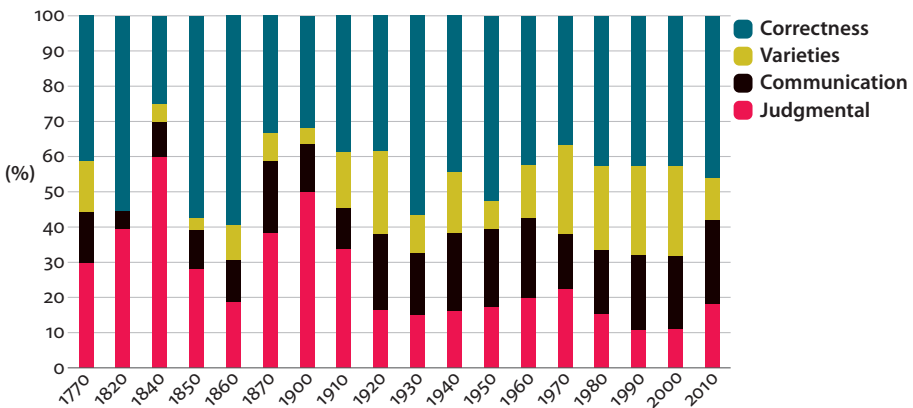


Figure 11. Proportions of terms in each category in HUGE

The data thus far have shown that while correctness still predominates, usage-guide writers are nonetheless looking for ways to account for the complexity of variation, even while trying to write for an audience expecting simple advice. Even books with a strong incentive to simplify end up with multiple terms. Casagrande (2008), though not part of either corpus, provides an example. It is a popularizing book with only 101 entries, and its advice is intended to be easy for a popular audience to grasp. Yet Casagrande uses a variety of labels: *wrong*, *a bad call*, *just don't go there*, *okay*, *ickypoo* and so on. One reason for the variety of terms is that writers of usage guides still try to be interesting or even entertaining and see variation in terms as a way to help. But more important than “elegant variation”, the number of terms for disapproval is probably also telling us that the underlying binary of right and wrong is insufficient. As much as readers want advice given in those terms, the writers of usage guides cannot always deliver the advice in those terms. Casagrande again illustrates this with her label *grammatical yet goofy* for the double copula in *what it is is people don't like these constructions* (2008, 109). Some other such terms are *ugly but grammatical* and *controversial but acceptable*.

Casagrande’s terms are very much like the terms I discuss in another paper as identifying at least one more level of acceptability in prescriptive judgments. In Chapman, 2017, I argue that we have reified terms to account for the simple model of usage: “the Rules” define “Standard English” or even just “English”, which is used by “the Educated”. Yet I also noted that usage guides routinely acknowledge another level of usage rules that somehow distinguish another level of approved language and approved speakers/writers. A quotation that shows the operation of these two levels comes from Ebbitt & Ebbitt:

- (2) Stylistically, the word still bothers *some readers*, who associate it with business jargon, but it is established as *standard English*.
(Ebbitt & Ebbitt, s.v. *contact*; emphasis added)

In the above quotation, Ebbitt & Ebbitt make a distinction between “standard English” and this extra level of approval, characterized by the approval of “some readers”. The terms for this extra level are not reified, and in fact, they are often mapped on to the simpler formulation where “rules”, “standard English”, and “the Educated” are allowed to stand in for these “extra rules” that define a “hyperstandard English” championed by “some readers”, “SNOOTS”, “purists” and the like. This formulation is given in Figure 12.

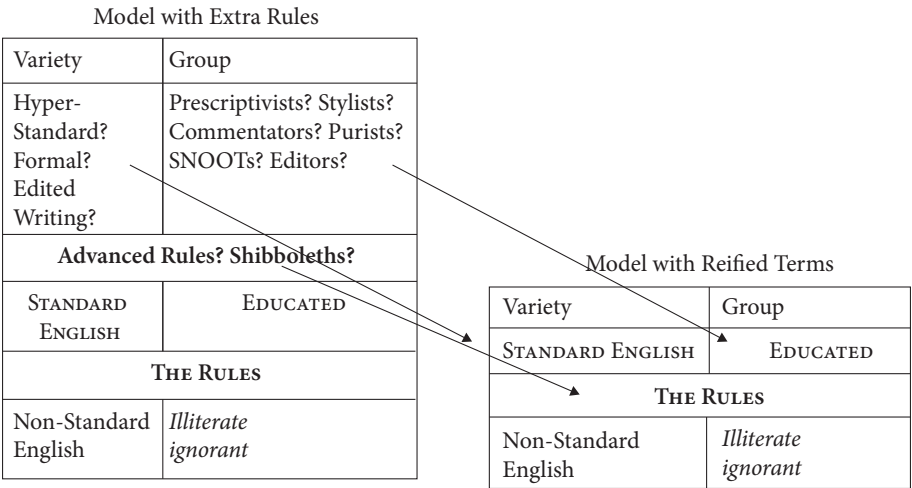


Figure 12. Relationship of extra rules to reified terms

One problem with Figure 12, however, is identifying which terms should be given immediately below the “extra rules” to label the language and people defined by these extra rules. I used “standard English” and “the educated”, because in my previous paper I viewed the rules favored by “some readers” and SNOOTS as an extra level – a level extending beyond standard English, as illustrated by the Ebbitt & Ebbitt

passage and many more like that. I still believe that is an acceptable formulation, but I am confident that that formulation is not how the purists and SNOOTS see these “extra rules.” The champions of these extra rules very seldom claim to be promoting anything other than “the Rules” that separate no more than “standard English” from non-standard English and “the Educated” from the less educated. So what terms do usage guides use to describe the proscribed forms for these extra rules or shibboleths?

It turns out that usage-guide writers employ three strategies to discuss these extra rules and their proscribed forms. The first is to refer to the extra rules in fairly neutral terms that still preserve the perspective of the SNOOTS and “some readers”, but do not mention any disapproval for speakers or language using the proscribed form. An example comes from Burchfield: “the currency of the *disliked* use in America is not clear to me” (Burchfield, 1996, s.v. *healthy, healthful*; emphasis added). Here, Burchfield acknowledges that “some readers” must not like the “conducive of health” meaning of *healthy*, since he uses *disliked* to characterize the use. But Burchfield avoids any further judgment about those who use *healthy* in this way or the language in which it occurs. In fact, he uses a passive form, so that he does not even have to mention the people who might dislike the proscribed form.

A second strategy is to attribute the judgments about a particular shibboleth to “some readers” or “purists” and then create distance between those “purists” and the handbook editor. One example of this comes from Evans & Evans:

- (3) The purists, particularly English purists, made an issue of it. Here was an abomination, an Americanism hideously repugnant.

(Evans & Evans, 1957, s.v. *contact*)

In this passage, Evans & Evans use hyperbole to suggest some distance between their attitude towards the proscribed meaning of *contact* and the attitudes of “purists”. It may be that a few SNOOTS have used such charged terms as *abomination* or *hideously repugnant*, though such terms do not show up much generally in the corpus. By seizing on more extreme terms, Evans & Evans can make themselves look more reasonable for not condemning the proscribed meaning.

A different distancing tactic, humor, is adopted by Garner:

- (4) In fact, though, many writers use *healthy* when they mean *healthful*, and *healthy* threatens to edge out its sibling. Such a development would be unhealthful, since it would lead to a less healthy state of the language.

(Garner, 2003, s.v. *healthy, healthful*)

By shifting to a pun, Garner is able to report the issue, but lessen his commitment to it – if it were truly serious, he would have told us. Needless to say, writers who use these kinds of distancing tactics generally disagree with the judgment against the proscribed form, or are at least less disapproving than the “purists” and “some readers”.

A third strategy is to acknowledge the legitimacy of the disapproval and maybe even share the disapproval, but at the same time to give in grudgingly to the changes in attitudes toward particular usage rules. These changes in attitude end up making the “extra rules” less a divider between “standard English” and non-standard English, and more a divider between those who value such rules and those who do not. In this strategy, usage-guide editors usually acknowledge that it would be good if the proscribed form could be stigmatized out of existence, but more in sorrow than in anger they realize that the stigma will not stick as much as it used to. A couple of examples of this strategy come from Follett, 1967 and Bernstein, 1965:

- (5) a. Persons old enough to have been repelled by the verb *contact* when it was still a *crude neologism* may as well make up their minds that there is no way to arrest or reverse the tide of its popularity.
(Follett, 1967, s.v. *contact*; emphasis added)
- b. Most often it is seized upon by those *lovers of the FAD WORD* who would rather be up to the minute than specific.
(Bernstein, 1965, s.v. *contact*; emphasis added)

Here we see the grudging acknowledgment that language trends are leaving the issue behind: only the dedicated SNOOTS and “some readers” can be persuaded to care about the issue.

In these quotations, we see some terms that could be used for any proscribed form, not just those proscribed in shibboleths: *abomination*, *repugnant*, *neologism*, etc. On the other hand, we see a few terms that are more typical of these extras rules. *Disliked use* may be applied mainly to shibboleths, since it highlights the people behind the disapproval. Just as “some people” in the Ebbitt & Ebbitt quotation was the key to seeing the extra level of approval defined by the extra rules, a reference to people may be the key to seeing the disapproval for the proscribed forms of those extra rules. At least such a reference is seen in the following passages:

- (6) a. Deprive your *businessman* of *contact* and he would be unhappy, but deprive your practiced writer of *contact* and he should be able to make out very well.
(Bernstein, 1965, s.v. *contact*; emphasis added)
- b. The great word of the era of sales, promotion and consolidation is retiring to its rightful place, as the *salesmen* themselves, poor fellows, turn to other occupations.
(Partridge, 1947, s.v. *contact*; emphasis added)

In these passages, the editors have identified a particular class of people who they suppose characteristically use the proscribed forms. The disapproval is meant to warn people not to sound like that class. Garner’s entry in (4) above also refers to people, when he writes “though, many writers use *healthy* when they mean healthful”. The symmetry of “many writers” with “some readers” suggests a possible formula for handling this concept, and indeed, other usage-guide editors use this formulation:

- (7) The frequency of the abuse suggests that *many writers* are unaware what the standard idiom is. (Follett, 1967, s.v. *hard put*; emphasis added)

In this formulation, the proscribed form is used by some unspecified number of people – “many writers” – though it is presumably enough writers to call into question whether the proscribed form is really characteristic of non-standard English. As it turns out, usage-guide writers mostly use “some writers” and “many writers” the same way – to condemn those who do not know or use the prescribed form. Thus “some readers” might notice the use of a proscribed form for some rules and “many writers” or “some writers” do not realize they should not use the proscribed form. I find these terms fascinating. The terms for quantifying, even though they are not specific, and even though no empirical evidence is given to justify their use, at least point to a more empirical view of language: a proscribed form may be risky to use depending on how many readers object to it or how few writers use it. Like the use of terms for varieties and communication, these quasi-quantifying terms are at least a nod toward the objections that have been leveled against the prescriptive tradition.

I do not mean to hint, however, that the prescriptive tradition has overcome the objection of its being too arbitrary and too poor a measure for the qualities it claims to measure – intelligence, skill, dependability, etc. As we have seen, labels that simplify language to a simple question of right and wrong still predominate. But as we have also seen, at least the labels used for proscribed forms have tended to become less judgmental, while at the same time showing a little more awareness of the complexity of variation in language. We might say the labels are getting better, even if they have a long way to go to become splendid.

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Appendix A. Usage guides in Complete-handbook Corpus (CHC)

Year	Author	Title	Total words
1770	Baker, Robert	Reflections on the English Language	45800
1841	Vescey, Francis	The Decline of the English Language	21917
1856	Burgess, Walton	500 Mistakes of Daily Occurrence	22351
1866	Alford, Henry	A Plea for the Queen's English	70112
1875	Gould, Edward	Good English	55998
1887	Ayres, Alfred	The Verbalist	66041
1898	Hodgson, William Ballentyne	Errors in the use of English	120198
1899	White, Richard Grant	Words and their Uses, Past and Present	138662
1906	Vizetelly, Frank H.	A Deskbook of Errors in English	56571
1909	Bierce, Ambrose	Write it Right	12479
1914	Utter, Robert Palfrey	A Guide to Good English	45684
1917	Hall, J. Leslie	English Usage	94962
1917	MacCracken, H. N. and Helen E. Sandison	Manual of Good English	97528
1920	Canby, Henry Siedel	Good English	109198
1922	Vizetelly, Frank H.	Slips of Speech	16699
1926	Fowler, H. W.	A Dictionary of Modern English Usage	478228
1927	Hadida, Sophie C.	Pitfalls in English and How to Avoid Them	61732
1932	Weseen, Maurice H.	Words Confused and Misused	115227
1932	Woods, George B and Clarence Stratton	Blue Book of Good English	70627
1942	Nurnberg, Maxwell.	What's the Good Word?	69183
1943	Witherspoon, Alexander M	Common Errors in English and How to Avoid Them	92108
1947	Partridge, Eric	Usage and Abuse	273674
1957	Evans, Bergen and Cornelia Evans	Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage	582151
1965	Bernstein, Theodore M.	The Careful Writer	144073
1965	Gowers, Ernest	Fowler's Modern English Usage (2nd ed.)	491225
1967	Follett, Wilson	Modern American Usage	207686
1993	Wilson, Kenneth G.	Columbia Guide to Standard American English	387474
1996	Burchfield, Robert W.	The New Fowlers Modern English Usage (3rd ed.)	613126
2003	Garner, Bryan	Garner's Modern American Usage	667234

Appendix B. Search terms

J = judgmental terms;

R = correctness terms;

C = communication terms;

V = varieties terms

Term	Tokens in CHC	Entries in HUGE	Type
wrong	2704	605	R
variant	1551	82	V
error	1528	383	R
slang	1401	41	V
colloquial	1223	256	V
confused	985	124	C
confusion	950	248	C
informal(ly)	903	451	V
incorrect	885	418	R
false	881	133	R
mistake	820	350	R
needless(ly)	776	44	C
fail	739	133	R
fault	624	169	R
jargon	503	10	V
vulgar	475	122	J
mistaken(ly)	462	104	R
misspell	455	20	R
redundant(ly)	451	81	C
dialect	448	129	V
ambiguous	424	111	C
dialectal	390	59	V
jocular	334	25	V
improper(ly)	305	89	J
ignorant (ly)	301	58	J
awkward	298	240	C
needless variant	292	12	C
failure	279	62	R
pedantic	266	86	J
careless	259	98	J
illiterate	258	92	J
vague	228	38	C
vulgarism	220	53	J
nonsense	206	57	R
absurdity	192	26	J
Americanism	186	45	V

(continued)

Appendix B. (*continued*)

Term	Tokens in CHC	Entries in HUGE	Type
pedantry	182	41	J
casual(ly)	167	86	V
solecism	162	54	J
cant	161	2	V
ridiculous	160	33	J
ungrammatical	159	84	R
confusing	155	47	C
unidiomatic	152	55	C
clumsy	151	72	C
objectionable	151	44	J
unnatural	142	53	C
confound	139	26	C
misleading(ly)	138	28	C
fallacy	133	7	R
uneducated	133	53	J
misplace	131	56	R
barbarism	127	11	J
violation	127	25	R
silly	126	37	J
not standard	116	15	V
slovenly	115	35	J
nonstandard	104	58	V
inappropriate	93	32	V
barbarous	92	8	J
journalese	90	5	V
awkwardness	81	17	C
anomalous	80	9	R
pleonastic	71	13	C
illiteracy	68	25	J
inability	59	8	R
neologism	54	2	R
vile	51	25	J
egregious	46	5	J
exceptionable	46	13	R
casualism	45	2	V
commercialese	43	1	V
embarrassing	43	8	J
no such word	43	10	R
oversight	43	3	R
impropriety	40	20	J
nonce word	40	0	R
pitfall	39	18	C
preposterous	39	7	J

Term	Tokens in CHC	Entries in HUGE	Type
embarrassment	37	4	J
bad grammar	36	15	R
degenerate	35	2	J
obscene	35	3	J
uncouth	34	3	J
bad English	32	17	R
not a word	30	3	R
depraved	29	2	J
substandard	25	19	R
barbarity	22	2	J
deformity	20	6	J
fallacious	19	3	R
jargonistic	19	0	V
stiffness	19	3	C
incorrectness	18	5	R
sloppy	18	14	J
obscenity	17	1	J
problematic	16	18	C
bad taste	15	2	J
solecistic	15	2	J
obtuse	14	1	C
blemish	13	7	R
not good English	12	14	V
business writing	11	5	V
unpardonable	11	2	J
false grammar	10	6	R
Britishism	9	0	V
unrefined	9	0	J
silliness	8	2	J
priggish	7	2	J
bad diction	4	0	R
false syntax	4	5	R
uncouthness	4	1	J
bad sentence	2	0	R

Paradigm shifts in 19th-century British grammar writing

A network of texts and authors

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Systematic and comprehensive linguistic studies of 19th-century British grammar books are scarce. This is surprising since the 19th century has often been claimed to constitute a turning point in English grammar writing, particularly due to the assumed paradigm shift from prescriptive works to predominantly descriptive grammars, the emergence of the comparative-historical approach around 1830, and phonetics gaining importance in the 1890s.

Combining methods from network analysis and historical corpus linguistics, we aim to reassess these assumed (meta)linguistic developments in grammar writing by examining authors' references to other grammarians in a corpus of 19th-century British grammars. We will show that changes, such as the turn away from prescriptive grammar writing, can indeed be further enhanced and systematically supported by quantitative results from the analysed network of referenced grammars and grammarians. Further, the analysis of the grammars' lexical inventory shows which authors take the lead in terminological progress.

Keywords: grammar writing, network analysis, corpus linguistics, 19th century

1. Introduction: 19th-century grammar writing

Murray's rule, as it stood, is clearly repugnant to perspicuity, and syntactical correctness. (Crombie, 1802, 205)

This quotation from Alexander Crombie's grammar *The Etymology and Syntax of the English Language, Explained and Illustrated*, which was published in 1802, exemplarily shows that in 19th-century grammar writing references to other grammarians did

not simply function to cite alleged authorities¹ or contributors in the field, but also to attack and repudiate the works of others. In this case, Crombie refers to Lindley Murray's famous *English Grammar Adapted to the Different Classes of Learners* (1795), which went through numerous editions (see Linn, 2006, 72).

A reference like this, which links 19th-century grammars to 18th-century grammar writing, is by no means a rare phenomenon. Indeed, grammar writing of the first half of the 19th century can be seen as a continuation of established practices (cf. Finegan, 1998, 543; Hickey, 2010, 12). References to earlier grammarians, often used to "evoke a feeling of both familiarity and authority in readers" (Hickey, 2010, 12), continued to be a common practice at least in the first half of the 19th century.

However, as can be seen in the above quotation by Crombie, authors are not necessarily cited as authorities. One aim of evaluative comments like "is clearly repugnant to perspicuity" was to justify the need to put forward the author's own and better judgment, commonly in the form of one's own contribution to grammar writing. For the historical linguist and pragmaticist, onomastic references, that is the mention of a name of another grammarian like that quoted above, form an important indicator of how 19th-century grammarians interacted with each other, of which linguistic strategies they used, and of why they reacted to other approaches to grammar.

Via recourse to a methodological combination of network analysis and historical corpus linguistics, this paper investigates a network of grammars and grammarians as manifested in such onomastic references to other writers of this genre. The aim is to discover the connection between changing authorities of writers and new linguistic approaches to grammar writing from a historical and diachronic perspective. While network approaches are often chosen in order to discover the structure of speech communities (e.g. Stuart & Botella, 2009; McGlashan, 2015), this study uses network analysis to detect and quantify interconnections among grammar authors as manifested in grammarians' references. These show which grammars were discussed and adopted in which discursive ways, and which authors lacked influence or popularity. Additionally, frequency analyses of linguistic terms constructive of 19th-century grammar writing, such as *prescription*, *comparative*, and *phonetic*, will be used to draw conclusions as to whether the lexico-grammatical inventories of the 19th-century grammars under investigation also point to the assumed changes or stability in grammar writing and to characteristic features of this genre. In particular,

1. There are different aspects why grammarians and their grammars could have been considered authorities in the field. Indicators are, for instance, a grammar's high number of editions, many references by other authors, frequent entries in book catalogues, the use in school curricula, and also (un)authorised copying. Further, normative grammars could reach authoritative status on what was considered to be correct usage (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2008, 12).

examining the ways in which grammarians refer to new developments propagated by other authors will allow us to give a more comprehensive systematic analysis of how modern concepts like prescriptivism² and descriptivism were defined and evaluated.³

Existing studies claim that 19th-century grammar writing is characterised by substantial changes, such as the turn away from the prescriptive tradition and the publication of the first modern descriptive grammars (Finegan, 1998, 559ff), the emergence of comparative and historical linguistics (e.g. Linn, 2006, 79), and the so-called “phonetic turn”, i.e. phonetics/phonology becoming a separate field of study (ibid.). But despite the importance of the genre ‘grammar’ for the investigation of the development of language norms and language use, and despite the vast number of British grammar books published in the 19th century,⁴ comprehensive linguistic studies focusing on 19th-century grammar writing in their entirety or that compare grammars from a corpus-based perspective are scarce so that “this area of investigation still constitutes a gap” (Anderwald, 2016, 3). Also in view of the significant studies on 18th-century grammar writing (e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2008), which call for corresponding studies of 19th-century grammars and grammarians, detailed diachronic and synchronic contextual investigations of 19th-century grammars in their historical contexts are also a desideratum.

The pilot corpus used in this study contains 40 British grammar books of the 19th century and is part of a larger corpus of British grammars from 1550 to 1900, which we are currently compiling. It will serve as the basis for various linguistic studies within the so-called *HeidelGram* project, which brings together historical corpus linguistics and network analysis to considerably extend the set of methodological tools applied in historical linguistics and corpus linguistics, and to build and analyse previously inaccessible synchronic and diachronic networks based on historical corpus data. The approach will offer new perspectives on established assumptions and long-held views on the history of grammar writing, investigating, for instance, historical concepts of “verbal hygiene” (Cameron, 1995), and help systematically and critically examine and reassess various aspects of the genre in long-term diachrony.

2. Prescriptivism is understood as a “form of grammatical description with the goal of instruction in the proper use of language, [...] influenced by historical, logical and aesthetic considerations” (Bussmann, 1998, 935).

3. Of course, we only start by highlighting and commenting on first occurrences of ‘modern’ terminology, such as *prescriptivism*. This simple form-to-function approach will be followed by in-depth studies of the major developments in the genre.

On the development of prescriptivist and descriptivist perspectives, see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade (this vol.).

4. See, for instance, detailed bibliographies in Görlach (1998) and Michael (1987).

The present study investigates the scholarly network of grammarians' references to other grammarians in 19th-century English grammar books with the aims to investigate major (meta)linguistic developments in the genre and to check the results against established assumptions. Further, we will discuss to what extent the lexico-grammatical inventory of the grammars might hint at the major changes and stability of evaluation and assessment in 19th-century grammar writing. Results will show that the linguistic strategies of dealing with other grammarians change substantially within the 19th century and that the year 1850 seems to form a turning point away from the occupation with authors representing the prescriptive tradition (see 3.3).⁵ Their approaches and views of English grammar are met with increasing opposition and refusal. Instead, in the second half of the century, the number of references to other grammars and grammarians is considerably lower, and authors primarily discuss their own contemporary contributions and turn to new ways of systematising grammar by way of descriptive or historical-comparative approaches.

The following section introduces the project *HeidelGram*, the corpus and the network (Section 2). Section 3 presents the main results, focusing on the network of texts, and on frequency analyses of selected keywords associated with (meta) linguistic changes in 19th-century grammar writing.⁶ Section 4 summarizes the results and presents conclusions.

2. The corpus and methodology

HeidelGram innovatively applies the methods of network analysis to corpus-based historical linguistics by implementing and examining different kinds of networks, such as the scholarly network of grammarians' onomastic references, and the network of grammatical categories used in grammar books. As a prerequisite for investigation, a representative XML-annotated ten-million-word corpus of English grammar books from the 16th to 19th centuries, i.e. from the beginnings of grammar writing in English to the first modern descriptive grammars, is currently being compiled. The pilot corpus of 19th-century grammar books, which is used for the present study, contains 40 texts with approximately 2.6 million words in total. The

5. These results are in line with new approaches to grammar writing which emerge in Great Britain around 1850, such as the introduction of comparative and historical grammar studies (cf. Görlach, 1999, 18) and the beginnings of the compilation of what is to become the *Oxford English Dictionary* (cf. Finegan, 1998, 559–564).

6. On the use of metalinguistic labels in usage guides, see Chapman (this vol.).

40 selected 19th-century grammar books were digitised from available *pdf*-files via optical character recognition software.

Criteria for text selection were the popularity and distribution of the grammar books on the one hand, and their variety in function, audience and text type on the other. The first criterion was accounted for by bibliographic listings of grammar books (e.g. in Michael, 1987; Görlach, 1998), by the numbers of editions, information in book catalogues, advertisements, and school and college curricula, and by contemporaries' comments in other genres (e.g. literary genres and private letters). The variety in function, audience and text type as a secondary criterion for text selection allowed for a more comprehensive treatment of the genre. The main functional subtypes of grammar books are teaching grammars ('school tradition') and reference grammars ('scholarly tradition') (Linn, 2006, 73).⁷ At the expense of a balanced corpus, which would mirror in rough proportion the entirety of all published grammars, scholarly grammars are intentionally overrepresented in the *HeidelGram* corpus, working under the assumption that developments in grammar writing would first and foremost manifest in scholarly works and appear in teaching grammars much later, if at all. The variety in audience and text type was achieved where possible, for instance, by choosing teaching grammars from different kinds of educational institutions, and by deliberately selecting works that present grammar differently. Typical text types, i.e. linguistic subtypes of grammars, are textbooks (e.g. Crombie, 1802; Meiklejohn, 1862–66), catechisms (e.g. Williams, 1818), and treatises (e.g. Cramp, 1838).

Network analysis comprises a variety of different methods and networks can be visualised in various ways. The general idea of network approaches is to provide methods to analyse the structure of (social) entities. These entities consist of a set of actors and a set of dyadic ties, representing some kind of interaction between the actors (Prell, 2012, 8ff). In the case of our project, the 'actors' are the major works of 19th-century grammarians. The dyadic ties are formed by the name-references the authors make to other grammarians, e.g. by citing them as authorities or by criticising their approaches. In other words, while most network studies examine social networks, i.e. social interactions of the respective actors, we focus on scholarly networks as manifested in references to other grammarians. The so-called "author intercitation", i.e. "the record of who has cited whom within a fixed set of authors" (White, 2011, 275), reveals the interconnections between authors irrespective of

7. This distinction is apparent from title page, preface, and form of the grammar books. Other, more specific categories of grammars, such as *philosophical grammar* or *metaphysical grammar*, are labels which either stem from the grammarians themselves or were assigned to them in the relevant secondary literature.

their possible personal acquaintance. In contrast to simply searching for grammarians' last names in the corpus, the advantage of our approach is that the scholarly network of grammarians' references reveals interconnections among grammar authors, thereby making transparent the complexity of agent-centred discursive processes in diachrony.

A list of 90 search terms (see Appendix), containing the last names of who is considered to be the most popular and influential grammarians between 1570 and 1900 (see, for instance, Finegan, 1998; Michael, 1987; Görlach, 1998), provided the basis for the automatic search within the corpus of 19th-century grammars. This led to a list of findings which, after manual omission of false positives, was transformed into an adjacency matrix, showing the "in-citations", i.e. the referenced search terms, and the "out-citations", i.e. the grammar books that contain these references (cf. White, 2011, 275). The matrix, in turn, was transformed into a network of weighed graphs. The network is visualised as a circle graph because these are suited to show chronological developments.

3. Results of network and frequency analysis

In the following sections we will present the main results of network and frequency analysis. We will show and discuss the most frequently referenced authors as well as grammarians who used references most often, look at the temporal distribution of references by means of a chronological network, and test established knowledge about 19th-century grammar writing by examining the frequencies of selected linguistic terms, such as *prescription*, *comparative*, and *phonetic*.

3.1 Most frequently referenced grammarians

The search for grammarians' last names in the 40 grammar books led to a list of 1,518 entries, i.e. 1,518 references to other grammarians, ranging from consent as in "I concur with Mr. Tooke in thinking, that the adjective is by no means a necessary part of speech" (Crombie, 1802, 70, on Tooke's description of grammatical categories) to all kinds of criticism, such as "Mr. Cobbett has either *misunderstood* or *overlooked* that circumstance" (Doherty, 1841, 194, on Cobbett's classification of verb moods).

In Table 1, the most frequently referenced grammar authors are listed.

Table 1. Most frequently referenced last names of grammarians (absolute number of references, percentage of all references)

	Referenced grammarian (year of major work)	Number of references	Percentage of all references
1.	Lindley Murray (1795)	284	18.7
2.	John Horne Tooke (1786)	226	14.9
3.	Robert Lowth (1762)	191	12.6
4.	Alexander Crombie (1802)	128	8.4
		829	54.6

The frequent references to the grammars of Lindley Murray (1795) and Robert Lowth (1762) support the assertion that both grammarians had an enormous popularity and influence in the Late Modern English period, as it is repeatedly stated in the relevant literature (e.g. Beal, 2004, 89f; Auer, 2008, 58, Chapman, 2008, 36; see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade, this vol.). However, a closer look at the discursive strategies of these citations reveals not only their evaluative character but also how attitudes towards alleged authorities of language and its use changed over time. John Kigan, for instance, refers to Lowth and Murray, remarking that

Doctor Lowth, about sixty years ago, gave the English grammar a scientific form: and subsequently, numerous other writers offered essays on the subject, each proposing some improvement. Of these Mr. Lindley Murray seems to have taken the lead; his grammar is therefore in very general use. (Kigan, 1825, v)

Interestingly, the term *scientific grammar* is used here in connection with Lowth's grammar (1762), while secondary literature usually attributes the expression to Henry Sweet, who elaborates on the term in the preface to his grammar (1892, iii). Since *scientific grammar* is used by several 19th-century grammarians before Sweet, the development and different contexts in which the term occurs has to be studied in detail elsewhere. What is striking here is that Kigan praises both Lowth and Murray for their scientific style of writing and approaching grammar, which caused the popularity ("in very general use") of these. 15 years later than Kigan, David Booth complains that there has not been any progress since Lowth, complaining, for example, that Lowth's grammar "has been plundered by many of his successors without being improved" (1837, 137), therewith indicating that the frequency of new publications of grammars at the time were a result of mere copying and not of an innovative, critical re-appraisal and re-conceptualisation of English grammar. The high number of references to Murray and Lowth thus does not necessarily imply agreement with former authorities. With regard to Lowth's grammar, authors also discuss its *insufficiency* and *blemishes* (e.g. Churchill, 1823, iii), and complain

about its uncritical acceptance and adoption by other grammarians. While secondary literature (e.g. Chapman, 2008, 36) considers Murray's work a pedagogical model for many other grammars, particularly due to his distinction of learners into different audiences, references to Murray in the grammar corpus point to a critical assessment of his approach. Grammarians, for instance, complain about the lack of difficulty of the exercises: "Those accustomed to use Mr. Murray's lessons on parsing will perhaps think the following too difficult; let such, however, reflect that Mr. Murray's are too easy" (Lennie, 1810, 53).

In contrast to frequent citations of the prescriptivists Murray and Lowth, the high number of citations of John Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley* (1786) is unexpected, considering that his work is rather a treatise on grammar, including philosophical and metaphysical aspects, than a 'typical' grammar book, dealing with the morphology and syntax of the English language. However, this corroborates Finegan's attestation of the grammar book's "extraordinary influence on the study of usage in the nineteenth century" (1998, 554).

A high number of references to other grammars and grammarians is also found in Alexander Crombie's grammar book from 1802, which draws on the major grammar books of the second half of the 18th century. In particular, Crombie often refers to Harris, Priestley, Lowth, and Lindley Murray. His "critical conservatism" (Görlach, 1998, 97) is considered useful by many later authors.⁸ In contrast to authors who simply copy other grammarians' positions, Crombie discusses and compares grammars, critically reflecting on their differences, such as the use of relative pronouns in the grammars of Lowth, Priestley, and others (Crombie, 1802, 59f.).

To sum up, 19th-century authors most often refer to the 18th-century prescriptivists (Lowth, Murray), or discuss the major philosophical approaches to grammar (Harris, Tooke). References are not necessarily made in order to cite authorities, but often to express criticism.

3.2 Most frequently referencing grammar authors

In the following we changed the perspective from referenced to referencing authors in order to examine the distribution of references among 19th-century grammar authors, and to gain insight into the reasons for over-proportionally frequent referencing.

8. Görlach (1998, 97) counts at least 25 19th-century grammarians who praise and/or use Crombie's grammar.

Table 2. Number of references to other grammarians (per 1,000 words)

	Grammarians (major work)	Number of references
1.	Gerald Murray (1847)	4.53
2.	William Cramp (1838)	3.06
3.	Alexander Crombie (1802)	2.04
	all others	<1.00

Three authors stand out compared to all other grammarians: Gerald Murray, William Cramp, and Alexander Crombie. Gerald Murray's frequent use of references is owed to his excessive criticism of many other grammarians, and of Lindley Murray in particular. His criticism is so severe and overdone that his attempts at reforming English grammar appear to be of minor importance, or, as Görlach remarks, "Murray is so polemical that his negative views outweigh his attempts at being constructive" (1998, 252). Gerald Murray, for instance, comments on the practice of citing other grammarians as authorities:

[A]s judges shelter their knavery by precedents, so do scholars their ignorance by authority; and when they cannot reason, it is safer and less disgraceful to repeat that nonsense at second hand, which they would be ashamed to give originally as their own.
(Murray, 1847, 215)

A typical example of Gerald Murray belittling Lindley Murray's originality and criticising his way of dealing with authorities of grammar writing is this:

He [i.e. Lindley Murray], without the shadow of either reason or argument, conceives he is fully warranted in adopting the opinion of Lowth, and concludes his sentence, by excluding Johnson, Priestley, and all who differ with Lowth from the class of correct and elegant writers! How glorious to be always supported on right and left by the most correct and elegant writers!
(Murray, 1847, 86)

However, Murray's attitude seems to backfire since he is never referred to by any other grammarian.

In contrast to Gerald Murray's attacks on other writers, Cramp (1838) and Crombie (1802) cite and discuss authorities on grammar writing while introducing their own approaches and definitions with caution. Crombie's grammar, in particular, was received as constructive, as the high number of references to Crombie shows (see Table 1). Numerous examples illustrate that the author did neither simply repeat or summarise what had already been published in other grammars nor reject other approaches without reason, but that he also showed his own critical engagement with language questions:

Some of our grammarians consider Lowth, in this instance [i.e. concerning particular participle constructions], as fastidiously critical; but to me he appears chargeable with error. Let us examine the reasons, which the author adduces in support of his opinion. (Crombie, 1802, 217)

Instead of condemning Lowth’s grammar wholesale, as Gerald Murray did, Crombie considered Lowth’s line of argument piece by piece, taking up his own position after having critically reflected those of others.

As seen in Table 2, the gap in the number of references is considerable between Gerald Murray, Cramp and Crombie, and all other authors in the corpus. It should also be noted that the motivations to refer to other grammarians can differ greatly. The detailed study of different kinds of references will be the topic of a subsequent paper.

3.3 Network of grammarians’ references

Figure 1 illustrates the references to grammarians from 1800 to 1900 in the form of a chronological network. This kind of visualisation was chosen because networks with nodes in chronological order are particularly well-suited to show the temporal distribution of references, and the most often referenced as well as referencing authors in one graph.

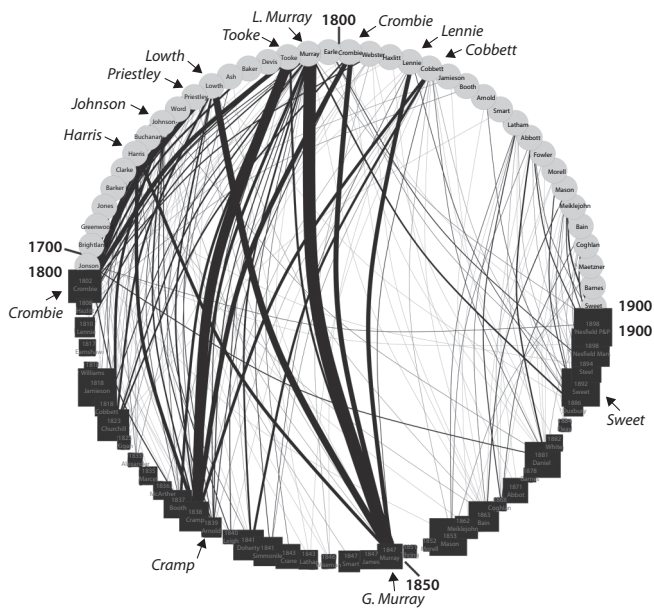


Figure 1. Grammarians’ references to other grammarians in the corpus (circles = referenced authors; squares = 19th-century grammars)

The circles in the upper half of the network are the referenced search terms, i.e. those last names of the most popular and influential grammarians between 1570 and 1900 according to secondary literature (e.g. Finegan, 1998; Michael, 1987; Görlach, 1998) that were referred to in at least one 19th-century grammar book. The squares below represent the 19th-century grammars. They differ in size due to the grammars' number of words. References to search terms in the grammars are visualised by lines of different sizes, the line width corresponding to the number of references made.

By far the earliest work to be referred to is Benjamin Jonson's grammar from 1640, which is considered a reference work on Early Modern English pronunciation, morphology and syntax (e.g. in Booth, 1837; Daniel, 1881). All other references address grammarians of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the following, we will discuss the 19th-century grammars and their references in chronology from 1800 to 1900.

Before 1810, Crombie's *Etymology and Syntax of the English Language* (1802) is the work with most references to other grammarians, notably Harris, Priestley, Lowth, Tooke, and Lindley Murray. In the 1830s, the grammar with the highest number of references to other authors is William Cramp's *The Philosophy of Language* (1838), in which the author frequently refers to Lowth, Tooke, Lindley Murray, Crombie, and Cobbett. In contrast to Crombie's grammar (1802), however, Cramp's contribution does not become authoritative in itself later on. This might be because Cramp's grammar constitutes a rather late occupation with prescriptive grammar writing at a time when "the trend already loses momentum" (Dekeyser, 1975, 266). The grammar with the highest number and relative frequency of references in the corpus is Gerald Murray's *Reformed Grammar, or Philosophical Test of English Composition* (1847). As discussed in connection with Table 2, Gerald Murray savages other grammarians while offering his own reformed approach to grammar writing. He builds his philosophical approach to grammar on authors like Harris and Tooke, while criticising Lowth (1762), Crombie (1802), Lennie (1810), and – most frequently and emphatically – Lindley Murray (1795ff).

Compared to the first half of the 19th century, the grammars after 1850 contain very few references to other grammars or grammarians. Only the works of Charles P. Mason (1858), Alexander Bain (1863) and John Coghlan (1868) stand out with about 20 references to other authors per grammar. In the 1880s, the grammars by Daniel (1881) and Duxbury (1886) are the only ones with significant numbers of references. The majority of references in the last decade of the 19th century is directed to contemporary authors.

The network graph clearly indicates a break in dealing with authorities in grammar writing around 1850: While before authors often referred to 18th-century grammarians, and to Lowth, Tooke, and Murray in particular, similar references become very rare in the second half of the 19th century. There are generally fewer citations, and they often focus on contemporaries.

Considering which authors were referenced by grammarians of the first half of the 19th century (see Table 1), there is a turn away from the focus on prescriptive grammar writing, particularly from the occupation with the grammars of Robert Lowth and Lindley Murray. However, this does not imply that authors in the first half of the century agreed to what prescriptive grammarians postulated. On the contrary, the occupation with the major prescriptive grammars was mostly questioning and critical, bringing discussions on lexical, morphological or syntactic matters of English grammar to an end instead of animating or resuming them. Authors often referred to both prescriptive grammarians, particularly Robert Lowth and Lindley Murray, and subsequent discourse in later grammar books. Cramp (1838), for instance, sarcastically comments on how Cobbett (1818) borrowed from Lowth's grammar (1762):

"When I see too many *its* in a page" says Mr. Cobbett, "I always tremble for the writer." – We are surprised that Mr. Cobbett did not detect and quote in justification of his fears, the following illustration from the pen of Dr. Lowth, for Mr. Cobbett seems to have studied Dr. Lowth's Introduction carefully, and with no small advantage. (Cramp, 1838, 87)

The different ways prescriptive authors were dealt with in the 19th century, and how they were received indirectly through other grammarians, as in the example above, will be the focus of a subsequent paper.

In view of the obvious break in the traditional way of grammar writing around 1850, it is necessary to emphasise that grammar writing in the 19th century is by no means a uniform process. The two main kinds of grammars, teaching grammars and grammars of the scholarly tradition, have to be looked at separately. Otherwise, the massive number of English grammars published also in the second half of the 19th century (see Görlach, 1998) cannot be explained, given the apparent decline of grammar writing based on the 'ancient' authorities.

With regard to the teaching of grammar, both child and adult education became more and more important during the second half of the 19th century, with compulsory elementary education being introduced in the 1870s (Görlach, 1999, 11), preceded by the establishment of a standardised system of public examinations controlled by the universities in the 1850s (Howatt, 1984, 133). Education became affordable by the middle class and the poor, despite some resistance (see, for instance, Bailey, 1996, 29–30).

The majority of teaching grammars, however, could well do without references to other grammarians. Written or compiled for very specific purposes, and often for single schools, grammars drew on the material of others, but their authors did not consider it necessary to name their sources (cf. Linn, 2006, 76).

Additionally, our pilot corpus is intentionally biased towards scholarly grammars (see Section 2). What we observe in Figure 1 is, in essence, the decline of

references in scholarly grammars, i.e. in grammars written for the purposes of scholarly study or reference. This hints at a paradigmatic change in (scholarly) grammar writing from an authority-based system, in which authors feel the need to position themselves in the traditional discourse, to an approach mainly focussing on grammar itself.

The preceding analysis has illustrated the turn away from references to prescriptive grammars. It is now important to ask whether this turn away from prescriptive grammar writing brings with it at the same time an innovative way of talking about and describing the grammar of English. In addition, and perhaps somewhat radically, it is justified to investigate whether the rejection of ‘traditional’ ways of investigating and teaching grammar fosters the major structural changes in grammar writing, such as the emergence of comparative and historical linguistics, the separation of phonetics and phonology from orthography, and the beginnings of descriptive grammar writing. To follow up on these research frameworks, we analysed the occurrences of those lexemes that most obviously seem to refer to the mentioned concepts, such as *comparative*, *historical*, *phonetic(s)*, and *descriptive* vs. *prescriptive/prescription*, in the corpus of 19th-century grammars, using a form-to-function mapping.

3.4 Distribution of linguistic keywords in the grammar corpus

In the following, established knowledge about 19th-century grammar writing, in particular the emergence of historical and comparative approaches to grammar, the turn from prescriptive to descriptive grammar writing, and the formation of phonetics as a separate field of study, is put to the test by examining the distribution of selected linguistic keywords within the 19th-century grammar books in order to reveal to what extent the structural changes in grammar writing went along with changes in the lexical inventory of the grammars. In contrast to the corpus-analytic method of keyword analysis, which labels words with unusually high frequency “keywords”, we define “keywords” as those words that have a particular importance or significance in the context of structural changes in grammar writing. The occurrence of the terms *comparative* and *historical* might, for instance, hint at the emerging comparative-historical approach to grammar, the use of the terms *phonetic(s)* or *phonology* might indicate the increasing tendency to regard the pronunciation of English as a distinct subfield of grammar, and instances of *prescriptive/prescription*⁹ or *descriptive* might in certain contexts reflect the turn away from prescriptive grammar writing towards a descriptive approach.

9. On the use of these terms, see also Tieken-Boon van Ostade (this vol.).

The following analyses form a starting point from a modern perspective, and are meant to highlight the emergence of modern terminology in 19th-century grammars. Subsequent in-depth studies will show to what extent the new approaches can already be attested earlier than the first occurrences of the respective modern keywords.¹⁰

We use absolute frequencies to show the distribution of the keywords because what matters here are first occurrences, and not frequencies related to the size of the grammar books.

3.4.1 Comparative and historical

William Jones initiated the historical-comparative approach to English philology in the 1780s (Finegan, 1998, 558). This, and many similar approaches to historical and comparative grammar which followed particularly on the continent, were, however, ignored by English grammarians until well into the 19th century (ibid.). According to the OED, the term *comparative* in connection with *philology* was first used in the *London Times* in 1882, declaring that “[c]omparative art history was in as primitive a stage as comparative philology” (OED, s.v. *comparative* 1.b.). *Historical* in connection with *philology* or *grammar* also occurs towards the end of the 19th century, around the same time as the term *historical linguist* (OED, s.v. *historical grammar*, *historical linguist*).

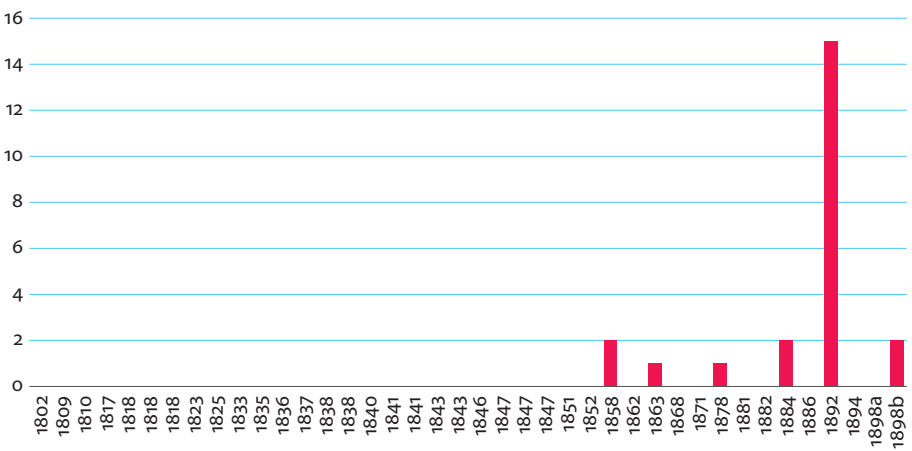


Figure 2. Distribution of the keyword *comparative* in the corpus (absolute frequencies)

10. We will further also investigate evaluative expressions with regard to grammar and language, such as *vulgar English*, *bad grammar*, *improper use* (see also Chapman, this vol.). In connection with the network of authors, which will be extended to the 18th century, this will lead to a comprehensive picture of the rise and fall of so-called “prescriptivism”.

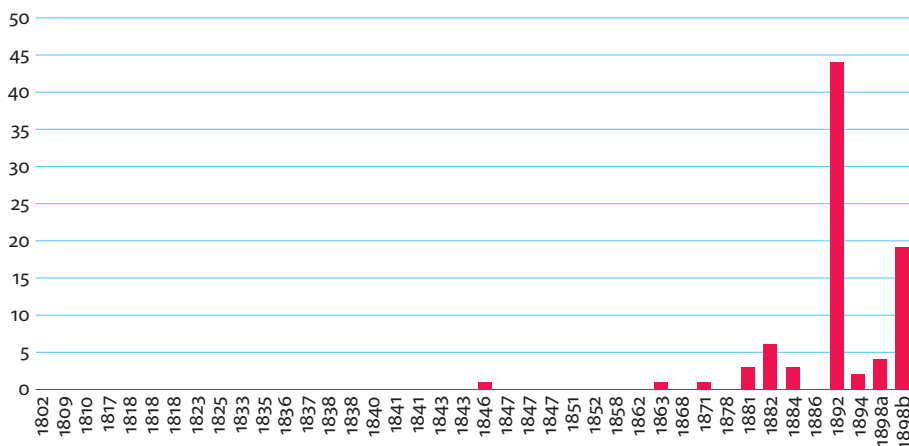


Figure 3. Distribution of the keyword *historical* in the corpus (absolute frequencies)

Figures 2 and 3 corroborate this late advent of historical and comparative grammar writing in British grammars. The first instance of the term *historical* in connection with *grammar* or *philology* is, however, already found in Wiseman's grammar book from 1846, which starts with a "Historical Introduction" (1846, 3ff), describing the emergence and development of the English language. The term occurs frequently only after 1880, peaking in Sweet's *New English Grammar Logical and Historical* (1892), in which a focus is placed on the history of language (1892, 176ff), and the history of English in particular (1892, 211ff).

The term *comparative* in the respective context also occurs earlier than attested in the OED, namely in C. P. Mason's grammar, which contains a "Comparative Table of Tenses in English, Latin, French, German, and Greek" (1858, 58f). In our corpus, Alexander Bain first uses the term *comparative grammar* (1863) in connection with noun derivation. Bain, stating that English root words can be traced back to more fundamental forms in other languages, calls approaches like these the "province of comparative grammar, or philology" (1863, 134). This quotation shows that the term *comparative grammar* must already have existed in scholarly discourse and that it was already considered a distinct subfield of grammar writing, although it did not play a role in the genre until late in the 19th century. Again, by far most instances of *comparative* in connection with *grammar* or *philology* stem from Sweet's *New English Grammar* (1892/1898). He is the first author who defines the terms *comparative grammar* and *historical grammar*, emphasising the proximity of both subfields (Sweet, 1892, 2).

To sum up, British grammarians' disregard for the historical-comparative approach is confirmed by the corpus data. Both *historical* and *comparative* in connection with grammar writing only occur in grammars of the second half of the

19th century, most notably in Sweet (1892/1898). Early occurrences of the terms predate OED citations by several decades.

3.4.2 *Phonetic(s)/phonology*

Henry Sweet is also commonly known as one of the founding fathers of modern phonetics (e.g. Beal, 2004, 132). Yet, by the time of Sweet and contemporary British phoneticians, such as Alexander Ellis and Alexander Melville Bell, “a well-developed system of phonetic and (sometimes) phonemic analysis was [already] in existence” (MacMahon, 1998, 381). This corresponds to the earliest citations the OED gives, dealing particularly with phonetic spelling, the phonetic alphabet, and phonetic change (OED, s.v. *phonetic*, *phonology*).

Figure 4 shows how this is reflected in the data.

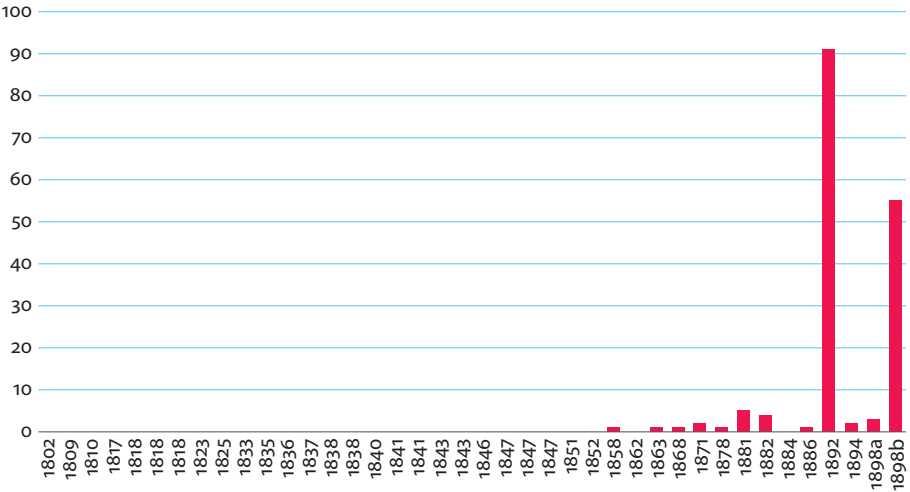


Figure 4. Distribution of the keywords *phonetic(s)/phonology* in the corpus (absolute frequencies)

The terms *phonetic(s)* and *phonology* (Figure 4) provide a similar picture to Figures 2 and 3. Sweet, being the first author to systematically divide phonetics from other levels of language description, uses the term more than 90 times. This is in line with the grammarian’s well-established reputation as “the man who taught phonetics to Europe” (Onions, 1921, 519).

Yet, early instances of the term *phonetic* can already be attested from the late 1850s. The first somewhat more extensive occupation with phonetics is found in Daniel’s grammar (1881), which – in connection with a description of the sounds of English – also explains phonetic changes in English pronunciation.

It should also be noted that – apart from the contents of grammar books – there were independent monographs on English pronunciation, such as Sweet’s *Handbook of English Phonetics* (1877). This shows that the systematic approach to phonetics is slightly ahead of its becoming a distinct part of grammar writing.

3.4.3 *Prescriptive/prescription and descriptive*

Linguists agree that the beginnings of the prescription stage of English grammar writing lie in the second half of the 18th century (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2008, 6) and that prescriptivism was at its height at least in the first half of the 19th century (Dekeyser, 1975, 266). After 1850, while prescriptive grammars continued to be published, many new grammars already “steer[ed] a middle path between prescription and description” (Beal, 2004, 118). Henry Sweet’s *A New English Grammar, Logical and Historical* (1892/98) is unanimously seen as one of the milestones of English grammar writing, being the first important descriptive and historical grammar (e.g. Beal, 2004, 115), and the first grammar that systematically introduced and dealt with phonetic descriptions (Finegan, 1998, 575).

In order to test these common assumptions, we looked at the distribution of the keywords *prescriptive* and *prescription* on the one hand, and *descriptive* on the other (see Figure 5):

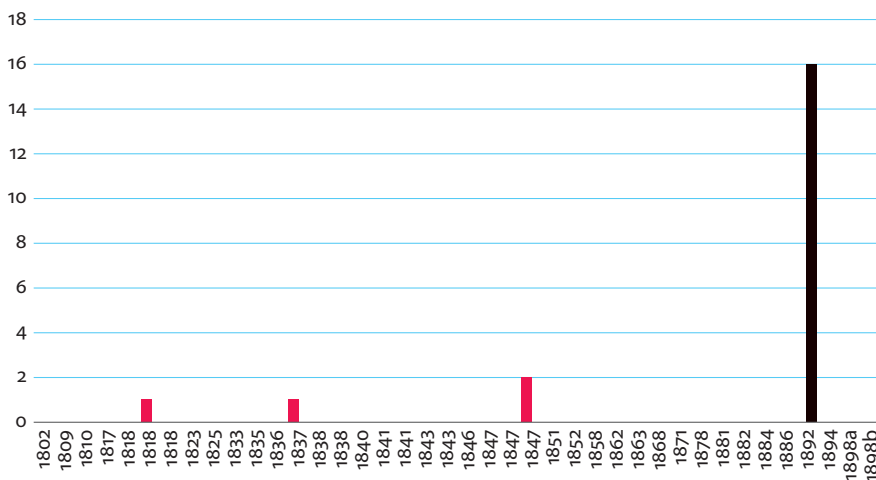


Figure 5. Distribution of the keywords *prescriptive/prescription* (red) and *descriptive* (black) in the corpus (absolute frequencies)

Two observations can be made that characterise the distribution of the terms *prescriptive/prescription* and *descriptive* in connection with grammar writing. Firstly, it is indeed Henry Sweet who, in his systematised description of different kinds

of grammar writing, coins the term *descriptive grammar* in our corpus. Secondly, the terms *prescriptive* or *prescription* are actually used by three authors in the first half of the 19th century, whereas no later author uses them. This accords with the results from the network graph (Figure 1), which showed hardly any references back to the major prescriptive grammarians like Lowth and Lindley Murray after 1850 (see Section 3.4). When 19th-century authors refer to prescriptive grammar writing, it is to criticise and abandon the approach. Booth, for instance, compares linguistic to medical prescription, complaining that “[a]s, in incurable diseases, the prescriptions are always most numerous and generally specific, so, on this subject [i.e. the use of *shall* and *will*], every grammarian has promulgated his own infallible instructions” (1837, lxiii), and a decade later Gerald Murray remarks: “How the foregoing anomaly [i.e. the use of *us* instead of *we* after *let*] originally crept into our language, and how long prescription has consecrated the property of its present application, is easy to conceive” (1847, 37). Thus, interestingly, while clearly form follows function here, the term *prescription* was already used by 19th-century grammarians who, in turn, referred back to 18th-century grammar writing.

4. Summary and conclusion

In English historical linguistics, corpus linguistics and historical pragmatics, historical grammar books have received little attention so far although they are often considered to be indispensable indicators of changing and stable language norms. Especially in the 19th century, ground-breaking changes in linguistics and language studies, such as the emergence of phonetics and historical-comparative linguistics, and the rejection of the prescriptive tradition in favour of a new, descriptive approach to grammar, are said to pave the way for modern grammaticography, and eventually for modern approaches to language study.

The *HeidelGram* project, which aims at conducting different kinds of network analyses on a representative corpus of English grammar books from the 16th to 19th centuries, intends to scrutinize established assumptions on the major developments in grammar writing by applying network-analytic methods and providing objective quantitative evidence. In the present study, we built and examined a network of 19th-century grammarians, as manifested by authors’ references to other grammarians, and drew conclusions about (meta)linguistic developments in the genre.

The network of grammarians’ references reveals a substantial change around 1850. In the first half of the 19th century, authors often referred to 18th-century grammarians, particularly to prescriptivists like Lowth and Murray, and to the philosophical grammar of Tooke. References range from cautious approval (e.g. by

Crombie, 1802) to complete rejection (e.g. by Gerald Murray, 1847) of the prescriptive tradition. After 1850, grammars seem to become more and more independent from the prescriptive tradition since there are almost no authors who refer back to grammarians of the 18th or earlier 19th century. References generally become less frequent in the second half of the 19th century, and authors mostly discuss contemporary works.

But although the results of the present study prove the turn away from the focus on prescriptivism and towards more contemporary currents, they do not necessarily indicate the emergence of new approaches to linguistics. A look at the grammars' word lists helps reveal when and in which context keywords such as *comparative* or *phonetic(s)* occurred for the first time.

Frequency analyses show that, indeed, the terms *comparative*, *historical*, and *phonetic(s)* emerge in their respective contexts in the second half of the 19th century. While the terms are only used sporadically at first, their occurrence culminates in the grammars by Henry Sweet (1892/1898) and John C. Nesfield (1898). Sweet also defines the term *descriptive grammar*, albeit not contrasting it with *prescriptive grammar*. Interestingly, the term *prescription* occurs in a few grammars of the first half of the 19th century, usually combined with a critical remark on the rigidity with which rules were stated.

It should, however, be noted that the above results only show the first occurrences of certain keywords, not of their concepts. It might well be that earlier grammars contain comparative, historical, phonetic or descriptive aspects, but do not use the expected terminology. William Cramp (1838, viii), for instance, rejects the "general opinion that 'the province of the grammarian is not to dictate what usages ought to be, but simply to discover what they are.'" If this is the 'general opinion' in 1838, it is surprising that the first grammars that markedly call themselves *descriptive* only occur several decades later. Also, the start of the English dictionary project in the 1850, which later became the OED, points to the existence of descriptive tendencies in English philology much earlier than attested in Figure 5. Assumedly, these are not the only cases where form follows function. A detailed study of the different paces of changing terminology and changing concepts will be a further task of the *HeidelGram* project.

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Appendix. Search terms used in network analysis

Abbott, Aickin, Alexander, Arnold, Ash, Bain, Baker, Barker, Barnes, Booth, Brightland, Browne, Buchanan, Bullokar, Churchill, Clarke, Cobbett, Coghlan, Collyer, Cooper, Coote, Cramp, Crane, Crombie, Daniel, Devis, Dilworth, Doherty, Douglas, Dubois, Duncan, Duxbury, Earle, Earnshaw, Fenn, Fenning, Fisher, Fleay, Fowler, Greenwood, Harris, Hart, Hazlitt, Hume, Hutchinson, James, Jamieson, Johnson, Jones, Jonson, Kigan, Kirkby, Lane, Latham, Leigh, Lennie, Lowe, Lowth, Maetzner, Marcet, Martin, Mason, Mattaire, McArthur, Meiklejohn, Miège, Millar, Morell, Murison, Murray, Nesfield, Newton, Priestley, Quentin, Rhodes, Shelley, Simmonite, Singleton, Smart, Steel, Sweet, Taylor, Thring, Tooke, Ward, Webster, Wesley, White, Williams, Wiseman

Promotional conventions on English title-pages up to 1550

Modifiers of time, scope, and quality

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This study traces the development of promotional conventions on English title-pages up to 1550. The early development of title-pages was influenced by older paratextual elements such as prologues and colophons. However, in the context of print production, book producers soon began to use this prominent new space for advertising their skills and products. In terms of this marketing function, the early title-page can be compared to the publisher's blurb. We examine how book producers promoted their work on title-pages and how the conventions related to this paratextual element developed in the early era of print. Our focus is on the modification of verbs and nouns describing books, texts, and the related production processes. Three main categories of modification emerge from our survey: time, scope, and quality. While the emerging conventions of title-page discourse share many features with modern advertising English, there are also features that seem surprising from the modern perspective.

Keywords: advertising, book production, Early Modern English, paratext, promotional discourse, sixteenth century, title-page

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we survey and discuss those English-language title-page claims up to 1550 that describe or evaluate textual activities or materials. By “textual activities” we mean book- and text-producers’ various forms of engagement with the text during the process that culminates in the finished printed product: writing, translating, editing, typesetting, printing, correcting, and so on. One example of a claim related to textual activities would be *diligently corrected*. Claims related to “textual materials” may address the printed book and the text(s) it contains; possible source texts from which the present book is produced (typically the printer’s copy); or other texts that bear some alleged relation to the book. *A good book* is one

example of such a claim. We approach the claims on early title-pages (see Section 2) within the framework of promotional discourse (outlined in Section 3), viewing them as potential instances of product differentiation that we expect to contain both promotional and informational elements.

While the earliest known English title-page dates back to the mid-1480s, those previous studies that systematically address (non-visual) communicative properties of this paratextual element largely focus on the period after 1550.¹ Even the recent study by Olson (2016) looks mostly at post-1540 material and focuses heavily on the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The early period, we argue, is worth a closer look than it has hitherto received. As illustrated below, it is during this formative period that we see the emergence of several communicative elements on the title-page which then gradually develop into more widely (and sometimes almost ubiquitously) attested promotional conventions in the decades after 1550. In this chapter, we present an overview of such promotional elements, discussing their characteristic themes and linguistic features, as well as noting when they first seem to have emerged on English title-pages. We also briefly identify some probable models for the English promotional discourse in textual statements found on the title-pages of coeval Latin and French books, and comment on the rare and unexpected claims found in our data.

2. Promotional paratext and the early development of the title-page

William Caxton's prologue to his second edition of *The Canterbury Tales* contains a well-known passage in which the master printer describes how his earlier edition had been criticised by "one gentylman" for "not accordyng in many places vnto the book that Gefferey chaucer had made" (STC 5083, sig. A2v).² To remedy this fault, Caxton tells his readers, he has obtained a "trewe and correcte" copy, "by whiche I haue corrected my book" (ibid.), i.e. the new edition at hand. Such comments on textual improvement may be viewed as a strand of broader paratextual communication in which early modern book producers in various ways sought to inform the reader about the properties of the text(s) printed in the book. In addition to

1. Studies on primarily visual elements of the title-page that also address the period before 1550 include McKerrow & Ferguson (1932) and Driver (1997). Suhr (2011, 125–142) explores both verbal and visual advertising strategies of the title-page and the title in seventeenth-century witchcraft pamphlets. For the use of typography to highlight verbal elements on title-pages in the Stuart period, see Ratia (2013).

2. For discussions of this passage, see e.g. Blake (1976, 99–100), Kuskin (2007, 150–153) and L. Hellinga (2010, 58). In connection to specific examples taken from early printed books, we refer to the edition by its Short Title Catalogue (STC, 2nd ed.) number. We omit signature references when quoting from title-pages.

mentioning the correction of errors or the use of a more reliable printer's copy (exemplar), their statements could address the improvement of the text also more broadly, for example by noting the insertion in the book of some new linguistic or visual element such as a table or an illustration. Alongside commenting on the properties of the material text and activities related to it, book producers also habitually conveyed information about the moral, spiritual, utilitarian or other merits of the work and the credentials of its author.

Some of the themes addressing textual properties and activities are already attested among the conventions of classical prologue-writing (see e.g. Janson, 1964). Such themes also come up, under various guises, in medieval Latin prologues (e.g. Minnis, 1984, 9–72; Curtius, 1990 [1953], 83–89), from which they make their way to the vernacular text production of the Middle Ages (e.g. Wogan-Browne et al. eds., 1999; Galloway, 2005; Litzler, 2011, 19–37). While textual comments by early modern printers like Caxton should be viewed in the light of this long rhetorical tradition, the printers also re-shaped the conventions by introducing new themes, emphases and material forms into paratextual communication. Commercial concerns of the book trade played an important role in the emergence of such novelties – best visible in the front matter (preliminaries) of the early modern book:

One of the most valuable ways to understand front matter in the early modern period is to recognize that these pages constituted an early, coherent, and very versatile system of advertising – perhaps even that these pages constitute something like the birth of modern advertising. (Saenger, 2005, 197)

Among the paratextual elements of the front matter, the need to promote the sales of the book and outdo the competing editions issued by rival printers seems to have been a key driving force especially behind the development of the title-page and its communicative conventions. The general history of the title-page in Europe from the last decades of the 15th to the early 16th century is outlined by Smith (2000).³ In short, the title-page started its life as a blank protecting the text of an unbound book. It then attracted a short-title or incipit (*Here begins...*) and often also a thematically more or less suitable woodcut image. From the first decades of the 16th century onwards, an increasing amount of information about the text and its production gradually made its way into the title-page from other locations such as the beginning of the text or the colophon at the end of the book.

Many of the paratextual elements present in printed books are also found in medieval manuscripts – for instance, prologues, tables of contents and indexes. Manuscript production usually took place in the “bespoke” mode: a customer initiated the production of a manuscript by commissioning it, and when the product

3. See also Pollard (1891), Johnson (1970 [1928]).

was finished, there was no need to market it. The title-page, in turn, is largely a product of the print culture, whose *modus operandi* is based on “speculative” production where “texts are (re)produced without certainty of being able to sell the copies” (Varila, 2016, 25).⁴ In other words, an edition is typically printed before it is known who will buy the copies. To sell the book, the publisher (printer, bookseller) needs to attract the potential customer to it.

According to Smith (2000, 21–22, 92, 102–108), the gradual increase of textual and visual information on the title-page reflects book producers’ realisation that this originally blank material space could be usefully harnessed to serve promotional needs. In addition to providing information about the text/work, the title-page would entice the person viewing it into buying the book by making various claims concerning the value of the product. Smith (2000, 102) views such claims as “the beginnings of the publisher’s blurb”. Also other researchers of early print and paratextuality have pointed out the importance of commercial considerations for the communicative conventions of the title-page – probably more so than for any other paratextual element of the early book (e.g. Bennett, 1952, 212–213; W. Hellinga, 1962, 111–112; Hirsch, 1967, 72, McKitterick, 2003, 136; Saenger, 2006, 38–54; Tyrkkö, Marttila & Suhr, 2013; Olson, 2016; see also Smith, 2000, 16, n. 14).⁵ Olson (2016, 620–623) notes that there is also early modern evidence of the practice of posting title pages as advertisements, giving examples from the late 16th and the 17th centuries (see also Shevlin, 1999, 49). He maintains that title-pages functioned simultaneously as independent advertisement posters; as the predecessors of dust-jackets for bookshop browsing; and as a way of identifying the book and its producers (Olson, 2016, 623; see also Silva, 2016, 608–609).

It is evident that such market-orientedness sometimes led book producers to supply title-page statements whose strong promotional purpose compromised the

4. For the few known instances of manuscript title-pages that precede the advent of print in the West, see Smith (2000, 31–34), Olson (2016, n. 2). The use of textual titles in medieval manuscripts is discussed, for example, by Sharpe (2003, 34–63) and Gibbons (2008). For practices of naming and presenting the text in the printed book before the development of the title-page, see Blake’s discussion of Caxton (Blake, 1976, 105–119). L. Hellinga’s (2009) study of sale advertisements for printed books in fifteenth-century Europe excludes title-page materials.

5. The foundational work on paratextuality by Gérard Genette (Genette, 1997) focuses largely on the author’s direct agency in paratextual communication. The title-page, in whose design the author’s own influence is normally assumed to be marginal, is therefore discussed only in passing in the chapter on “The Publisher’s Peritext” (Genette, 1997, 32–33). The persuasive function of the title (i.e. its “function of tempting”) is discussed by Genette (1997, 91–92), without connecting it to the communicative purposes of the material title-page. Massai (2011) surmises that the formulaicity of textual claims on title-pages of early modern drama editions probably means that they were written and supplied by the publisher.

accuracy of their informational content. Based on his survey of nearly four hundred editions of English books printed between 1539 and 1580 whose title-pages make the claim of “never before printed”, Olson (2016, 626) observes that “[i]nitially honest title-page descriptions rapidly become commercialised catchphrases”. Massai’s (2011) exploration of statements about textual accuracy and improvement on title-pages of English playbooks from the Elizabethan period to the Restoration gives somewhat more credit to such claims. Massai’s focus is on what she calls “editorial pledges” – defined as instances when drama editions “inform their readers about the quality, provenance, and reliability of the printer’s copy” (Massai, 2011, 91). While such pledges have often been dismissed as mere marketing devices in previous research on drama (Massai, 2011, 91), Massai’s scrutiny of textual variation in these editions shows that the pledges also often informed the reader about the producers’ genuine attempts to improve the text in some way.

3. Advertising discourse

The questions asked by Olson and Massai about the predominantly informative vs. commercial tendencies of the title-page statements seem to reflect one of the fundamental questions in advertising research: whether advertisements should be understood as primarily informative or persuasive (see e.g. Hermerén, 1999, 34–39; Gieszinger, 2001, 18). In practice, these two seemingly conflicting orientations are often closely intertwined in advertising discourse. This can even be a conscious strategy (see Leech, 1966, 130). As Bhatia observes,

the most popular promotional strategy in advertising has been to *describe and evaluate a product or service in a positive manner*, which may be seen as information-giving function in language. These two functions of language, i.e., informational and promotional are therefore unlikely to create tension, even if they may not be entirely complementary to each other.

(Bhatia, 2005, 221; emphasis in the original)

The balance between these functions and the linguistic resources used to realise them may depend on the strategy of “product differentiation” that the writer of the advertisement chooses for the communicative situation (Bhatia, 2005, 216). In other words, by what linguistic (and visual) means can one best demonstrate that the advertised product is sufficiently different from its competitors on the market? Strategies that prove efficient may eventually become conventionalised and adopted by everyone. However, once the conventions have been established, differentiation can be achieved through the use of “[u]nexpected strategies, novel and creative exploitation of language” instead of formulaic phrases, as suggested by Toolan

(1988, 53). The conventions of the specific promotional text category also play an important role here (Bhatia, 2005, 217–218; see also Hermerén, 1999, 36). In the 18th century, for example, advertisements for patent medicines seem to have been linguistically more expressively persuasive than other newspaper advertisements on average (see Görlach, 2002, 26). In fact, Gieszinger (2001, 4) regards them as “a separate category of advertisements using particularly offensive methods and hyperbolic claims, which was frequently condemned as puffery”.

The role played by the constraints of the specific text category should also be borne in mind when exploring the promotional conventions of the early title-page. While Early Modern English title-pages can in terms of their function be broadly situated into the domain of advertising, their material context and form are obviously quite different from those of the prototypical newspaper advertisement (from the 18th century onwards) on which most previous research into historical English promotional discourse has focused. It is also important to recognise the influence of the well-established medieval rhetorical conventions of paratextual discourse on the development of the title-page. Indeed, the promotional conventions of the title-page might ideally be best analysed in combination with those other paratextual elements that according to Saenger (2005, 197) collectively form “the versatile system of advertising” in the early modern book.

Some of the linguistic means of promotion exhibited by title-pages can nevertheless be similar to those used in more prototypical kinds of historical advertisement. As Bhatia (2005, 219) points out, seemingly disparate kinds of promotional text (like the modern job application letter and the sales promotional letter) may have a surprisingly similar communicative purpose and they may employ similar lexico-grammatical and discoursal features (see further Bhatia, 1993). Bhatia notes that the communicative purpose of the publisher’s blurb is the “[d]escription and evaluation of the book in order to influence the future actions, attitudes and judgments of the readers” (2004, 170). We assume the early title-page to have fulfilled a similar function. Another similarity between blurbs and early title-pages is the constraint placed on the message by the limited physical space available (cf. Bhatia’s ‘situation-type’, 2004, 170). The authorship of the message may also remain unclear in the case of both blurbs and early title-pages. Importantly, the idea of product differentiation seems applicable to the communicative purpose of the title-page too: to be promotionally effective, the title-page needs to present the book in a sufficiently different guise both from the previous editions of the same work (or earlier editions of other closely similar works) as well as from concurrent competing titles on the market. This can be achieved by both linguistic and visual means, of which the former are the focus of the present chapter.

4. The present study

In our study, we seek to establish how textual processes and products were described on early English title-pages. We expect this survey to reveal some of the emerging promotional strategies employed by early book producers. Our approach relies partly on earlier work on advertising language. Bhatia finds that while the modern publisher's blurb is influenced by the topic of the book in question, some elements of description may still be predictable – for example, the range of adjectives and verbs may be similar across different books (2004, 170). At least some features typical of modern advertising English are arguably descendants of early modern or even earlier practices. Leech points out, for example, that one “apparently timeless ingredient” of promotional language is the frequent use of attributive adjectives (1966, 168), while Gieszinger (2001, 129) notes that especially premodifying adjectives “play a major role in product description”. As one of the functions of the early title-page was to promote the book and its producers, we expect to find positive evaluations of the book and its production process that present the product in a favourable light. We seek to find out whether early English title-pages display features typical of modern advertising language, such as promoting the product by offering positive and favourable product descriptions (Bhatia, 2004, 64) or employing adjective clusters for evocative effect (Leech, 1966, 129). We also pay attention to features that appear unexpected or even contradictory to modern conventions. To access such descriptive elements, we examine the modification of a selection of verbs and nouns in our dataset.

The dataset used in the present study consists of the title-pages of all the publications recorded in the *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) database published in 1473–1550. EEBO contains microfilm scans of almost all extant books printed in English or in English-speaking areas in 1473–1700. For some editions, a transcript of the full text of the work is also available in EEBO. Especially when a work was published in multiple editions, EEBO rarely reproduces the text from more than one edition. However, the EEBO metadata contains title-page transcriptions of nearly all editions from the period studied. As our focus is on title-pages, EEBO is therefore an ideal resource for the present study. Our dataset consists of approximately 4,000 early English title-pages.

We have taken some additional measures to construct as reliable a dataset as possible. Firstly, we have excluded material that is not dated or datable to a specific year within this time range – for example publications dated “1500–1599”. Secondly, EEBO gathers metadata from both title-pages and colophons; the resulting dataset thus potentially contains some colophons alongside title-pages. This is especially true for the early years of printing, when the conventions related to

these paratextual elements of the book were still developing. For this reason, we have manually removed colophons from our data until 1530 by cross-checking the metadata against EEBO images. After this date, the EEBO metadata fields for the title-pages rarely contain information taken from colophons. Finally, in some of the very early editions, there is no separate title-page; the title of the book and the beginning of the main text are on the same page. As this is a part of the development of the title-page, we include such titles in our survey.

Our data were collected from EEBO and organised in yearly plain-text files by our two interns. Using the corpus analysis toolkit AntConc, we first created a concordance containing all the items in the dataset. We analysed the resulting concordance manually to identify verbs and nouns related to textual activities and materials. For our survey, we selected (1) key verbs related to textual processes, such as *print* and *correct*, and (2) key nouns referring to abstract and physical written material, such as *work* and *copy*. We then looked at the collocates of these nouns and verbs to identify the adjectives and adverbs modifying them – for example, *newly printed*, *true copy*. This allowed us to determine what kinds of formulae the book producers typically used to discuss their processes and products on the title-pages.

The individual occurrences were then checked to collect the instances related to textual activity and accompanied with one or more modifiers qualifying the textual process or product. For example, of the total number of 726 instances of *book*, only 81 contained the kind of modification that is the focus of our study (see Table 1). We have excluded modifiers that are used purely referentially (*in the second book, a certain treatise*). Modification related to agency and location, often expressed by prepositional phrases (*printed in London*), is also out of the scope of the current study. While such phrases may occasionally carry promotional value (*translated by Robert Whyttynton, poet Laureate*), they are simply too numerous in our dataset to be covered in this initial survey. Finally, some verbs that semantically belong to the same field of textual activities (for example, *compose* and *confer*) were excluded from the study at this stage, as they yielded no instances of modification.

Table 1 contains the nouns and verbs examined and the number of instances per item in our dataset; note that the numbers only cover the relevant modified occurrences of these verbs and nouns as outlined above. Orthographical variation was taken into account in the data collection stage, after which variants were merged in categories following the modern English spelling as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the categories for *amend* and *mend* as well as *print* and *imprint* have been conflated, as can be seen from the table.

Table 1. The verbs and nouns studied and the number of relevant instances

Verbs	Relevant hits	Nouns	Relevant hits
(a)mend	16	book	81
compile	20	copy	25
correct	109	edition	2
gather	10	exemplar	1
make	22	text	1
oversee	7	treatise	111
(im)print	96	work	19
put forth	5	–	–
recognise	7	–	–
set forth	27	–	–
translate	107	–	–
write	4	–	–
Total	430	Total	240

Although the number of examples for each item is given in Table 1, our survey remains qualitative in nature. For several reasons, presenting the data of this pilot study in quantitative terms is problematic (see further Section 5.4 below). Firstly, both the verbs/nouns and their modifiers often occur in binomial structures. For example, in the phrase *newly amended and corrected*, the modifier *newly* only occurs once, but it could be argued to modify both *amended* and *corrected*. Counting these instances twice – once per verb – leads to some overlap between the categories. Secondly, the dataset contains several editions of some works. Especially with very popular works that were reprinted several times with the same formulae repeated on the title-page, this leads to an obvious bias. Neither would limiting the data by only counting one edition per work be representative of the material, as our focus is on expressions that are commonly found in second and later editions. However, these problems of quantification are not fatal for the present study, as our purpose here is to establish the emerging conventions of promotional language on early English title-pages. In the following section, we present the results of our analysis.

5. Modifiers of time, scope, and quality on early English title-pages

The modifiers of text-related verbs and nouns in our data can be divided into three main categories: modifiers of time, scope, and quality. In the discussion below, all numerical evidence presented refers to the relevant modified occurrences of the verbs and nouns in our dataset, as described above in Section 4 (see Table 1). The present section is divided into four parts. The first three sections (5.1–5.3) focus

on modifiers of time, scope, and quality respectively. However, modifiers from different categories are also commonly combined in our data. Examples of such usage are given in the last section (5.4), where we discuss our findings and their implications on a more general level.

5.1 Modifiers of time

Modifiers of time are the most common category for the verbs of textual activity investigated in this study. Of the 430 relevant occurrences of textual verbs, 356 are modified by a time-related adverb such as *newly* or *lately* (some of these instances are combinations of modifiers of time and either scope, quality, or both). In other words, over four fifths of the instances examined are modified by temporal adverbs.

There is, however, some variation in the use of temporal modifiers between different verbs. All relevant instances of the verbs of textual activity (*a*)*mend*, *make*, *put forth*, and *recognise*⁶ are modified in terms of time. The verb (*im*)*print* is also predominantly modified by temporal pre-modifiers such as *again*, *first*, *late*(*ly*), *never before*, *new*(*ly*), and *now*. Nearly 90% of the 109 occurrences of the verb *correct* contain a time-related modifier, typically *newly*, *lately*, or *once again*, with *newly* being the most common of these. This is also the context in which a modifier of time seems to have made its first appearance on an English title-page: “Leteltun teners newe correcte” (STC 15723). The book is Rychard Pynson’s edition (probably in 1510) of Thomas Littleton’s *Tenures*, an early treatise on English property law. It is worth noting that the treatise itself is written in French and only the title-page is given in English, perhaps to make the book appeal to a larger audience.

Of the verbs *compile* and *translate*, approximately three quarters of the relevant occurrences are modified in terms of time as well. For the textual verb *set forth*, a temporal modifier is used in 15 of the 27 instances. In the case of *oversee* and *write*, temporal modifiers are present in approximately one half of the instances. The verb *gather* is the only one in our dataset for which temporal modifiers are in the minority (three out of ten instances).

The textual verbs listed above typically refer to the textual processes of the book producers. In our data, these processes and products are commonly modified by adverbs suggesting a degree of immediacy (*lately*, *newly*, *now*), novelty (*first*, *never before*), or previous popularity of the product (when something is printed *again* or *once again*). The temporal modifier *now* occurs alone relatively rarely; it is typically used together with other temporal modifiers (for example, *now first translated*, *now lately compiled*, *now newly printed*).

6. In the now obsolete sense “To look over (a document etc.) again; to revise, correct, amend” (OED Online, 3rd ed., s.v. *recognize*, v. 1).

Of the 240 instances of nouns examined, 41 occurrences (approximately one fifth) are modified by a time-related adjective, either as the sole modifier or together with a modifier from another category. There is thus a marked quantitative difference between the use of temporal modifiers to qualify verbs on the one hand and nouns on the other hand. The modifier of time used with *book* and *treatise* is typically the adjective *new*; this is in line with the evidence on textual verbs, where *newly* was the most common temporal adverb. For example, the collocation *new book* occurs 18 times. In these usages, the adjectives most commonly qualify the printed book itself.

Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly for promotional discourse, our data also reveal some cases in which the venerable age of the text is highlighted as a positive trait. The adjective *ancient* occurs once in the prognostication and calendar STC 421.17, [1536]: “gathered out of the moost auntyent bokes of ryght holy astronomers”. Similar usages of *ancient* are found in other descriptions of source texts of compilations, where material is said to be gathered, for example, from *ancient fathers*, *ancient laws*, or *ancient philosophers*. The modifier *old* is found in two 1530s editions of a polemic religious work defending biblical translation into English, originally written in the first half of the 15th century: *A compendious olde treatyse, shewynge howe that we oughte to haue ye scripture in Englysshe*. The first edition, STC 3021, is dated to 1530; the second edition to 1538 (STC 3022). In these cases, the emphasis on the antiquity of the exemplar or work lends authority to the present book. The title-pages of both editions of *A compendious olde treatyse* contain a curious paratextual poem “Thexcusacyon of y^e treatyse”, which can be read as the book producers’ apologetic defence for their recycling of old material – and perhaps even as a metacomment on their promotional choice to emphasise the age of the work in the main title. In this poem, the book as a personified object addresses the reader in the first person to convince them of its continuing relevance to contemporary religious discussion. The point made by the speaking codex is that while its language is archaic and ineloquent, it nevertheless speaks the truth:

- (1) Though I am olde / clothed in barbarous wede
 Nothyng garnysshed with gaye eloquency
 Yet I tell the trouth / yf ye lyst to take hede [...] (STC 3021)⁷

Similarly, the noun *copy*, used to refer to the printers’ source text, is modified by the adjectives *ancient*, *first*, and *original*. The earliest of the five relevant hits in our data is *Life of Priests*, printed by Robert Redman (STC 6894, [1533]). The title-page notes that the work was “fyrst compyled in Latyne” by

7. For the manuscript versions and printed editions of *A compendious olde treatyse*, see Hudson (1985, 229, 242–244).

- (2) the reuerend and deuoute father Dyonisius / sometyme one of the Charterhouse in Ruremond / and taken and exemplified with great diligence out of an originall copy / y^e which he wrote with his owne hande / and nowe agayne beyng diligently corrected / is translated into the Englyshe tonge.

The title-page here contains very specific information on the production context of the work, emphasising the close connection to the *original* as well as noting that the work has been *diligently corrected* for the purposes of producing the English translation.

In our data, *newly* is the most common temporal adverb, and most of the other adverbial modifiers also stress the novelty of the book (e.g. *lately*, *now*). The adjective *new* is also commonly found modifying textual nouns. Olson points out that phrases emphasising the novelty value of titles, such as “newly amended and much enlarged” and “never before printed”, are commonly found in publishers’ catalogues of the 17th century (2016, 624). On the basis of his survey of title-pages from 1539–1580, Olson maintains that such formulae were typically copied from previous editions used as printer’s copies – even when the two editions came from different printing-houses (2016, 626). In Olson’s view, early book producers

could maximise the sales potential of their books by reprinting a previously successful text to anchor the volume, then adding supplementary material, in order to promote it with new and improved ingredients – preferably provided by the text’s original author. (2016, 624)

Olson finds this combination the ultimate business strategy, offering safety in the form of books that had already proved popular, while also stressing the novelty value of these reprints on the title-pages. The emphasis on novelty already seems to be a conventional marketing strategy in the first half of the 16th century, as shown by our survey. Phrases such as *once again printed*, in turn, imply a sustained demand for the work: here, the popularity of the text acts as a selling point. However, the work or source text is instead authorised by the use of adjectives emphasising its age.

5.2 Modifiers of scope

Whereas temporal adverbs commonly modify textual verbs, modifiers of scope – such as *briefly*, *compendiously* – rarely occur with these verbs. Only two of the verbs, both related to compilatory processes, are modified in terms of scope: *compile* (three instances) and *gather* (five instances). Other verbs related to compiling and revising material, excluded from the present paper, could potentially invite similar modifiers of scope. However, it should be noted that in many such verbs, a change

in scope is already encoded in the meaning of the verb itself – for example, *add* and *enlarge* suggest a wider scope, whereas *abridge* and *redact* imply the opposite. Some textual verbs invite specific types of modification not readily placed into the abovementioned three categories. For example, modifiers of location are occasionally found with the verb (*a*)mend (*amended in many places; here and there*). While such modifiers have been excluded from the present study, they might be fruitfully explored in the future in the context of textual processes of correction and revision.

Modifiers of scope are much more common with textual nouns. Of the 240 instances of textual nouns analysed, modifiers of scope occur in 85 cases – approximately one third. Modifiers of scope are especially commonly found with the nouns *treatise* (64 instances) and *book* (18 instances). The earliest modifier of this kind is found on the first known English title-page, in William de Machlinia's edition of *A Treatise on the Pestilence*: "A passing gode lityll boke necessarye & behouefull agenst the Pestilence" (STC 4591, [ca. 1485], our emphasis).⁸ This title also shows the first modifiers of quality on an English title-page (see further Section 5.3).

The most common modifier of scope is *little* (85 instances), but the adjectives *brief*, *compendious*, *great*, *short*, and *small* also occur in our data. It may seem surprising that modifiers suggesting small scope or brevity form the overwhelming majority of scope modifiers used on the title-pages (for example, *this little book*, *here begins a short treatise*, *a compendious treatise*), whereas the adjective *great* only occurs once, in STC 9286, [1533]: "The great boke of statutes co[n]teynyng all the statutes made in the parliamentes". This finding stands in stark contrast to that reported by Gieszinger (2001) in a diachronic study of advertising language in *The Times*, 1788–1996. The 12 most frequent descriptive adjectives found in her material include four potential modifiers of scope (*great*, *large*, *wide*, *full*), none of which denotes small scope or brevity (see her Table A 34, Gieszinger, 2001, 322). Of these four adjectives, *great* and *large* top the list at the beginning of the time span surveyed and gradually decline in frequency thereafter (*ibid.*).

It is possible that the kind of product being promoted in our data (book, text, work) steered producers towards the choice of diminutive modifiers. In her study of evaluative language in 16th-century English prologues and dedications written by translators, Ruokkeinen (2013, 52–54) observes the frequent use of *little* in phrases referring to the present book or text. She notes that while the evaluative meaning of the adjective could in itself be viewed as "mildly negative", it is associated with a "strongly positively colored discourse type in the paratexts" (2013, 53). Here, Ruokkeinen sees a possible connection with the Latin term *libellus* ('a little book') used in classical paratextual formulae as part of the conventional "modesty topos"

8. For this title-page and its dating, see Smith (2000, 62–64).

through which writers sought to present their work in a (seemingly) humble and self-deprecating guise (2013, 54; for *loci communes* typical of the modesty topos in the classical and medieval periods, see Curtius 1990 [1953], 407–413; Janson, 1964, 124–148; van Dam, 2008). As these studies indicate, the modesty topos was especially characteristic of prologues and dedications, in which writers in various ways endeavoured to win their reader’s goodwill (and hence promote the text). The frequent diminutive modifiers of scope on the title-pages of our material may indicate a transfer of such conventions from these more established paratextual elements to a newly emerging element. It is worth pointing out that the adjective *short* also modifies a variety of specific textual nouns that are found in our dataset but left outside the scope of the present study; examples include *short cronycle*, *short summe*, and *shorte tragycall hystorie*. The adjective *brief* is used in a similar manner (*brefe apologye*, *brefe chronycle*, *brefe comedy*). In these cases, brevity appears to have more transparent positive connotations (see also Varila, 2016, 71). The usage suggests that in addition to the modesty topos, also the topos of “brevity as a literary virtue” (see Curtius, 1990 [1953], 487–494; Janson, 1964, 96) may have influenced the diminutive phraseology of the title-pages.

5.3 Modifiers of quality

The final category of modification arising from our survey is that of textual accuracy or quality. These modifiers suggest, for example, that the text was *truly* or *diligently* produced, or that a work is *fruitful* or *false*. With regard to verbs, modifiers of quality are less common than modifiers of time. However, in the case of textual nouns, they form the largest category of modification in our dataset.

Of the 430 instances of textual verbs, 87 (approximately one fifth) are modified in terms of quality. The modifiers expressing textual accuracy or quality that occur more than once in our dataset with the textual verbs are *diligently*, *duly*, *exactly*, *faithfully*, *purely*, *truly*, and *lively* (the last item appearing in illustrated texts). The verb with which modifiers of quality occur most often is *translate* (30 instances). Texts are, for example, *faithfully translated*, or *truly and purely translated*. Another verb that is commonly modified in terms of quality is *correct* (26 instances). With this verb, *diligently* and *truly* are the most common modifiers used.

Of the 240 instances of textual nouns, more than half (129) are modified in terms of textual accuracy or quality. The noun *copy* mostly occurs in the formula “a true copy of the ordinance”, repeated in 15 editions of royal ordinances from 1526 to 1546. The adjective *true* also modifies the noun *copy* in three other works. The earliest one is an almanack printed first by Wynkyn de Worde (STC 389, [1522]) and a few years later by Richard Fawkes (STC 390, [1525]). The other two works are, firstly, Pynson’s edition of *Troilus and Criseyde* from 1526 (STC 5096); and,

secondly, the “true copy of a prolog wrytten [...] by Iohn Wycklife” (STC 25588 [1550]). These examples of the phrase *true copy* perhaps indicate that accuracy in following the source text was among the most crucial qualities of *copy* as a textual entity. Ordinances are legally binding, and almanacks contain mathematical information – in both cases, it is understandable that accuracy is such a crucial factor. In the case of *Troilus and Criseyde* and the prologue attributed to Wyclif, the rationale behind stressing the meticulous text-production process may rather be the perceived status of the author or work.

The noun *work* itself is modified in terms of the quality of the contents by the use of adjectives *excellent*, *fruitful*, *holy*, and *notable*. Similar adjectives also often accompany the two more common nouns in our dataset, *book* and *treatise*. Of the 81 examples of *book* analysed here, 46 contain a quality-related modifier such as *fruitful* (nine instances) or *good* (seven instances). For *treatise*, 47 of the 111 examples analysed are modified in terms of quality. The most common modifier here is *devout* (17 instances). However, many of the quality-related adjectives only occur in the dataset once or twice. Examples of rare modifiers of quality include, for example, *commendable*, *excellent* and *passing* (‘pre-eminent’, ‘outstanding’, *OED Online*, 3rd ed., s.v. *passing*, adj. 2).

In some cases, these adjectives modifying textual nouns might be interpreted as parts of the title of the book, as, for example, in “The golden boke of christen matrimonye” (STC 4046). A more modern point of comparison for this practice is perhaps the inclusion of modifiers or epithets within product names; Leech points out that such elements in brand names “contribute only to the evaluative aspect of the advertising message, by building up favourable associations with the product” (1966, 132). The inclusion of *golden* in the title of the book serves such a promotional purpose, even if it is considered a part of the title.

While the noun *book* most commonly refers to the printed book at hand, in some cases it occurs in references to other books. The negative modifiers of *book* in our data, such as *erroneous*, *false*, and *poisoned*, are found in these references. In terms of promotional discourse, such uses might be viewed as early instances of “negative comparative advertising”, in which product differentiation is achieved through the construction of an explicitly negative image of a competing product on the market (for the concept, see e.g. James & Hensel, 1991). As Beard’s (2010) examples from the 20th century show, the use of this strategy has often led to so-called “comparative advertising wars” characterised by strong emotions and escalating hostility between the parties. In 16th-century England, especially title-pages of publications associated with religious controversies seem to have favoured such negative promotion. Books by the indefatigable polemicist Thomas More make use of it, for example, on the title-page of More’s critical response to an unsavoury book about the Eucharist issued by an anonymous Protestant adversary:

- (3) The answer to the fyrst parte of the poysened booke, whych a namelesse heretyke hath named the souper of the lorde. (STC 18077, [1533])

The strategy of negative labelling also appears in publications by Protestant authors. The title-page of George Joye's refutation of a work by Bishop Stephen Gardiner, for example, refers to "this bysshops false bookes" and issues a direct command to the reader not to be deceived by them (by way of comparison, Gieszinger, 2001, 104–105 found that in her historical advertising data from *The Times* the use of imperatives for the reader's involvement peaked only in the late 19th century).

- (4) The refutation of the byshop of Winchesters derke declaratio[n] of his false articles, once before confuted by George Ioye Be not deceiued by this bysshops false bokes. Heare novve the tother parte, and iudge truely of the trueth. For the veritie vvyll haue the victorie. (STC 14828.5, 1546)

In contrast to the more frequent negative portrayal of the quality of competitors' products,⁹ there is only one instance of negative modification of the present book:

- (5) The armyng of a Christen Warriier readie to fyghte with the enemies of our captain and Sauioure Iesus Christe, to the whiche soldiers, Henry Barret the writer of this rude boke, wisheth health & muche increase of faith. (STC 1499, 1549)

Phrases employing the adjective *rude* ('lacking in elegance or polish; deficient in literary merit', *OED Online*, 3rd ed., s.v. *rude*, adj. 11) and the corresponding adverb *rudely* belong to the stock elements of early English prologues and dedications (see e.g. Ruokkeinen, 2013, 51–52, 54–55). They were used, for example, by William Caxton in several of the prologues and epilogues he wrote for his own translations, often in collocations formed with *simple* as a seemingly apologetic reference to his own work as translator (e.g. "I hu[m]bly bysec[h]e his most exellent & bounteuous hye[n]es to pardone me of this symple & rude translacion where in be no curyous ne gaye termes of rethoryk", STC 7269, 1489, sig. S5v). The usage may be interpreted within the frame of the modesty topos as a conventionalised expression of the writer's contrived humility (see Section 5.2 above). While it might first appear a very negative example of product differentiation, this modification does not necessarily suggest that the book in question is defective. Instead, it reveals the author's familiarity with the wider conventions of paratextual discourse. To see whether the use of this phrase in 1549 (Example (5)) might have been an innovation that

9. See also Busse, Gather & Kleiber's observations (this vol.) on (critical) referencing among 19th-century grammar writers.

caught on later, we searched for it on the title-pages of the books printed in the 1550s and 1560s. No occurrences were found even in this supplementary dataset. The extreme rarity of the usage in our data suggests, therefore, that transferring this clearly negative phrase from the discursive context of the prologue (or dedication) onto the more directly promotional title-page may not have been a very successful business move.

To sum up, textual nouns are commonly modified in terms of quality to suggest that the product being sold is, for example, *good*, *proper*, *devout*, or *useful*. The fact that these adjectives are often paired is in line with the conventions of advertising English. For example, Leech notes that adjective clusters “are common in all advertising” (1966, 129). Especially *fruitful* seems to be an adjective favoured in pairings such as *fruitful and pleasant* or *fruitful and necessary*. The modifiers of quality can also be combined with modifiers of time or scope. Leech points out that the emphatically emotive combination of “an approbatory adjective followed by one or more concrete meaning” is very common in advertising (1966, 129). An example from our data is *proper new book*, where *proper* has an attributive and *new* a concrete meaning. In such cases, the promotional is intertwined with the informative (cf. Bhatia, 2005, 221).

In marketing, the term “brand image” refers to the set of beliefs or associations related to a particular brand. As Meenaghan puts it, the “product is seen as providing core functional benefits while the brand is responsible for creating the magnetic human-like aura around the actual product” (1995, 24). Meenaghan points out that advertising is a way of actively controlling the brand image of a product (1995, 28). The modifiers of quality in our data, when combined with textual verbs, place emphasis on the quality of textual processes leading to the finished product: the text has been *faithfully translated* or *diligently corrected*. Such adverbs, while informing the reader that the process has been conducted in a certain manner, simultaneously advertise the quality of the resulting product. It is not only the book itself that is favourably presented but also the public image of the author or printer. During the time period in question, the brand of book producers was already being constructed by visual means (e.g. printers’ devices), and the inclusion of textual statements may have served a similar function.¹⁰

10. For early English printers’ devices, see e.g. Blake (1976, 121–126) on Caxton and Driver (1997, 90) on de Worde.

5.4 Overview of findings

In this section, we focus on the overall picture of the conventions of promotional discourse on early English title-pages as it emerges from the analyses in the preceding sections. Table 2 shows the raw data and the percentage of the verb and noun occurrences modified in terms of time, scope, and quality respectively (note that some verbs and nouns are modified by adjectives or adverbs from more than one category, which is why the sum total of the percentages exceeds 100). As can be seen from the table, textual activities (verbs) are most commonly modified in terms of time, while texts and books (nouns) are most often modified with regard to their quality.

Table 2. The categories of modifiers of verbs and nouns on early English title-pages

Modifiers	Time	Scope	Quality
Verbs (total 430)	356 (83%)	8 (2%)	87 (20%)
Nouns (total 240)	41 (17%)	85 (35%)	129 (54%)

Modifiers of time and quality can be combined, as in *newly and (most) truly corrected* and *newly and diligently translated*. Noun modifiers are also often paired, as in *a very fruitfull and pleasant book*. A modifier of quality may accompany a temporal modifier (*a proper new book*) or a modifier of scope (*a compendious and very fruitful treatise*), while modifiers of time and scope may also occur together (*a little new treatise, a compendious old treatise*). In one instance, all three types of modifiers are used together: “A godly newe short treatyse instructyng euery parson” (STC 12887, Robert Stoughton, [1548]). According to Leech, clusters of three adjectives “are not unusual” in advertising (1966, 129); however, in our data, this example is exceptional. In contrast, while in modern advertising verb groups tend to be simple, consisting of single words (Leech, 1966, 121), in our data verbs are also commonly paired (*corrected and amended*).

It should be noted that novelty or quality can also be expressed by other constructions on the title-page, sometimes in less explicit ways than in the formulae discussed above. For example, the date on the title-page may already suggest that a book is newly printed. Textual quality, in turn, may be implied by the names of book producers. If the person named on the title-page, for example, the author, translator, or printer, had a reputation as a meticulous and careful text-producer, this could imply to the initiated reader that the present volume was carefully prepared as well (see also Tyrkkö, Marttila & Suhr, 2013). The title-page of the 1534 revised edition of William Tyndale’s translation of Genesis, for example, announces the text as having been corrected by Tyndale himself: “The firste Boke of Moses called Genesis Newly correctyd and amendyd by w. T.” (STC 2351).

Our survey of title-pages reveals that some of the textual nouns examined – *edition*, *exemplar*, and *text* – are still rare in the first half of the 16th century. The word *text*, in our dataset, is only used in connection to biblical material. The word *exemplar* only occurs once, in “Taverner’s Bible”, STC 2067 (1539), where the translation is claimed to have been *recognised* after “most faythful exemplars”. The word *edition* occurs on the title-pages of successive editions of two theological works (probably) printed in 1548 (STC 4411, 4412, 25591a, 25591); it is used in promotional phrases that draw a qualitative distinction between the present book and an earlier printed version of the same text. The first recorded attestation of *edition* in the current (2nd ed.) entry in *OED Online* (s.v. *edition*, n.) is dated to 1551, so its appearances on our title-pages seem to belong to the earliest uses of the word in English. Using a learned “philological” neologism of this kind on the title-page may have been a promotional strategy intended to highlight the textual quality control of the book (cf. Leech, 1966, 178–179 about lexical neologisms in advertising). In the future, we intend to extend our survey to the latter half of the 16th century to see whether the use of such specialised textual nouns on title-pages becomes more common as the volume of printed materials increases.

It is worth stressing the point that many of the formulae used on English title-pages have corresponding forms in other languages. For the English *diligently printed*, for example, we have *cum diligentia impressum* (in the colophon STC 25491.7, London [1530]). *Newly recognised* corresponds with *nuper recognita* (on the title-page of STC 23148, London [1520]). A French title-page of a London production, in turn, claims to have been *novelment imprimes, et ouesq[ue] toute diligence reuses, coriges, et amendes* (STC 15732, London [1540]; some of the English editions of this work, *Lyttelton Tenures*, contain similar but not identical formulae). These formulations have probably influenced English textual statements to a great extent, so a closer analysis of the parallels between English and Latin/French title-page formulae seems a fruitful direction for further research.¹¹

It should also be emphasised that some of these formulae can be found not only on title-pages but also in other paratextual elements. For example, in the 1483 preface to the second edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, already mentioned above, William Caxton claims to have “dylygently ouersen and duly examyned” the book to ensure that it corresponds to the author’s text (STC 5083, sig. A2v). Similarly, Caxton’s famous surviving advertisement for his Sarum Pie claims the product to be “wel and truly correct” (STC 4890, [1477?]; see also L. Hellinga, 2009, 8). These statements that predate the first title-pages in English are very similar to the early title-page formulae found in our data. On the whole, our findings stress the need

11. Reichhart (1895, 1–158) provides an inventory of Latin formulae about correction from title-pages and colophons of continental incunabula; see also Grafton (2011, 23).

to explore the transfer of promotional conventions between different paratextual elements, including permutations of the modesty topos (cf. the discussion of *little* and *rude* in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 above).

6. Conclusion

Our survey of the modifiers of time, scope and quality that were applied to descriptions of textual activity and textual objects on English title-pages up to 1550 reveals some of the strategies used for product differentiation by early book producers. With regard to modifiers of time, the commercially efficient emphasis on the novelty of the product is present already in the early era of printing in English. Much less common, but nevertheless present, is the strategy of stressing the value of *ancient*, *first*, *old*, or *original* copies and texts. This strategy probably reflects both the importance assigned to earlier textual authorities as well as book producers' awareness of the occurrence of errors during textual transmission and the consequent need to go back to the "original" version. In our data, modifiers of scope are much more commonly attached to textual nouns than verbs. Perhaps as a reflection of the rhetorical topoi of brevity as a literary virtue and modesty, the promotional statements on early English title-pages often emphasise the small scope of the book/text. While there is much variation in adjectives describing the quality of texts and books, and such modifiers are relatively common in the dataset, there is a smaller number of adverbs related to the textual quality that modify verbs. Some lexical items, such as *faithful(ly)* or *true/truly*, are found in both categories. In addition to the predominantly positive evaluation of the present book and its making, the modifiers of quality also include some unfavourable descriptions of competing or alternative books/texts. The concept of negative comparative advertising may help us interpret such uses.

Our study shows that formulae stressing the novelty or improved qualities of the product, identified by Olson (2016) in later 16th-century textual statements, already appear in the first half of the 16th century. The promotional value of these statements is easily perceived, but evaluating the reliability of this information would require further examination of the linguistic and visual features of second and later editions claiming on their title-pages to have been diligently amended. This would necessitate collating the texts of subsequent editions of a given work, determining how the textual claims of book producers correlate with actual changes introduced in the texts of these works.

Commercial considerations undoubtedly form part of the rationale for the inclusion of textual statements on title-pages. However, the appearance of similar formulae in other paratextual elements shows that it is not only the printers and

publishers but also other book producers who make such claims. The title-pages may be a meeting-place for the statements from, on the one hand, the meticulous authors and editors engaging in critical reworking of texts, and, on the other hand, the business-oriented printers and publishers capitalising on these “new and improved” texts. For a better understanding of textual statements made by book producers in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, it would thus be necessary to consult other types of paratextual elements alongside title-pages.

The speculative mode of production, in which books are offered for sale for prospective buyers, encouraged early book producers to adopt strategies of product differentiation, stressing the better quality of their product when compared to other products aimed at the same intended audience or “target market”. These strategies – partly borrowed from other languages, partly coined by the book producers themselves – emerged and developed into conventions in the course of the 16th century. Eventually, some of these conventions may have become too commonplace to remain effective, thus necessitating the introduction of new, creative, and even playful linguistic strategies.

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 STC 421.17 = *A very true pronosticacio[n]*. London: John Byddell, [1536].
 STC 1499 = *The armyng of a Christen warriar readie to fyghte with the enemies of our captain and sauioure Iesus Christe*. London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549.
 STC 2067 = *The most sacred Bible, whiche is the Holy Scripture conteynynge the Old and New Testament*. London: John Byddell for Thomas Berthelet, 1539.
 STC 2351 = *The firste boke of Moses called Genesis*. [Antwerp: Martin de Kayser, 1534].
 STC 3021 = *A compendious olde treatyse, shewynge howe that we oughte to haue ye scripture in Englysshe*. [Antwerp: Johann Hoochstraten], 1530.
 STC 3022 = *A compendious olde treatyse shewynge howe that we ought to have the Scripture in Englysshe*. London: Richard Banks, [1538?].
 STC 4046 = *The Christen state of matrimonye wherin housbandes and wyfes maye lerne to kepe house together with loue*. [Antwerp: Widow of Christopher Ruremond?, 1538?].
 STC 4411 = *A faythfyll and moost Godlye treatyse concernynge the most sacred Sacrament of the blessed body and bloude of our sauioure Chryst*. [London : John Day for William Seres?, 1548?].
 STC 4412 = *A Faythful and moost Godlye treatyse concernynge the most sacret Sacrament of the blessed body and bloude of oure sauioure Christe*. London: John Day and William Seres, [1548?].

- STC 4591 = *A passing gode lityll boke necessarye [and] behouefull a[g]enst the pestilence*. [London: William de Machlinia, ca. 1485].
- STC 4890 = *If it plesse any man spirituel or temporel to bye any pyes of two and thre comemoracio[n]s of saliburi vse*. [Westminster : William Caxton, 1477?].
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What can we learn from constructed speech errors?

Mrs Malaprop revisited

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Due to her untiring and constantly failing attempts to enhance her social standing by employing highly extravagant diction, Mrs Malaprop in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) has given her name to a specific type of lexical misapplication exploited for humorous effect. While her 'malapropisms' have usually served as a starting point for scholarly investigations into similar speech errors produced by modern speakers, this paper asks what the original material, skilfully embedded in a 'comedy of manners', can tell us about the linguistic microstructure of such lexical mismatches, about their semantic relationship to the target words, and how this peculiar kind of material relates to modern speech error typologies. To examine these questions, the linguistic character of Mrs Malaprop's malapropisms will be explored on the basis of some significant criteria applied in pertinent studies of Present-day English data. Sheridan's material will also be seen in relation to relevant evidence provided by three leading 18th-century dictionaries and by the *OED*. I hope to show that, when examined in their original, late 18th-century context and tested against some major variables, Sheridan's malapropisms are not so far away from linguistic reality as is often assumed. Yet however 'authentic' his constructed malapropisms may be, their skilful use for literary effect nevertheless calls for a special treatment.

Keywords: error/substitution – target, 'hard words', Latinate terms, literary sociolect, 'classical' malapropisms, Sheridan's *The Rivals*, speech error typology, structural features, semantic relatedness

1. Introduction

This paper examines the linguistic habits of Mrs Malaprop – the pretentious, amusingly self-blind matron in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals*, first performed in 1775. Her unflinching talent for confusing words has made her the

name-giver for malapropisms, or malaprops,¹ as they are also called. This peculiar linguistic trait has also secured her a place in modern cognitive and psycholinguistic literature on speech errors. Malapropisms can thus be examined both in their original socio-cultural and linguistic setting and in their relationship to modern authentic speech material. A combination of both perspectives opens up a number of questions: how realistic is Mrs Malaprop's (mis)constructed language? Does the playwright's effort to achieve the intended dramatic effect shape her misguided lexical choices and her discursive practices in a way that markedly deviates from plausible linguistic behaviour? To what extent do her linguistic eccentricities follow predictable patterns that also guide natural word selection errors?

The analytic steps taken in this paper reveal that Mrs Malaprop has left us quite a challenging legacy. First, the concept of 'malapropism' will be scrutinised on the basis of various dictionary definitions (Section 2). The following Section (3) asks what the play itself reveals about the linguistic peculiarities of Sheridan's famous character, it briefly describes the socio-cultural climate in which such linguistic stereotyping flourished and poses the question how Mrs Malaprop's literary sociolect relates to contemporary language. Section 4 sketches out how modern speech error typology defines the term 'malapropism' and how it handles this concept in comparison to philological approaches. Subsequently, some major structural variables that serve for the classification of 'real' malapropisms will be introduced in order to apply them to Sheridan's examples (Section 5). The final Section (6) deals with semantic aspects of malapropisms, especially with the disputed question whether errors that show a semantic relationship to the appropriate word have to be excluded from this category.

Only selective evidence of a primarily qualitative nature can be presented here, but Mrs Malaprop's enthusiasm for the high-sounding word provides us with enough evidence to work out major tendencies. Taking Tiffany Stern's critical edition of *The Rivals* (2004)² as the text basis, we get some 72 malapropisms, including

1. According to the *OED*, the unsuffixed term *malaprop* was first attested in Lord Byron's autobiographical letters and journals both as a noun (1814) and in its – meanwhile obsolete – adjectival use (1815), whereas the more common suffixed term *malapropism* appears first in 1830. See also the short-lived, 19th-century variant *malapropoism*, with three quotations spanning from 1834 to 1893 (all three *OED* entries were updated in June 2000).

2. All quotations from and references to the *The Rivals* relate to this edition, which is based on the 1775 text, with selected variants from the revised 1776 version. Spelling and punctuation are modernised, but markings with a potential significance for the performance (such as italics indicating emphases) have been preserved. All lexical items that are central to the argument of this paper have been checked against the 1775 version in the Oxford Text Archive, available at <<http://tei.it.ox.ac.uk/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/K04/K043015.000.html>>.

a number of doubtful cases.³ There are particularly two reasons why this material defies quantification in absolute numbers. The first is the complex textual history of the play. The earliest version that has come down to us is the Larpent manuscript (San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, Larpent MS 383).⁴ The first performance of *The Rivals* at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden on 17 January 1775 was so ill received that Sheridan decided to withdraw and rewrite his comedy. The new version, first printed and re-issued in 1775, and reprinted with revisions in 1776, then became a great success.⁵ The second reason why we have to be cautious with statistical reckoning lies in the material itself. As will be demonstrated in more detail below, the boundary between malapropistic misuse and unusual, rare or innovative, yet still acceptable use is a fuzzy one and difficult to determine from a 21st-century point of view. Besides, as can be gleaned from the “target” column in the two lists of malapropisms appended to this paper, there is not always just one semantically and contextually ‘right word’ for a given malapropism, and competing targets may differ in structure and meaning.

The fact that malapropisms are lexical errors for whose origin and shape pronunciation plays a major role⁶ determines the selection of metalinguistic sources used here as historical reference works in addition to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) online: Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), a landmark in the development of the general dictionary of English⁷ and an ‘authoritative’ source for 18th-century vocabulary, and – for more detailed and more reliable phonetic information⁸ – two early pronunciation dictionaries by prominent teachers

3. For a collection of all the malapropisms in Sheridan’s *The Rivals* as represented in Stern’s edition (2004), with references to questionable items, see the Appendix to this paper.

4. As Stern (2004, 22) points out, this is “the copy that was sent to the Lord Chamberlain for approval before performance and is thus similar to the version of the play performed, and damned, on the first night”. Under the title “Larpent Variations”, Stern prints “two significant scenes” (*ibid.*, 22) from this manuscript – Act IV, Scene v and the final Act V, Scene iii – in an Appendix (*ibid.*, 173–182). While the former does not contain any malapropistic material, some of the malapropisms in the latter scene have been included in the discussion, but excluded from the counts. For an alphabetical list of the malapropisms in the final scene of the “Larpent Variations”, which provided a different ending, see Table 2 in the Appendix to this paper.

5. For a brief survey of the textual history of *The Rivals*, see Stern’s “Notes on the Text” (2004, 22).

6. See Section 2 below.

7. For details of this “towering achievement in lexicography and letters” (Reddick, 2009, 155), see *ibid.*, 155–172.

8. Dr Johnson restricts information on pronunciation in his *Dictionary* to stress marking in polysyllabic words. His accentuation system – adopted from Nathaniel Bailey’s *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, Supplement II (1727) – has been characterised as “rudimentary and ineffective” (Bronstein, 1986, 24).

of elocution in the orthoepistic tradition: the *General Dictionary of the English Language* by Richard Sheridan's father Thomas (1780), and John Walker's *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791).⁹ These special reference tools were both published some years after *The Rivals* was composed, but we may quite confidently assume that the materials young Richard worked with as an assistant elocutionist were not much different from what his father later propagated in print. The subtitle of his *General Dictionary* announced that one of its main objects was "to establish a plain and permanent Standard of Pronunciation". This serves as a reminder that all the 18th-century reference tools used here are typical products of their time, the so-called "age of prescriptivism", with its socially exclusive norms of 'correct', 'proper' and 'polite' language,¹⁰ but it is exactly these norms that Mrs Malaprop tries to imitate without success.

In this context, it is important to note that, unreliable as she may be in her choice of vocabulary, we can very likely trust Mrs Malaprop on the phonetic side. Julia, one of the young lovers in the play, explicitly refers to "her select words so ingeniously *misapplied*, without being *mispronounced*" (I.ii.153–154).¹¹

2. Defining malapropisms

In an entry that was updated in June 2000, the *OED* defines the term *malapropism* as follows:

The ludicrous misuse of words, esp. in mistaking a word for another resembling it; an instance of this.

In pointing out the "ludicrous" effect of malapropisms, the *OED*'s definition implicitly shows its indebtedness to the origin of the term in literature and dramatic art, where such instances of lexical "misuse" are fabricated exactly for this purpose. At the same time, the definition remains unspecific as regards the linguistic nature of the resemblance that, by implication, triggers the mistaken use of one lexeme for another.

9. Thomas Sheridan's *General Dictionary* was "one of the most influential pronouncing dictionaries of the period" (Beal, 2009, 160), but John Walker, who imitated Sheridan's scheme of notation, surpassed him in terms of success and "set the standard for the form and content of English pronouncing dictionaries throughout much of the nineteenth century" (Beal, 2009, 172).

10. For the 18th-century "doctrine of correctness" in terms of grammar and a survey of standards of "proper and polite speech" as reflected in statements by contemporary lexicographers and their works, see Sections 5.1 and 7.2.2 in Beal (2004, 89–105, 170–178), and Beal (2009, 175).

11. As regards individual pronunciations and their exact realisation, of course the usual caveats for a prescriptively-minded, pre-IPA age apply.

Though the following three definitions of *malapropism* from advanced learner's dictionaries (listed in chronological order) are somewhat simpler in style (due to their use of a limited defining vocabulary), they provide additional information on the concept:

The wrong use of one word instead of another word because they sound similar to each other, with results that are unintentionally funny (CALD ⁴2013)

literary an amusing mistake that you make when you use a word that sounds similar to the word you intended to say but means something completely different (LDCE ⁶2014)

an amusing mistake somebody makes when they use a word which sounds similar to the word they wanted to use, but means something different (OALD ⁹2015)

All three definitions agree that phonetic similarity lies at the heart of the “wrong use” or “mistake” typical of a malapropism. In addition, the *LDCE* and the *OALD* point to a more or less marked difference in meaning between the intended and the actually produced word, thereby creating a more explicit link to the posited hilarious effect. Only one of the dictionaries – the *LDCE* – labels *malapropism* as “literary”, though the epithets “amusing” (*LDCE*, *OALD*) and “funny” (*CALD*) parallel the *OED*'s “ludicrous” in echoing the term's origin in comedy. Its entertaining nature is certainly a necessary condition for the success of a malapropism as a literary device, but scarcely an essential defining criterion for ‘real’ malapropisms produced by ‘normal’ language users. In describing the effects of the speaker's lexical confusion as “*unintentionally* funny” [my emphasis], the *CALD* indicates both the psycholinguistic reality¹² and the discriminatory potential of malapropisms, which Sheridan in *The Rivals* exploits in a masterly way.

3. Mrs Malaprop's language: A literary sociolect

As Margaret Schlauch (1965), has demonstrated in an article on “The Social Background of Shakespeare's Malapropisms” more than fifty years ago, Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop was by no means the first literary figure who mixed up her words, but she was a particularly successful example of conceited lexical incompetence. The pattern employed by the playwright is a rather simple one: Mrs Malaprop transfers her social aspirations into the realm of stylistics, reaches too high and thereby constantly disgraces herself before her better educated and linguistically more capable fellow characters and in the eyes of an informed audience. Thus, in her absence, Captain Jack Absolute scorns Mrs Malaprop for her “ridiculous

12. See below, Section 4.

vanity, which makes her dress up her coarse features and deck her dull chat with hard words which she don't understand" (*The Rivals*, III.iii.65–68), and Sir Lucius O'Trigger ironically calls her "a great mistress of language" and "the queen of the dictionary" (II.ii.37–38). Such comments, which have been skilfully built into the play, provide important background information: though the so-called 'inkhorn controversy' over excessive classical borrowing into English had been fought out some 200 years before *The Rivals* was put on stage,¹³ the 'hard-word problem' still formed a serious language barrier for a substantial part of the British population in the later 18th century. For Mrs Malaprop's intellectual ambitions, consulting dictionaries is obviously not a remedy,¹⁴ but part of the problem.

There may be an autobiographical element in the obsession with language use and misuse in large parts of *The Rivals*: some critics see Mrs Malaprop as a sort of personal revenge by Richard Sheridan (1751–1816) on his tyrannical father Thomas (1719–1788), the famous elocutionist, dictionary writer, actor and theatre manager, who had forced young Richard to serve him as a sort of 'rhetorical usher' for his clients.¹⁵ The playwright's early practical experiences with exercising 'correct' language use and language correction no doubt provided him with first-hand knowledge of 'authentic' material and ample food for stereotyping and social satire. As "a prototype for Mrs Malaprop" (Stern, 2004, 23), Sheridan apparently also drew on the character Mrs Tryfort in his mother Frances' play *A Journey to Bath* (originally titled *A Trip to Bath*, 1765).¹⁶

The question of authenticity, naturalness or plausibility is indeed a crucial one for the classification and evaluation of malapropisms. Over ninety years ago, Henry Fowler acknowledged their frequent occurrence and their problematic nature for the average English language user by devoting two pertinent entries in his best-selling *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* to the description and illustration of "Malaprops" (1926, 340) and "Pairs & Snares" (1926, 419). Fowler took great pains to point out the artificial nature of Mrs Malaprop's mistaken lexical choices (1926, 340):

13. For a brief overview of the 16th-century debate about the status of English and the problem of enrichment, see Gneuss (1996, 21–22).

14. For "The Early Development of the English Monolingual Dictionary", which started with the hard-word dictionary, see the survey article by Osselson (2009). The first specimen of this type, Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604) reflects "his stated intention of helping the less literate readers with the more learned words" (Osselson, 2009, 133), while Mrs Malaprop and her audience could draw on a much wider spectrum of lexicographical works, among them the three best-selling dictionaries used here as reference works (see above, Section 1).

15. On possible biographical allusions in *The Rivals*, see Stern (2004, 25–26).

16. On similarities in the linguistic habits of Mrs Tryfort and Mrs Malaprop and verbal parallels in the two characters' utterances, see Stern (2004, 23).

She is now the matron saint of all those who go wordfowling with a blunderbuss. Achievements so heroic as her own do not here concern us; they pass the bounds of ordinary experience & of the credible. Her votaries are a feebler folk; with them malaprops come [as] single spies, not in battalions, one in an article, perhaps, instead of four in a sentence, & not marked by her bold originality, but monotonously following well beaten tracks.

More recently, Manfred Görlach (1999, 494) has voiced a similar scepticism about the linguistic credibility of Sheridan's literary creations and extended this view to almost all such occurrences in early Modern English drama:

[...] the instances found in plays (where they are certainly intended to ridicule their speakers) are mostly far-fetched and exaggerated – no doubt to ensure that the audience got the joke [...].

Görlach also warns us of too simplistic a conceptualisation of the socially stigmatising potential of malapropisms: their frequency in early Modern English literary texts “appears to indicate that even lower-class speakers loved the sesquipedalian word” (1999, 480). There can indeed be no doubt that Mrs Malaprop's verbal misapplications are manufactured linguistic devices, i.e. intentional word plays which are carefully constructed for comic effect. My claim, though, is that their degree of deviation from natural speech errors of this kind is not as great as is usually assumed, if we view them in their original, late 18th-century context. Sheridan and his contemporaries are the heirs of “a period of heightened lexical activity” (Nevalainen, 1999, 336), stretching roughly from the early 16th to the mid-17th century and leading to a significant increase in lexis by borrowing (mostly Latinate terms), word-formation and semantic change.¹⁷ At a time when schooling and, in particular, access to higher education were still the privilege of a small, and mostly male, minority, linguistic insecurity was a natural consequence of lexical enrichment, and despite increased efforts at regulation and standardisation during the 18th century, the difference between creative variation and wrong use was probably often only a subtle one.

17. For a detailed account of “Early Modern English Lexis and Semantics”, including a critical survey of the available metalinguistic sources, see Nevalainen (1999).

4. Mrs Malaprop's malapropisms and modern speech error typology: Terminological questions and problems

The challenge which malapropisms pose to English philologists has been increased by the fact that the term equally functions as a category in modern speech error typology.¹⁸ In an influential paper entitled “Malapropisms and the Structure of the Mental Lexicon”, Fay & Cutler (1977) appropriated the term to designate a lexical mismatch of a different type than the one associated with Mrs Malaprop and her peers. Fay & Cutler's malapropisms are non-intentional, spontaneous speech production errors – ‘momentary selection errors’ (Aitchison, 2012, 23) – which speakers tend to correct once they notice them.¹⁹ By contrast, Mrs Malaprop's lexical confusions are deliberately produced in the given form; hers are ‘errors of ignorance’ (Fay & Cutler, 1977, 505; Aitchison, 2012, 23), terms that are by definition inappropriate (*mal-à-propos*)²⁰ for the given purpose, by which she, however, proudly abides because she is, and remains, unaware of her deviation from common usage. From a cognitivist point of view, Mrs Malaprop confidently reproduces words for which she has stored a formally altered representation in her mental lexicon that is then only retrievable in this faulty form. Malapropisms are speech errors, but “not, strictly speaking, errors in speaking” (Zwicky, 1979, 339).²¹ By contrast, Fay & Cutler's malapropists demonstrate the involuntary effects of a temporary failure in their speech production system; they can and will process the correctly stored item once they notice this failure.

Unfortunately, Arnold Zwicky's attempts (1979, 1982) to keep the two types of speech errors conceptually and analytically apart by introducing the specifying term ‘classical malapropism’²² for the internalised errors of ignorance in Sheridan's sense have failed. Apart from Zwicky's own work, I know of no subsequent study that tries to make a systematic distinction between ‘errors of ignorance’ and ‘temporary selection errors’. The reason for this is probably a practical one: Aitchison

18. For a survey of different types of speech errors from a psycholinguistic perspective, see Fromkin (2004).

19. Zwicky (1982, 125) equates “Fay-Cutler malapropisms” with “tip-of-the-tongue approximations”.

20. See *OED* s.v. *malapropos*, adv., adj., and n. (entry updated in June 2000).

21. For this reason, Zwicky (1982, 129) considers malapropisms of little value for the exploration of speech production: “Classical malapropisms will tell us no more about lexical retrieval than does the production of any other lexical item: speakers producing classical malapropisms are, from their own points of view, simply retrieving and producing ordinary lexical items.”

22. Cf. Zwicky's “Partial classification of errors, focused on the classical malapropism” (1982, 123), Figure 8.1.

& Straf (1981, 753), for example, in their study on child and adult malapropisms, point out that their definition of ‘malapropism’ covers both categories because “[i]n the data under discussion, it was impossible to distinguish satisfactorily between the two types”,²³ and even Zwicky (1979, 342; 1982, 124) conceded that, despite his attempts to isolate ‘classical malapropisms’ from similar errors, his data were “very noisy”. Since then, Mrs Malaprop’s name has been claimed for an even wider spectrum of word errors.²⁴ A comparison of our historical material with modern cognitive and psycholinguistic studies on malapropisms is thus not only problematic because of the constructed nature of Sheridan’s examples.²⁵ In fact, some of Mrs Malaprop’s lexical confusions could equally be assigned to another category if they did not come straight from the horse’s mouth. For example, when she exclaims

(1) “Come, girls! The gentleman will *exhort* [for *escort*] us.”

(*The Rivals*, V.i.246)²⁶

this is usually classified as a malapropism, but under normal circumstances (i.e. in a non-fictional context) the metathetical exchange of /ks/ for /sk/²⁷ qualifies as an ‘assemblage error’²⁸ that occurs spontaneously in speech production.

To differentiate between the actually uttered, malapropistic form and the expected, conventionalised form – “the lexical item that would be considered appropriate by a native speaker of English” (Aitchison & Straf, 1981, 198) –, the terms

23. For problems regarding the classification of different types of selection errors and the interpretation of pertinent evidence, see also Aitchison (2012, 23).

24. While, e.g., Vitevitch’s (1997) study on “The Neighborhood Characteristics of Malapropisms” works with Fay & Cutler’s error corpus, Goldrick et al.’s (2010) paper on “Mrs Malaprop’s Neighborhood” examines “the non-semantic errors produced in both spoken and written word production by four individuals who suffered neurological injury” (2010, 113).

25. The ‘naturalness’ of relevant modern data is also by no means always guaranteed. Aitchison & Straf’s child and adult malapropisms, for example, were extracted from “500 or so original letters” which “were obtained in response to two requests made by the English *Sunday Times* newspaper” (1981, 199).

26. In quotations from Sheridan’s *The Rivals*, malapropisms and their (presumed) targets (added in square brackets) are highlighted in italics.

27. See Sheridan (1780), s.vv. *to escort* and *to exhort*. In contrast to Sheridan, Walker (1791), s.vv., gives the pronunciation with /sk/ for *escort* and with /gz/ for *exhort*. In accordance with the 18th-century tendency to adapt pronunciation to spelling, both dictionaries prescribe the pronunciation of <h> in *exhort*.

28. For this category, “in which the right items have been chosen but assembled in the wrong order” and which has “probably [...] relatively little to do with the mental lexicon”, see Aitchison (2012, 21), with further examples on p. 23.

‘error’ and ‘target’ (established by Fay & Cutler, 1977) are applied here. They appear to be appropriate for the ‘designer malapropisms’ under inspection;²⁹ in addition, the more neutral term ‘substitution’ is occasionally used instead of ‘error’.

5. Testing Mrs Malaprop: A sample analysis of structural features

In order to explore the principles and mechanisms of malapropisms, research has mainly concentrated on three linguistic dimensions that significantly shape the relationship between error and target:³⁰ wordhood (5.1), word class (5.2), and micro-structure (5.3), i.e. phonological make-up, expressed in the number of syllables, in stress assignment and rhythmic pattern, and morpho-phonological shape. For the ‘internal architecture’ of malapropisms particularly agreement in word-initial and, to a lesser degree, word-final segments has proved significant. Seen in combination, these analytic criteria form a complex set of interacting factors that work together in a way that still awaits clarification. A further, disputed aspect that apparently interacts with the other factors in cause and effect is added in Section 6: semantics.

5.1 Wordhood

The criterion of ‘wordhood’ says that malapropists usually tend to produce existing words rather than substitutions of the target that have no equivalent in current lexis. It is not surprising that Mrs Malaprop’s constructed lexis yields a 100% rate of real words: a misapplication of vocabulary in actual use accentuates her intellectual deficits and makes it easier for an informed audience to get the joke. Besides, checking her lexical inventory against a dictionary aiming for comprehensive coverage such as the *OED* means that we get attestations for an exceptionally large spectrum of ‘existing words’. By comparison, Zwicky’s, 1979 sample of 158 real-speaker malapropisms yielded a 87% wordhood rate (1979, 345; 1982, 125). However, a closer look at his twenty “classical malapropisms [...] that are not existing words of English” (Zwicky, 1979, 345) demonstrates that, taken by itself, the ‘wordhood criterion’ is a rather weak one. To get at the heart of this criterion, we have to apply a distinction that is vital for the study of lexical productivity:

29. It has to be kept in mind, though, that the error-target dichotomy reflects the norm-oriented hearer’s perspective and the analyst’s position and seems thus not really adequate for a speaker-oriented analysis of the phenomenon in a natural speech production environment.

30. Cf., for example, the spectrum of analytic criteria applied in Aitchison & Straf (1981) and Zwicky (1982).

that between possible and actual words. As defined by Plag (2018, 45), a ‘possible’ or ‘potential’ word is “a word whose semantic, morphological or phonological structure is in accordance with the rules and regularities of the language”. It seems important that both Mrs Malaprop’s ‘real word malapropisms’ and the allegedly non-existent words of Zwicky’s testees³¹ consist of structural building blocks³² that are recurrent in English, and though the given combinations may be unattested, unnoticed, and semantically inappropriate for their purpose, they nevertheless fit English structure.

5.2 Word class

Following the assumption that meaning and word class are integral parts of lexical representations in the mental lexicon (Aitchison, 2012, 120–121), we should also expect a 1 : 1 correlation in word class between target and error.³³ Mrs Malaprop largely confirms this assumption. There are only three instances that call for discussion. None of them is a blatant breach of lexical class assignment, even though the following instance has been classified as such:

- (2) [...] promise to forget this fellow! To *illiterate* [for *obliterate*] him, I say, quite from your memory. (*The Rivals*, I.ii.178–179)

Aitchison (2012, 120) argues that the natural preservation of word class in malapropisms “is a feature which the playwright Richard Sheridan was unaware of when he created his fictional Mrs. Malaprop. [...] A confusion between *illiterate* (adjective) and *obliterate* (verb) would be unlikely in spoken speech”. The 18th-century reference dictionaries chosen here all confirm the different word-class membership of the two lexemes.³⁴ Yet, in addition to the verb *obliterate* (attested from 1548), the *OED* also has an entry for a corresponding adjective – apparently a rare word that was first attested around 1600 as a past participle and became obsolete in the 19th

31. A substantial portion of these words (8 out of 20; Zwicky, 1979, 345–346) are in fact attested in the *OED*, e.g. *flagrance* for *fragrance*, *holocaustic* for *holophrastic* and *vanishment* for *banishment*.

32. The term ‘structural building block’ is here used as an umbrella term for regular sound sequences, syllables, morphemes and morpheme-like units.

33. Zwicky (1979, 345–346; 1982, 125) records a 91% part-of-speech match for his natural data. Among his examples for non-agreement are, however, doubtful members of the category ‘classical malapropism’ such as *lever* for *never* or *sunlight* for *some light*.

34. See Johnson (1755), Sheridan (1780), and Walker (1791), s. vv. *illiterate*, a. and *to obliterate*, v. a. The latter abbreviation stands for *verbum activum*, a transitive verb.

century.³⁵ In the etymology section, *obliterate*, adj., is classified as a direct borrowing from classical Latin *oblit(t)eratus* rather than the result of language-internal conversion from the earlier verb.³⁶ For Latinate words with multiple word-class membership in English it is, however, often impossible to determine whether they result from direct borrowing or language-internal word-class shift. What is decisive in the given context is the ease with which words in English could (and still can) be transferred into a different word class.³⁷ Thus, a language artist like Sheridan may well have allowed his extravagant character to apply the frequent process of conversion by way of analogy – here of course against current usage – on the adjective *illiterate*. The audience would nevertheless have had no problem to get the intended meaning because Sheridan provides them with a whole set of semantic and structural decoding cues: the preceding synonym *to forget*, the infinitive marker *to*, presumably paired with the verbal suffix pronunciation of *-ate*,³⁸ and the appropriate preposition for the target *obliterate* in the dependent phrase *from her memory*. Such co-textual factors have so far received little attention in the linguistic study of malapropisms, though relevant cognitive, psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic research has demonstrated the relevance of the semantico-syntactic environment both for speech production and perception. *The Rivals* abounds with examples for processing aids which the successful playwright intuitively or intentionally built into his constructed language.

35. The infrequency of the adjective *obliterate* can be deduced from the fact that none of our 18th-century reference dictionaries records this form. The *OED* entry for †*obliterate*, adj., was updated in March 2004; the dates of the last quotations – 1834 for its earlier, participial function (sense 1.a.) and 1860 for the adjectival one (sense 1.b.) – indicate that the word had already gone out of use when the entry was first published in 1902.

36. Such an assumption would run counter to the usual process: where English has both a Latin-based adjective and a verb in *-ate*, the directionality of conversion, according to the *OED* (s.v. *-ate*, suffix³, 5.), is usually from participial adjective to verb.

37. Cf. Nevalainen's résumé of her lexicographical studies (1999, 425–426): “conversion is the third-most frequent word-formation process in Early Modern English”.

38. Paralleling the word class-specific division between PDE /-ət/, adj., and /-ert/, v., Sheridan (1780), s.vv. *illiterate*, a., and *to obliterate*, v. a., makes a systematic distinction between the adjectival pronunciation of the suffix *-ate*, indicated by <e> with a superscript <1>, and the verbal one, indicated by <a> with a superscript <2>. Walker prints “[t]he long slender English *a* as in fate, pa-per, &c.” (1791: xvi), i.e. <a> with a superscript <1>, for both vowels. – For the usual 18th-century pronunciation /e:/ for the reflex of ME /a:/ and tendencies towards diphthongisation, see MacMahon (1998, 449–450). On varying stress patterns in the late 18th century and reduced versus unreduced forms of verb-final *-ate* in varieties of Present-day English, see Lass (1999, 130–131).

The second instance where error and target differ in their word-class affiliation – Mrs Malaprop’s *Hesperian curls* for *Hyperion’s curls* (*The Rivals*, IV.ii.14) – opens a whole series of embarrassing lexical distortions in a highly inappropriate intertextual reference to Shakespeare: she (mis)quotes Hamlet’s eulogy on his dead father (*Hamlet* III.iv.56–59, ed. Jenkins, 1998, 316) in an attempt to commend Captain Absolute to her reluctant niece Lydia. In substituting the poetic adjective *Hesperian* ‘Western’ (*OED* s.v. A.1.) for the classical name *Hyperion* (the Greek Titan associated with the East), Mrs Malaprop displays her ignorance – just as when she subsequently confuses Shakespeare’s *Jove* with *Job*, exchanges *Mars* for *March*, and prosaically renames the *herald Mercury Harry Mercury* (*The Rivals*, IV.ii.14–16) –, but she does not offend against English word-formation and grammar when she replaces the genitival premodifier with an adjectival one.

In the third case in point, when Mrs Malaprop in a melodramatic moment reveals her second identity

(3) Pardon my *chameleon* blushes, I am Delia.

(*The Rivals*, “Larpent Variations”, V.iii.113–114)

chameleon has been taken as a malapropism for *vermilion* (ed. Stern, 2004, 179, note on line 114). At first glance, *vermilion* in adjectival function has here falsely been replaced with the similar-sounding noun. A look into our 18th-century reference dictionaries shows, however, that both *chameleon* and *vermilion* are only recorded there as nouns (“s[ubstantives]”),³⁹ although the *OED* s.v. *vermilion*, n. and adj., documents an adjectival use since 1589 (first in combination with *blush*).⁴⁰ Here again, Sheridan has obviously exploited the ease with which English words can move between word classes and combined grammatical flexibility with semantic allusiveness: the specifying element in *chameleon blushes* serves as a satirising attribute that suggests a repeated change of complexion, thereby creating an ingenious associative link between error and target.

5.3 Linguistic microstructure

In this section, some major criteria are taken up from the relevant literature to demonstrate that, structurally, Mrs Malaprop’s linguistic lapses largely accord with the traits that characterise real-life malapropisms. For the reasons outlined above,

39. See Johnson (1755), Sheridan (1780), and Walker (1791), s.vv. *chameleon*, s. and *vermil*, *vermilion* s.

40. The relevant citation s.v. *vermilion*, B. adj. a., from Robert Greene’s *Menaphon* (1589) reads: “Shee [...] died her cheekes with such a vermilion blush”.

in Section 4, the quantitative results of modern, natural-data studies are used here sparingly and with some reservation. Overall, the tendencies worked out above in terms of ‘wordhood’ and ‘word class’ are confirmed: the fictional Mrs Malaprop’s lexical substitutions tend to represent the relevant microstructural features in a prototypical way.

As demonstrated in Section 2, malapropisms are usually classified as sound-based errors, or, as Aitchison (2012, 153) calls them, “similar-sound errors”: phonological resemblance to the target serves as their central classifying trait. Aitchison (2012, 166) assumes that there is a “natural clumping principle” in the mental lexicon due to which words that are most alike in their phonetic shape are most closely linked and thus particularly likely to get confused.

The structural unit that has been most often studied in this context is the syllable. With more than half of the sample consisting of words with four or five syllables, Mrs Malaprop confirms the *OED*’s statement in the etymology section of *malaprop*, n. and adj., that the phenomenon is named after a character who “habitually confuses long words”.⁴¹ The primary source of confusion, however, is very likely not length per se, but its typical connection with foreign, chiefly Latinate, origin and structures and the lack of morpho-semantic transparency for the uneducated.

Regarding the syllable numbers of error and target, Sheridan’s data exhibit a high rate of agreement (about 85% as compared to 71% in the Zwicky data; 1979, 345; 1982, 125). Relevant studies point to a close relationship between syllables and rhythmic patterns. Aitchison’s findings in this respect are fully confirmed by our historical malapropisms: if error and target agree in their syllable number, they usually preserve their metrical structure, and material that is being added or lost typically consists of unstressed syllables (cf. Aitchison, 2012, 161–163). In nearly 80% of all cases, there is a complete match in syllable number (added in square brackets) and stress pattern between Mrs Malaprop’s substitution and her target, as exemplified in (4a).

- (4) a. *'extirpate* for *'extricate* or *'exculpate* [3/3] (*The Rivals*, I.ii.191)
lo'cality for *lo'quacity* [4/4] (I.ii.303)
la'conically for *i'ronically* [5/5] (I.ii.229)

About 20% of the instances belong to a second type with syllable loss or addition and preservation of the main stress on the same or a phonetically similar element (4b).

41. The example cited by the *OED* for illustration – “the very *pineapple* of politeness” (for “the very *pinnacle* of politeness”; see below, Section 6) – is, however, not really representative of excessive word length.

- (4) b. *intu'ition* for *tu'ition* [4/3] (*The Rivals*, I.ii.287)
simu'lation for *dissimu'lation* [4/5] (V.i.183)
perpen'diculars for *par'ticulars* [5/4] (V.i.202)

In addition, there is a rare third type, where the difference in syllable number and morphological shape between substitution⁴² and target implies a stress shift (4c).

- (4) c. *sī'militude* for *simi'larity* or *'simile* [4/5/3] (*The Rivals*, IV.ii.17)

For a more fine-grained phonological analysis of malapropisms, research has variously tested the quality and sequence of individual sounds, sound types (vowels, consonants), sound combinations, and their position within the word.⁴³ Despite limited comparability, the particular relevance of word-initial segments for the phonetic shape of malapropisms was confirmed in all the studies consulted here.⁴⁴ Malapropistic reconfiguration does, however, neither strictly follow syllabic nor clearly morphemic patterns (Aitchison, 2012, 160). The borrowed nature of almost all of Mrs Malaprop's malapropisms⁴⁵ adds further complications: their foreign origin and structure exhibits the well-known specifics in terms of base allomorphy, bound roots, limited analysability and stress shift.⁴⁶ As it is particularly the beginning of words that is susceptible to malapropistic (ex)change, such problems can best be illustrated by the notoriously difficult type of 'pseudo-prefixed' words of the *constraint* for *restraint* and *advice* for *device* type. These examples come from Aitchison's modern speech error data (2012, 150), but instances such as those in (5) are also a regular part of Mrs Malaprop's repertoire:

42. The term 'substitution' is here preferred to 'error' as *similitude* in (4c) cannot be classified as a malapropism with absolute certainty (see below, Section 6).

43. Cf. the set of variables listed in Aitchison & Straf (1981, 755–756) and in Zwicky (1982, 124). Apart from a high agreement in stress pattern, the 'Fay-Cutler malapropisms' proved "significantly different from classical malapropisms on almost every linguistic dimension" (Zwicky, 1982, 125).

44. Aitchison & Straf (1981, 219) suppose that "[g]reater familiarity with the written word and dictionaries is likely to lead adults to concentrate on word initials" – a factor that may be of special relevance for the 18th century with its clear primacy of the written word and the great popularity of dictionaries at that time (cf. above, footnote 14).

45. Of native English or Germanic origin are *Harry* for *herold* in Mrs Malaprop's quote from Hamlet (*The Rivals*, IV.ii.16; see above, Section 5.2) and *gasping* for *aspen* [*leaf*] (*The Rivals*, "Larpet Variations", V.iii.82). *Gasp*, v., is "[p]robably a borrowing from early Scandinavian", and *asp*, n., is of Common Germanic descent (OED s.vv.).

46. For a detailed treatment of the morpho-phonological characteristics of 'learned' loans from the classical languages and French, see Minkova & Stockwell (2009), especially chapters 4–10.

- | | |
|--|--|
| (5) <i>affluence</i> for <i>influence</i>
<i>precede</i> for <i>proceed</i>
<i>reprehend</i> for <i>apprehend</i> or <i>comprehend</i> | (<i>The Rivals</i> , IV.ii.47)
(V.i.247)
(I.ii.249; III.iii.71) |
|--|--|

With roughly a quarter of all attestations, such pseudo-derivations, composed of non-native, chiefly Latin stems and ‘switched prefixes’, form the largest subgroup of Mrs Malaprop’s mischosen words. Pace Henry Fowler’s claim of “bold originality”, Sheridan’s half-educated heroine is here “monotonously following well-beaten tracks” (Fowler, 1926, 340).⁴⁷ Her lexical distortions reflect an insecurity in the use of Latinate ‘pseudo-prefixations’ that has continued to pose a challenge to less educated speakers of English well into our times.

In a natural speech-processing environment, morphologically complex substitutions, especially suffixations, could also result from a “fall-back procedure” (Aitchison, 2012, 154), which natural speakers tend to apply when their lexical memory temporarily fails them: instead of activating the normal ‘whole-word route’, they perform “an emergency word-formation operation” (Aitchison, 2004, 1782) along the ‘decomposition route’.⁴⁸ Example (4c) above, *similitude* for *similarity*, and Examples 6a–b below – *artificial* for *artful* and *ingenuity* for *ingenuousness* – fit into this category. Taking natural speech procedures into account, it does not seem surprising that all three substitutions, which are marked as malapropisms in Stern’s edition of *The Rivals*, on closer inspection turn out to be doubtful cases. The fact that for parts of their lexical history the above-mentioned pairs could be used as synonyms⁴⁹ may have resulted from frequent fall-back operations leading to temporary semantic extension. Compared to what would be expected in non-constructed language, Mrs Malaprop’s complex word choices exhibit, however, an extraordinary feature: the more likely result of a ‘fall-back procedure’ would be structurally straightforward *artful* for *artificial* and *ingenuousness* for *ingenuity*.⁵⁰ In this respect, Sheridan’s designed substitutions follow a logic of their own: it is not the much more transparent, ‘word-based’ pattern with native Germanic suffixes

47. Aitchison (2012, 150) classifies errors such as *constraint* for *restraint* as “slips of the tongue” and discusses them in the context of “The *Pertoire Question” (2012, 150–152), i.e. whether “words are entered in the mental lexicon in their stem form, with the prefixes stripped off” (2012, 150) – a question which she answers in the negative (see also Aitchison, 2004, 1783–1784).

48. See the description of major processing models for morphologically complex words in Plag (2018, 47–51).

49. For details, see below, Section 6.

50. Cf. Aitchison’s authentic example *deduceful* for *deductive* [rules] (Aitchison, 2004, 1782; 2012, 154).

which his heroine usually goes for; in her craze for complexity she rather produces formations with bound roots of the non-native, 'stem-based' type.⁵¹ Even for *similitude* and *similarity* – both fully Latinate formations –, this 'complexity principle' is confirmed: with *similitude*, Sheridan makes Mrs Malaprop use the structurally – and semantically – less transparent formation.

6. Malapropisms and semantics

Besides their phonetic similarity, it is the semantic difference between substitution and target that turns a malapropism into a speech error and a successful literary device, though malapropisms are by definition not semantically-based word selection errors: the malapropist 'means' the right concept, even if the accompanying form s/he retrieves from his or her mental lexicon is a mismatch. Contextual embedding in a suggestive lexical, semantico-syntactic and pragmatic environment usually secures the recipient's recognition of the error and the 'corrective' activation of the concept with the actually intended meaning.

Semantics has usually played no or only a minor role in the study of 'real-life' malapropisms. In order to get 'clean' data for research into the multi-layered speech production process, errors with a semantic basis are usually excluded from modern psycholinguistic examinations of malapropisms. The claim that semantic errors "must be distinguished from malapropisms" can already be found in Fay & Cutler's pilot study (1977), based on the impressionistic argument that in malapropisms "the target and error seem to be unrelated in meaning" (Fay & Cutler, 1977, 505). The types of semantic errors which the two researchers eliminated from their list of 'true malapropisms' consist of antonymic and meronymic substitutions, e.g. *bad* for *good* and *toes* for *fingers*, and verbal blunders such as *contemporary* for *adjacent* [*building*] or *below* for *before* [*Thackeray*] (Fay & Cutler, 1977, 507), with the latter examples reflecting a confusion of semantic dimensions like time and space. Only the first three error-target pairs, however, are exclusively meaning-related: in the fourth pair, *below* for *before*, the pseudo-prefix *be-* introduces an additional morpho-phonological factor that may have played a part in triggering the wrong word choice. Besides, *below* for *before* can hardly qualify as a malapropism in our sense, i.e. a storage error and thus a persistent error of ignorance.⁵² Sheridan provides us with a number of 'hard word' examples that better illustrate the problems

51. For the distinction between 'word-based' and 'stem-based' word-formation patterns in English and their historical background, see Kastovsky (2006), especially sections 7.3–7.5.

52. On Fay & Cutler's extended definition of 'malapropism', see above, Section 4.

of a categorical exclusion of semantic errors from the class of malapropisms: in contrast to the majority of Fay & Cutler's 'semantic errors', antonym substitutions such as Mrs Malaprop's *horizontal* for *vertical* ("Larpen Variations", V.iii.77) or *controvertible* for *incontrovertible* (*The Rivals* I.ii.192) are not only semantically related but exhibit different types of morpho-phonological links and thus meet the primary criterion for inclusion.

In sorting out all semantically related items, Fay & Cutler (1977, 507) say that they relied on their intuitions. The practical difficulties of such a procedure led Aitchison & Straf in their "multivariate analysis" (1981, 197) of adult and child malapropisms to take a radical methodological decision:

An important non-phonological criterion which was omitted was the presence or absence of a semantic link; the problem here was the difficulty of deciding whether such a link existed in many cases: a jury of graduate students was unable to agree whether there was or was not a semantic link in malapropisms such as *desecrated* coconut (desiccated), *flamingo* dancing (flamenco), *hoovering* (hovering) of a hovercraft, *masturbate* (masticate). (Aitchison & Straf, 1981, 203)

Including potential semantic errors in the data and then excluding semantic considerations from research criteria is obviously not a solution to our classification problem. A jury of professional linguists would probably apply different criteria, but it remains doubtful whether they would arrive at clear and unanimous decisions about the (un)relatedness of meanings in such tests. And even if such a decision is possible and the question of semantic resemblance can be answered in the positive, as, for example, for Mrs Malaprop's *parricide* for *homicide* (*The Rivals*, V.i.182), it is hard to find a convincing reason for the necessity of a categorical distinction between malapropisms and semantic errors on the basis of the definitions presented above in Section 2.⁵³ There are in fact doubts if the one-sided concentration on structure within research into malapropistic speech errors is cognitively justified. As Fromkin (2004, 1791) points out, "there is strong evidence that words are listed in the [mental] lexicon according to various phonological criteria. This however does not contradict the need for also including a semantic sub-lexicon in which words are listed by semantic classes and/or features".

If we allow for semantic similarity between error and target in malapropisms as an optional feature⁵⁴ – besides the obligatory condition of phonetic similarity –, we

53. The only difficulty might be posed by the *LDCE*'s solitary claim that the malapropism "means something *completely* different" than the target [my emphasis].

54. For a recent study of Shakespeare's malapropisms that excludes such an option, see Keller (2017). Keller takes a markedly different approach from the one pursued here by aiming

are in agreement with early Modern English linguistic reality and, as can be safely assumed, with the playwright's intentions: the borrowed material with its specific structural make-up, from which Sheridan drew so lavishly for his malapropisms, contains a lot of similar-sounding items with a quite similar range of meanings. This invites confusion and contamination, or, to put it more positively, conceptual transfer with a potential for semantic change. A closer study of our late 18th-century data yields a substantial number of cases where the boundary between extended use and misapplication was apparently a fuzzy one: today's individual malapropism may be tomorrow's semantic innovation. Relevant examples from Mrs Malaprop's inventory include instances such as

- (6) a. *artificial* for *artful* (The Rivals, I.ii.291)
 b. *ingenuity* for *ingenuousness* (III.iii.2)

From a Present-day English point of view, these pairs clearly represent different concepts⁵⁵ and at the same time – due to their phonetic similarity – potential confusables. This is probably the reason why they have both been classified as malapropisms.⁵⁶ A closer analysis of these examples, based on historical metalinguistic sources, demonstrates however that from an 18th-century point of view we are dealing with partial synonyms. This makes it extremely difficult to draw the boundary between an acceptable, contextually appropriate usage of a polysemous word and a semantic error. In the first case, with Mrs Malprop calling

- (6) a'. Lucy! Lucy! [*Aside*] Had she been one of your *artificial* ones,
 I should never have trusted her. (The Rivals, I.ii.290–29)

the intended and contextually appropriate meaning is expressed by PDE *artful* 'wily, cunning, crafty, deceitful' (*OED* s.v. *artful*, adj. (and n.), 2b.).⁵⁷ However, the *OED* s.v. *artificial*, adj. and n., III. †8., records an attestation for the sense

"to provide evidence-based arguments for a clear delimitation of the malapropisms proper" (2017, 244, Abstract). She distinguishes "true malapropisms as defined by the *OED*" (2017, 248) from the categories 'semantic relation' and 'nonce formation', by which she understands "combinations of sounds without any clear lexical meaning" (2017, 248).

55. The adjectival pair *ingenious/ingenuous* is listed in Room's *Dictionary of Confusable Words* (2000) s.vv. It can thus be assumed that the accompanying nouns have also preserved their potential for malapropistic misuse.

56. Cf. Stern (2004, 64), note to line 291; (2004, 102), note to line 2.

57. The *OED*'s comment following this definition, "Now the most common sense", refers to Present-day English conditions as the entry was updated in December 2008.

‘Displaying or characterized by artifice; artful, cunning’ (labelled *Obsolete*) in a citation referring to a female person from “a1777”, i.e. nearly contemporary with Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (1775), and another one as late as 1868. Yet the spectrum of meanings offered for *artificial* in our 18th-century reference dictionaries does not include the person-related ‘cunning’.⁵⁸ We may thus conclude that this was a rare sense at Sheridan’s time and that the dramatist very likely designed Mrs Malaprop’s *artificial* as a malapropism.

The quotation underlying (6b) poses similar problems of semantic disambiguation. Mrs Malaprop compliments Captain Absolute on the *ingenuity* of his appearance. The intended meaning ‘openness’ is recorded for the assumed target *ingenuousness* by Johnson (1755), Sheridan (1780) and Walker (1791): all three give ‘openness, fairness, candour’. Dr Johnson, however, lists these three defining terms plus ‘freedom from dissimulation’ also as the first sense of the alleged error *ingenuity* s. 1. “[from *ingenuous*]”.⁵⁹ The *OED* s.v. *ingenuity*, n., I.3., confirms this usage and illustrates it by citations spanning from 1614 to 1889, but adds “Now rare, the current word being *ingenuousness*”.⁶⁰ If we go by Dr Johnson and the *OED*, Mrs Malaprop’s use of *ingenuity* is thus not an error for *ingenuousness* but a then still current sense of the word. Yet there was obviously so much confusion in the use of the two nouns⁶¹ and their accompanying adjectives that from the author’s point of view a conceptualisation as a malapropism seems likely. This view is strengthened by contextual factors:

- (6) b’. Your being Sir Anthony’s Son, Captain, would itself be a sufficient *accommodation*; but from the *ingenuity* of your appearance, I am convinced you deserve the character here given of you. (*The Rivals*, III.iii.2)

58. Only the numbered entries in Dr Johnson’s dictionary (1755) are cited here because, as quite usual, Sheridan (1780) and Walker (1791) give exactly the same definitions without sense numbers: *artificial*, a. ‘1. Made by art, not natural; 2. fictitious not genuine; 3. artful, contrived with skill’; *artful*, a. ‘1. Performed with art; 2. Artificial, not natural; 3. Cunning, skilful, dexterous’.

59. Like Johnson’s entry for *ingenuity*, the *OED* entry shows a bipartite division into senses connected with *ingenuous*, adj., and with *ingenious*, adj.; the *OED*’s etymology section additionally refers to the confusion of the two adjectives in the 17th century.

60. Both the *OED* entry for *ingenuity*, n. and *ingenuousness*, n. were first published in 1900 and have not yet been fully updated. “Now” (s.v. *ingenuity*, n., I.3.) thus refers to lexical conditions in the late 19th century.

61. *Ingenuousness*, in turn, is said to have been “[u]sed by confusion for *ingeniousness* (= *ingenuity* n. II). *Obsolete*.” (*OED* s.v. *ingenuousness*, n., 4.).

With the immediately preceding *accommodation* for *recommendation*, *ingenuity* for *ingenuousness* forms one of the ‘malapropistic clusters’ that are so typical of the play. Besides, the whole utterance is full of dramatic irony: the Captain who gets praised for his ‘freedom from dissimulation; honesty; straightforwardness; sincerity’ (*OED* s.v. *ingenuity*, n., 3.) is in fact ingeniously holding a second, secret identity: that of the poor soldier Ensign Beverley.

The last examples examined here in more detail

- (4) c. *similitude* for *similarity* or *simile*⁶² (*The Rivals*, IV.ii.17)

is part of Mrs Malaprop’s misplaced remark following her absurd misquotation of Hamlet: “However, the similitude struck me directly” (*The Rivals*, IV.ii.17). According to the *OED* (s.v. 3.b. and 4.a.), the semantic spectrum of *similitude* in 18th-century England still included the senses of both target options suggested by Stern (2004, 126, note to line 17): *similarity* and *simile*. This is confirmed by Dr Johnson (1755), who – followed by Sheridan (1780) and Walker (1791) – defines *similitude* by ‘1. Likeness; resemblance’ and ‘2. Comparison; simile’. Though the various senses lead to different interpretations, none of them can be utterly dismissed as inappropriate or wrong. It thus seems impossible to decide whether we are dealing with a malapropism in this case, and among Sheridan’s socially and intellectually heterogeneous audience judgement may also have differed. Uncertainties of this kind were probably part of the playwright’s linguistic and dramatic strategies.

All the examples in (6) discussed above demonstrate that, just like phonetic similarity, semantic relatedness cannot be determined in absolute terms. This applies to literary malapropisms – the products of a creative mind – even more than to natural ones. The decisive point for a ‘classical’ malapropism is not the absence or presence of a semantic link between error and target. The really important question is whether the semantic difference between the two concepts involved is apt to create the impression of inappropriateness on the recipient’s side which, in a literary context, is usually designed to provoke an intended ludicrous or satirising effect.

To complicate matters, Sheridan’s malapropisms can quite often be construed both ways, as in (6b) above: “Mrs Malaprop reinvigorated the comedy of misusing words partly because so much of what she says ‘wrong’ is also ‘right’” (Stern, 2004, 11). Her verbal blunders may render her utterances nonsensical in their linguistic co-text, but they nevertheless quite often make sense within the given situational context. Sheridan’s audience was constantly exposed to this specific kind of ‘double-speak’ and thus trained to ‘double-think’. Intricate shifts

62. The numbering as (4) c. takes up the first mention of this example in Section 5.3 above.

between senses – more or less related ones – of phonetically similar words and double-entendre oscillations between the still (in some way) plausible and the odd or the absurd are typical of Sheridan's literary malapropisms. To expose his doubtful heroine to ridicule, the playwright skilfully exploits semantic ambiguities and applies multi-layered strategies that are not always immediately recognisable from a present-day English linguistic background. The complexities of such a procedure shall be demonstrated by a final example. Mrs Malaprop's aside compliment to Captain Absolute

(7) He is the very *pineapple* of politeness! (*The Rivals*, III.iii.22–23)

is one of the most famous malapropisms which sounds, however, rather far-fetched to modern ears. This is partly due to the exceptional nature of the substitution: the target *pinnacle*, a borrowing from French and Latin, is not, as usual, replaced by another learned Latinate loan but by a well-established Germanic compound – presumably a loan translation of post-classical Lat. *pomum pini* (*OED* s.v. *pineapple*, n., “Origin” and “Etymology”). At first sight, *pineapple* for *pinnacle* seems no more than a clumsy, failed attempt at remotivating an intransparent term by folk-etymology. As the relevant definitions in our 18th-century reference dictionaries offer no hint for any relationship between substitution and target,⁶³ we have to draw on the *OED* to throw more light on this question. At Sheridan's time, *pineapple* denoted (a) ‘A pine cone’ – a sense that became rare in the 18th century and has only lived on as a dialect term (*OED* s.v. I.2.a.) –, (b) the tropical fruit that goes by this name in English from 1624 to the present day (*OED* s.v. I.3.), and (c), in extended use, ‘An ornament or ornamental design in the shape of a pine cone or (later also) a pineapple’ (*OED* s.v. II.5.). *Pinnacle*, in turn, especially referred to ‘a small ornamental turret, usually terminating in a pyramid or cone [...]’ (*OED* s.v. 1.a.), and, in figurative use, ‘Also: †a perfect embodiment or exemplar of something; [...]’ (*OED* s.v. 3.).⁶⁴ In their concrete, ornamental sense, a pineapple (especially in the older ‘pine cone’ sense) and a pinnacle show certain similarities in form, and Sheridan may have intended such associative links. The metaphorical extension to the ‘perfect embodiment’ sense, which Mrs Malaprop's intended compliment requires, is, however, not attested for *pineapple*. But if we take into account that in 18th-century England pineapples were “extremely expensive luxury items and the display of a pineapple at a dinner table was a way of ostentatiously showing

63. Johnson (1755), Sheridan (1780), and Walker (1791), all define *pineapple* very vaguely as ‘A Plant’, and *pinnacle* as ‘A turret or elevation above the rest of the building; a high spiring point’.

64. The *OED* entries for *pineapple*, n. and for *pinnacle*, n. were both updated in June 2006.

off wealth”,⁶⁵ Mrs Malaprop’s peculiar word choice does not seem as odd as it may appear at first sight. In explicitly referring to pineapples and – with an audience trained in word-play – simultaneously alluding to pinnacles as objects of decorative art, Sheridan once again demonstrates the intricacies and sophistications of his dramatic language. Mrs Malaprop’s *pineapple of politeness* can still be classified as a malapropism because her figurative use of the ‘fruit’ concept probably was and obviously has remained an isolated one. It also stands out among Sheridan’s word plays by preserving the alliterative pattern of the target *pinnacle of politeness* while introducing the native formation *pineapple* into the formulaic expression – a striking stylistic incongruity which Mrs Malaprop usually eschews through her penchant for the high-sounding term of classical origin.

7. Conclusion

Mrs Malaprop’s numerous verbal misapplications are carefully designed literary devices, but despite their fictitious character they are grounded in contemporary linguistic reality. The number of mostly Latinate ‘hard words’ that had come into Renaissance English provided Richard Sheridan with ample material to expose the linguistic eccentricities and the intellectual deficits of his heroine. Both Mrs Malaprop’s confused inventory of hard words and collections of modern confusables prove that borrowed terms with their complex morpho-phonological shape are primary candidates for malapropisms. As regards structural criteria for this type of speech error – wordhood, word class and phonological make-up –, the playwright makes Mrs Malaprop largely conform to the major tendencies that have been worked out by modern research. In these respects, her verbal blunders are so systematic in nature that she can easily compete with today’s real-life malapropists. The relevant studies are, however, mostly based on a much wider understanding of the concept. While phonetic similarity between error and target is generally acknowledged as a necessary condition for malapropisms, the defining criterion of semantic unrelatedness that guides modern psycholinguistic investigations into this field forms a critical issue. The selected case studies offered in this paper support a definition of ‘malapropism’ close to the original context that is broad enough to allow for semantic and pragmatic subtleties, for cases of polysemy, semantic ambiguity, irony and satire – features that are so vital for the intended dramatic effect. Literary malapropisms pose a specific challenge in our continuing search

65. My thanks go to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this important piece of information to my attention.

for “[t]he non-anomalous nature of anomalous utterances” (Fromkin, 1971). If looked at closely in their original linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts, many of Mrs Malaprop’s misguided word choices turn out to be artificial, artful and quite natural at the same time.

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Appendix

In Table 1 below, the malapropisms in Sheridan's *The Rivals* that have been identified by Tiffany Stern in the annotations to her 2004 edition of the play are listed in alphabetical order together with the target words suggested by Stern. The individual readings usually refer to the 1775 version of the play. Wherever Stern gives preference to variants from the 1776 edition or has altered or modernised the spelling of the original, the form appearing in the edited text is listed first, with the alternative reading from the 1775 version being given in angle brackets.⁶⁶ Where Stern is in doubt whether a particular term is a malapropism or not, this is indicated by a question mark. A question mark plus an explanatory footnote is added to occurrences which range among Stern's malapropisms but on closer inspection cannot safely be assigned to this category.

Malapropisms occurring in the final scene (Act V, Scene iii) of the "Larpent Variations" (Huntington Library, Larpent MS 383) and taken from Stern's Appendix (2004, 175–182), are listed separately in Table 2.

66. Three malapropistic readings from the 1775 text that do not appear in Stern's text, have been included in this list: <meretricious>, <miscellaneous> and <transferred> (see comments in footnotes).

Table 1. Malapropisms in Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775/1776)

Malapropism	Target(s)	Reference <i>Act, Scene, Line</i>
accommodation	recommendation	III.iii.2
adulation	admiration	IV.ii.10
affluence	influence	IV.ii.47
allegory	alligator	III.iii.201
analysed	paralyzed, amazed	IV.ii.236
anticipate	exacerbate	IV.ii.155
antistrophe	catastrophe	V.i.184
artificial	artful	I.ii.291
caparisons	comparisons	IV.ii.6
commotion	<i>presumably</i> emotion	II.ii.31
compilation	appellation	IV.ii.145
conciliating	<i>presumably</i> constricting or humiliating	I.ii.274
conjunctions	injuncts	III.iii.32
<conjunction>		
contagious	contiguous	I.ii.245
controvertible	incontrovertible	I.ii.191
delusions	allusions	V.iii.186
derangement of epitaphs	arrangement of epithets	III.iii.73
dissolve <desolve>	solve, resolve	V.iii.214
enveloped	developed	V.i.186
envoy	convoy	V.i.247
exhort	escort	V.i.246
exploded	exposed	III.iii.31
extirpate	extricate, exculpate	I.ii.190
felicity	alacrity, velocity	V.i.242
fluxions	<i>presumably</i> fractions	I.ii.236
geometry	geography	I.ii.244
Harry	herald	IV.ii.17
Hesperian curls	Hyperion's curls	IV.ii.15
? honour	humour	V.iii.182
hydrostatics	hysterics	III.iii.37
illegible	ineligible	I.ii.278
illiterate	obliterate	I.ii.178
? incentive	instinctive	II.ii.29
? induction	inducement	II.ii.30
ineffectual	intellectual	III.iii.13
infallible	<i>presumably</i> ineffable	II.ii.34
? ingenuity ⁶⁷	ingenuousness	III.iii.2

(continued)

67. For the questionable status of *ingenuity* as a malapropism for *ingenuousness*, see above, Section 6.

Table 1. (*continued*)

Malapropism	Target(s)	Reference <i>Act, Scene, Line</i>
interceded	intercepted	III.iii.39
<interested> ⁶⁸	disinterested	II.ii.33 (note)
intricate	ingrate <i>or, perhaps</i> , obstinate	I.ii.213
intuition	tuition	I.ii.287
Job	Jove	IV.ii.15
laconically	ironically	I.ii.229
locality	loquacity	I.ii.303
malevolence	benevolence	I.ii.302
March	Mars	IV.ii.16
<meretricious> ⁶⁹	meritorious (?)	II.ii.36 (note)
misanthropy	misanthrope <i>or</i> misogynist	I.ii.218
<miscellaneous> ⁷⁰	<i>presumably</i> misallied, misapplied, erroneous <i>or</i> promiscuous	II.ii.33 (note)
oracular	vernacular	III.iii.72
orthodoxy	orthography	I.ii.246
paradoxes	parallaxes	I.ii.236
parricide <paracide> ⁷¹	homicide	V.i.182
participate	precipitate <i>or</i> exacerbate	V.i.233
particle	article	III.iii.35
perpendiculars	particulars	V.i.202

68. This malapropism has been added to Stern's list. The relevant passage: "As my motive is interested, you may be assured my love shall never be miscellaneous", occurs in the 1775 version of Mrs Malaprop's love letter to Sir Lucius O'Trigger and was revised out of the 1776 text by Sheridan. Stern (2004, 89) excluded this passage from her edited text. Yet in contrast to *interested*, she acknowledged *miscellaneous* as a malapropism because this term is being taken up in the excerpt from the Larpent manuscript which Stern included in her edition (see below, Table 2).

69. In the 1775 version, the love letter to Sir Lucius by Delia, alias Mrs Malaprop, ends with the phrase *yours, while meretricious*, which Sheridan dropped from the 1776 text. Stern (2004, 89) here follows the latter version and refers to the omission in a footnote (to line 36) without further comment. *Meretricious* undoubtedly qualifies as a malapropism, but an appropriate target seems hard to find: (*while*) *meritorious* seems odd, and this is presumably why Sheridan removed the phrase from the revised text. For the frequent confusion of *meretricious* and *meritorious* in Present-day English, see Room (2000), s.v. *meretricious/meritorious* and <<http://grammarist.com/usage/meretricious-vs-meritorious/>> [accessed 28 February 2018].

70. See above, footnote 68 and below, footnote 75.

71. The spelling <par(r)acide>, normalised to <parricide> by Stern (2004, 149, line 182) is a current 18th-century spelling (cf. *OED* s.v. *parricide*, n.¹, "Forms").

Table 1. (*continued*)

Malapropism	Target(s)	Reference <i>Act, Scene, Line</i>
persisted	desisted	III.iii.37
physiognomy	phraseology	IV.ii.12
pineapple <Pine-apple>	pinnacle	III.iii.23
precede	proceed	V.i.247
preposition	proposition	III.iii.34
progeny	prodigy	I.ii.233
punctuation	punctilio, punctiliousness, compunction, <i>or</i> , <i>perhaps</i> , unction	II.ii.33
putrefactions	petrifactions	V.i.240
reprehend	apprehend <i>or</i> comprehend	I.ii.249
reprehend	apprehend	III.iii.71
retrospection	introspection	IV.ii.156
? similitude ⁷²	similarity <i>or</i> simile	IV.ii.18
simony	cyclometry <i>or</i> ciphering	I.ii.236
simulation ⁷³	dissimulation	V.i.183
<salivation>		
supercilious	superficial	I.ii.242
superfluous	superficial	II.ii.32
superstitious	superfluous	I.ii.251
<transferred> ⁷⁴	traversed	I.ii.1 (note)
Van Dyke <Vandyke>	vandal	V.iii.222

72. According to the OED s.v. *similitude*, n., 3.b. and 4.a., in 18th-century England this term still carried the meanings of both target words suggested by Stern (2004, 126, note to line 17), i.e. *similarity* and *simile*, and can thus not safely be classified as a malapropism (cf. above, Section 6).

73. Stern (2004, 149, note to line 183), gives preference to the 1776 reading *simulation* and classifies it as a malapropism for *dissimulation*. As both terms in Sheridan's time could denote actions of feigning and false pretence, this classification is questionable (cf. OED s.vv. *simulation*, n. 1.a and *dissimulation*, n., 1.a.). By contrast, the 1775 reading *salivation* rejected by Stern is a malapropism for *simulation*.

74. In the relevant utterance by Lucy, the maid: "Indeed, ma'am. I traversed half the town in search of it", Stern (2004, 50) prints the contextually appropriate verb *traversed* from the 1776 text, but mentions in his note to line 1 that both the 1775 text of the play and the Larpent manuscript have *transferred*: "Sheridan seems originally to have intended several characters to use malapropisms; this example would have shown that Lucy, like Mrs Malaprop, aspired to a vocabulary she did not possess."

Table 2. Malapropisms in the Larpent manuscript (1774), Act V, Scene iii

Malapropism	Target(s)	Reference <i>Act, Scene, Line</i>
chameleon	vermilion	V.iii.114
convict	convince	V.iii.117
gasping	aspen	V.iii.82
horizontal	vertical	V.iii.77
miscellaneous ⁷⁵	<i>presumably</i> misallied, misapplied, erroneous <i>or</i> promiscuous	V.iii.98
perforate	permeate	V.iii.112

75. Citing from Mrs Malaprop’s love letter (“Is this your promise that your love should ‘never be miscellaneous?’”), Sir Lucius refers back to the passage quoted above, in footnote 68. See there for further explanation.

The proverbial discourse tradition in the history of English

A usage-based view

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The present contribution sheds light on the mental representation of proverbs in relation to the norms and conventions of discourse traditions (cf. Koch, 1997; Oesterreicher, 1997). While the proverbial tradition is seen as a very important discourse tradition of medieval England (for example Schaefer, 1992; Shippey, 1994; Aurich, 2012a), it is widely acknowledged that it is no longer as influential in modern times. The article introduces a new model of mental representation (“dual layer storage model of proverb representation”) which is a modified version of the “superlemma model of idiom representation” (Sprenger et al., 2006). This new model incorporates a facilitation process in line with the usage-based view (e.g. Bybee, 2013). The article argues that the particular norms and conventions of discourse traditions in the history of English which are connected with the proverbial tradition have an effect on the strength of the representation of proverbs in the mind.

Keywords: mental representation of proverbs, usage-based view, lexical access, discourse traditional norms and conventions, history of English

1. Introduction

In the present contribution an attempt will be made to bring together strands of research in a meaningful way which may seem very disparate at first glance: phraseology, psycholinguistics, and discourse traditional norms and conventions.¹

1. This study is part of a larger research project (“Psycholinguistic Aspects of Varying and Changing Proverb Structure. Mind, Mapping, and Memory”, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) LU 1942/2–1; grant for 2015–2019). The aim of the project is to test hypotheses on the representation of proverbs in the mind with the help of corpus-based analyses and psycholinguistic tasks and measurements. The findings from the empirical studies will be

The present article focuses on the interplay between the mental representation of proverbs, as a particular type of fixed expression, and the norms and conventions of discourse traditions (cf. Koch, 1997; Oesterreicher, 1997). It is assumed that norms which regulate the language, form and content of different types of discourse (say, gnomic poetry or personal letters) may have a huge impact on how our mind organises forms of language which are commonly used in these types of discourse. It will be argued that particular cognitive mechanisms involved in storing proverbs will be activated in response to both the degree of the cultural salience of proverbs and their frequency of use in a given cultural setting.

The article adopts a comparative view by trying to contrast the contexts of medieval/Renaissance and modern England. In Section 2, a brief overview of phraseological and psycholinguistic research on proverbs will be provided. A new model of mental representation of proverbs will be introduced in Section 3: the ‘dual layer storage model of proverb representation’ is a modified version of the “superlemma model of idiom representation” (Sprenger et al., 2006). This novel model of lexical access incorporates a facilitation process in line with the usage-based view (e.g. Bybee, 2013). Section 3.2 also presents corpus results which underpin the hypotheses discussed in Section 3.1.²

Section 4 then turns to the various links between the proverbial genre, discourse traditions, and practices of usage in medieval and modern England. It will be argued that the particular norms and conventions of discourse traditions in the history of English which are connected with the proverbial tradition have an effect on the strength of the representation of proverbs in the mind. The final section provides some reasoning on the wider implications of this study.

2. Proverbs in phraseological and psycholinguistic research

In research, there is no consensus on how to define the proverb (that is ready-made multi-word units such as *Time is money*, *The grass is always greener on the other side*, etc.). The following characteristics of proverbs, however, are commonly agreed upon: They are conventionalised multi-word units that are “equivalent to a sentence”, “have become part of everyday language as an expression of worldly wisdom”,

discussed in view of their implications for the variation and change of the linguistic structure of proverbs (cf. also Lückert, 2018).

2. A corpus (CAEP, *Corpus of American English Proverbs*) was compiled for this project – it includes 4,164 proverb variants (2,191 proverb types) in the cleaned data set and has a size of 2,562 word types and 28,159 word tokens (see Section 3.2 for further information).

and “express generalized experiences or value judgements” (Steyer, 2015, 209–210).³ What is more, proverbs are seen as a predominantly oral phenomenon (cf. Mieder, 2007). The transmission histories of individual proverb items, however, may include both oral and written sources. According to Janz, proverbs have been passed on for centuries from generation to generation first entirely orally in the more distant past and later on in part in the oral mode and in the written mode (1997, 3).

In addition, there is agreement that proverbs are culturally salient (Norrick, 2007, 381; Mieder, 2015) and that they are handed down as part of folkloristic tradition (Mieder, 2007). Their predominantly oral nature is seen as a source for the variability of their structure (Chlosta & Grzybek, 2005; Grzybek, 2012b). This variability can, for example, be observed in related proverb variants of this kind: *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*, *The bad apple doesn't fall far from the tree*, *The bad apple doesn't roll far from the tree*, and, for instance, *The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree*.

The linguistic criteria for defining proverbs do not seem to correspond to how language users perceive this class of multi-word units. It has been observed that in this context no fine distinctions are made between, say, *proverbs*, *sayings* or *slogans* – most language users seem to rely on “the concept *sentence as message*” (cf. Steyer, 2015, 223).

In recent years, paremiological research has begun to focus more on corpus-based approaches. These, however desirable, bring with them a number of challenges. For one thing, the overall size and balance of general language corpora/reference corpora may be lacking (Steyer, 2015, 208). For another, further limitations will have to be confronted when searching corpora: the particular corpus architecture may allow only specific search queries (say a maximum of 5-grams as is true of *Google Books* (American; via BYU) and *Google Books Ngram Viewer*). As a result of which corpus is searched and which search queries are used, the token frequency of proverbs may vary considerably (cf. Steyer, 2015, 216).

As pointed out above, reference corpora are of a questionable representativity. This is why I have chosen to illustrate the rare use of modern English proverbs in their canonical full form with examples from a very large corpus, namely the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA; at present 533,788,932 million words):⁴

3. There is no agreement on whether some characteristics such as ‘used for didactic purposes’ or ‘metaphoric quality’ are to be considered obligatory or optional.

4. The familiarity data in Examples 1 to 3 stem from two surveys which relied on proverb completion tests (Chlosta & Grzybek, 2004, 2005). In these experimental studies, the initial part of the proverb items was given and subjects were required to note down the missing part – for example, *better late* was provided aiming at *Better late than never*.

- (1) *Give credit where credit is due* (COCA 49 hits, 0.09 per mil; familiarity 88.1%;
cf. Chlosta & Grzybek, 2005, 79)
- (2) *Better late than never* (COCA 92 hits, 0.17 per mil; familiarity 100%;
cf. Chlosta & Grzybek, 2004, 41)
- (3) *No news is good news* (COCA 24 hits, 0.05 per mil; familiarity 100%;
cf. Chlosta & Grzybek, 2004, 41)

What is really intriguing may be summed up as follows: we may observe in the data, in general, that proverbs tend to be linguistically complex (cf. Mac Coinnigh, 2015), rather infrequent (cf. Moon, 2007, 1050), and that they may appear familiar to speakers even if they are infrequently used (cf. Grzybek, 2012a, 107). How this discrepancy can possibly be resolved will be discussed in Section 3.1 below.

In psycholinguistic research, it is widely accepted that fixed expressions such as proverbs or idioms are stored in the brain (cf., for example, Honeck, 1997; Horvath & Siloni, 2009, 287). The exact nature of this storage, however, is far from well understood and has been speculated on in diverse forms over the last few decades. Models commonly focus on the comprehension rather than on the production of fixed expressions (Sprenger et al., 2006, 162). These models, however, all try to capture the manner and *locus* of storing fixed expressions and range, for instance, from the configuration hypothesis (e.g. Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988), the head-based storage hypothesis (Horvath & Siloni, 2009), the hybrid model of idiom representation (e.g. Cutting & Bock, 1997), the superlemma model (Sprenger et al., 2006) to the inflationist lexicon hypothesis (Tremblay, 2012).

The focus in research has been on the storage and processing of idioms (e.g. Cutting & Bock, 1997; Sprenger et al., 2006; Horvath & Siloni, 2009; Siyanova-Chanturia et al., 2011). Proverbs as a specific type of fixed expression, however, have not been as widely studied in psycholinguistic research to the present day (for an overview cf. Honeck, 1997, 128 ff.).

3. The dual-layer storage model of proverb representation

3.1 Theoretical discussion

To lay the foundations of discussing which effects discourse traditional norms may have on the mental representation of proverbs we need to explore first how proverbs are stored in the mind in general. For this purpose a novel model will be presented in this section.

In contrast to earlier models of representation which have emphasised the processes involved in the comprehension of proverbs, the model proposed here is

solely meant to describe the processing of proverbs in the context of lexical access (as an early phase of comprehension) as this may make clear how the low token frequency of proverbs may correlate with their linguistic complexity and familiarity. Metaphoric mappings, or, say, analogical processes in the understanding of proverbs are not affected. In this regard, the present model may *complement* earlier models which focus, for example, on analogical mappings in the comprehension of proverbs (such as the “extended conceptual base theory”; cf. Honeck, 1997, 128 ff.). Whether literal and/or figurative meanings are processed simultaneously or in a sequence is not central to my approach – before any further processes may set in, the lexical material needs to be accessed.

As the model proposed here aims at explaining micro-level processes in the context of lexical access, I decided to work with a current model of lexical access in the processing of fixed expressions rather than with models of proverb comprehension which emphasise figurative mappings.⁵ The superlemma model (Sprenger et al., 2006) is an adapted “hybrid model” (Cutting & Bock, 1997). All hybrid models claim that idioms are “unitary” as they are represented by an own lexical entry and, at the same time, they are “compositional” as they have an internal structure with links to simple lemmas in the mental lexicon (cf. Sprenger et al., 2006, 164).

Sprenger et al.’s model, however, modified the earlier hybrid model by adding a further level of representation (the unitary superlemma) on the lemma plane. While the earlier hybrid model required two distinct types of connections – a meaning relationship and an allocation of one element to another (Cutting & Bock, 1997), the superlemma model involves just one type of connection between conceptual and lemma level (a “meaning relationship” and an “element of” relationship”; cf. Sprenger et al., 2006, 175). The superlemma model can, thus, explain both language comprehension (bottom-up) and production (top-down) (cf. Sprenger et al., 2006, 175–176).

The superlemma model needs to be adapted slightly to better represent how lexical access may be organised in the context of processing proverbs. It is my working hypothesis that proverbs also have an entry of their own in the mental lexicon. The dual-layer storage model (which only differs from the superlemma model in the *marking* of lemmas which occur in proverbs) can presumably explain how a low token frequency can correlate with a high level of familiarity in proverbs thanks to a facilitation process on the lemma level as a result of usage (cf. Bybee, 2006). A mark-up – which I would like to label the “p-lexicon mark-up” (p-lexicon for “proverbial lexicon”) – would be attached to salient content words (especially if these are repeated in many familiar, current proverbs).

5. It is assumed that lexical access is a wholly “automatic process” (cf. Honeck, 1997, 154).

These salient content words need not be highly frequent in general language use but should appear with a statistically significant frequency of occurrence in proverbs. A considerable number of lexical items associated with proverbs would, thus, gain a mark-up in the minds of individual language users in accordance with the use of the words in proverbs. Words with a p-lexicon mark-up may be said to facilitate storing, identification, and production of proverbs (the dual-layer storage model of proverb representation is sketched in a general form in Figure 1 below and illustrated with actual examples in Figure 2 further below).

The p-lexicon mark-up may, therefore, be considered a back-up system or secondary reservoir as proverbs can rely – to a degree – on a mutual strengthening of their representation in the mind. When a language user is exposed to an individual proverb (e.g. *Mind your own business*, see Figure 2 below) the lexis in this proverb (among others *business*) will at the same time impact the memory representation of further proverbs the language user knows which also include the lexical item(s) in question (e.g. *Business before pleasure* or *There’s no business like show business*, and many more).

It stands to reason to assume that there are two types of items in the p-lexicon. We may, firstly, mention salient words which are used very frequently in proverbs, that is high-frequency keywords (for instance *life* which seems to be a central word in numerous modern English proverbs such as *You can get all A’s and still flunk life*, *Grab life by the balls*, or *Live life to the fullest* and many more).⁶

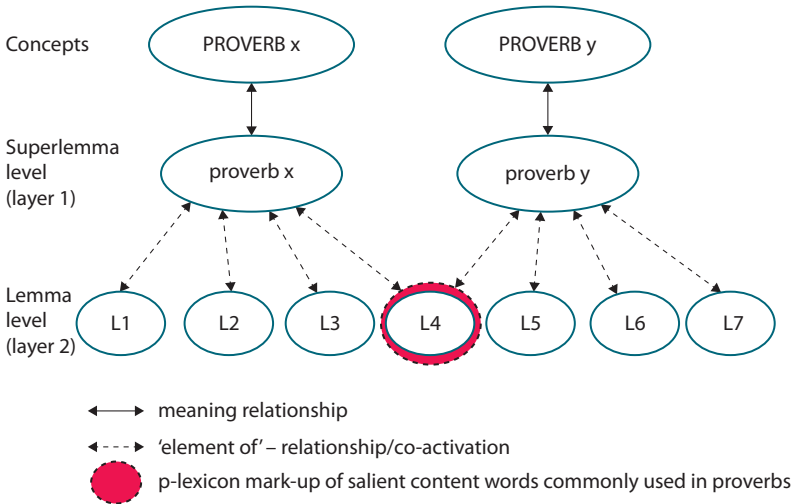


Figure 1. Dual-layer storage model of proverb representation, adapted from Sprenger et al.’s (2006, 176) superlemma model

6. In CAEP there are 117 tokens of *life*, in COCA 436,096 tokens. The log likelihood value for the frequency of occurrence of *life* in CAEP compared to COCA is 192.6 (which is a highly significant over-use in CAEP at $p < 0.001$).

Secondly, there are salient words (often fossilised entities) which are used extremely infrequently in everyday speech but which perform an important role in a (number of) proverb(s) and which are characterised by a high contextual predictability. Such low-frequency keywords may be illustrated by the example of *bygone* in the proverb *Let bygones be bygones* which is still current today.⁷ Both types make proverbs more memorable.

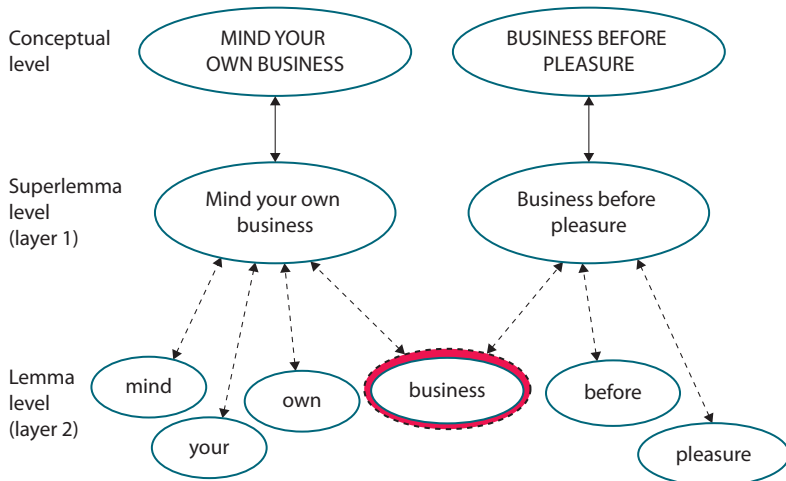


Figure 2. The representation of the proverbs *Mind your own business* and *Business before pleasure* on the basis of the dual-layer storage model of proverb representation

As such keywords are strongly associated with the proverb as a category, they are probably best suited to prime individual proverbs in which they are used. This may mean that keywords with a higher log likelihood value for an over-representation in *CAEP* in my study are better suited for allusions to and modifications of proverbs than is true of lexical material which is not as strongly tied to the proverbial genre.⁸

The increased memorability of proverbs may stem from a “rescaling mechanism” which has already been discussed in psycholinguistic research in the context of other linguistic entities (cf. Guttentag & Carroll, 1998, 956). Rescaling in proverbs may be described along these lines: language users are sensitive to the

7. The log likelihood value for the frequency of occurrence of *bygone(s)* (2 tokens in *CAEP* vs. 193 tokens in *COCA*) is 17.1 ($p < 0.001$).

8. This may be illustrated by the noun *customer* with a token number of 3 in *CAEP* as compared to 45,538 tokens in *COCA* (insignificant over-use in *CAEP* at LL 0.14 $p > 0.1$). Cf. Naciscione who has studied allusions to fixed expressions (including proverbs) and points to the “image-bearing constituents” of the Phraseological Unit (PU) which “evoke the whole PU in the reader’s mind” (2010, 70). These image-bearing constituents seem to correspond to the keywords discussed in the present study.

low frequency of proverbs (cf. Siyanova-Chanturia et al., 2011 on idioms), they acknowledge the (high) cultural salience of proverbs, and, last but not least, they adjust their attention/response criteria. The idea that response criteria may be adjusted as a function of how important a piece of information is rated is by no means new in linguistic research (e.g. Schmidt, 2010, 212).

3.2 Corpus results

Results from a corpus analysis which aimed at generating a lexical profile of proverbs suggest that there are indeed words which are strongly tied to the proverb as a category (the keywords discussed in Section 3.1). The corpus – *CAEP* (*Corpus of American English Proverbs*) which was compiled for this project consists of 4,164 modern American English proverbs in the cleaned data set which have been annotated with data on token frequency from online databases and reference corpora (such as *COCA*) and survey data on familiarity.⁹ *CAEP*, which was compiled in a spreadsheet version with Microsoft Excel, has a size of 28,159 word tokens and 2,562 word types.

For the present article a sample of $N = 347$ word lemmas from *CAEP* have been scrutinised for their contextual predictability on the basis of comparing the frequencies of occurrence of the word lemmas in *CAEP* to *COCA* as normative corpus (observed and expected frequencies) and calculating the log likelihood values as a “goodness-of-fit” test. For the analysis of *CAEP* the concordance software *antconc3.2.4w* was used. It seemed reasonable to restrict the analysis of the lexical profile to ‘content words’ only which (also, and sometimes exclusively) appear in the most frequent and familiar proverbs of *CAEP* (this sub-set includes 347 content word lemmas across 247 proverbs – 5.9% of the cleaned data set).

The results suggest that 59.4% of the lemmas ($N = 206$) are significantly over-represented in *CAEP*, that 24.2% of the lemmas ($N = 84$) are insignificantly over-represented, and that 16.4% of the lemmas ($N = 57$) are under-represented (including $N = 14$ (4%) significant under-representations).¹⁰ These results underpin

9. The decision to work with modern American English proverbs is linked to the ready availability of data on American English proverbs (e.g. Mieder’s extensive collections and also current surveys on familiarity) and the sparsity of data for British English proverbs.

10. Whether these (candidates for) keywords differ in how well they prime related proverbs was tested in the experimental part of the project in February 2018. Data from $N = 97$ native-speaker informants was collected in the Boland Lab at the University of Michigan, USA (self-paced reading and memory tasks). Preliminary results reveal that keywords do indeed facilitate processing of proverbs and that they contribute to a strengthened memory representation of these multi-word units (cf. paper given at the EUROPHRAS conference on September 11, 2018, in Białystok, Poland).

the assumption that a number of content words are strongly associated with the proverbial tradition. These findings for modern American English proverbs can – with some reliability – be transferred to an appraisal of the historical context.¹¹

Table 1. Top twenty lemmas of CAEP keywords (sub-set of highly frequent/familiar proverbs) ranked by log likelihood

	Word lemma list (cf. CAEP)	POS (cf. OED)	Of CAEP	Of COCA	Log likelihood value	Critical value LL (DF 1)
1	<i>never</i>	adv.	205	343686	622.20	$p < 0.001$
2	<i>like</i>	adj./adv./ conj./prep.	91	52032	461.31	$p < 0.001$
3	<i>there</i>	adv.	330	1463606	455.27	$p < 0.001$
4	<i>good</i>	adj./n./adv.	165	486731	336.44	$p < 0.001$
5	<i>better</i>	n./adj./adv.	99	144722	325.37	$p < 0.001$
6	<i>thing</i>	n.	161	538926	294.31	$p < 0.001$
7	<i>man</i>	n.	157	543627	278.28	$p < 0.001$
8	<i>God</i>	n.	48	19513	275.21	$p < 0.001$
9	<i>dog</i>	n.	65	69394	251.77	$p < 0.001$
10	<i>best</i>	n./adj./adv.	84	198438	203.40	$p < 0.001$
11	<i>life</i>	n.	117	436096	193.40	$p < 0.001$
12	<i>always</i>	adv.	87	238216	188.42	$p < 0.001$
13	<i>get</i>	v.	209	1317745	182.36	$p < 0.001$
14	<i>bad</i>	adj./n.	59	111474	166.29	$p < 0.001$
15	<i>make</i>	v.	173	1133929	142.05	$p < 0.001$
16	<i>fool</i>	n./adj.	23	8748	134.87	$p < 0.001$
17	<i>every</i>	adj./pron.	77	283478	128.81	$p < 0.001$
18	<i>love</i>	n.	45	88541	123.55	$p < 0.001$
19	<i>count</i>	v.	32	37191	118.84	$p < 0.001$
20	<i>money</i>	n.	63	213246	114.01	$p < 0.001$

4. Proverbs, discourse traditions, and practices of usage

Having discussed a general model of representation of proverbs in Section 3, we may now turn to a consideration of how exactly cultural factors, or more precisely discourse traditional norms, may shape the storage of proverbs in the mind.

The notion of discourse traditions (e.g. Oesterreicher, 1997; Koch, 1997) is useful when exploring how proverbs are embedded in a given cultural context. It goes without saying that proverbs can only be studied if we consider the types of

11. Cf. the “uniformitarian principle”.

discourse they are typically used in. Discourse traditions are understood as sets of more or less fixed norms and conventions for the production and reception of discourse which are specific to a given cultural setting and which may undergo change over time. There are norms and conventions on the planes of form, language and content that are fixed to varying degrees and find expression both in the production and reception of discourse (cf. Oesterreicher, 1997, 29–30).

We may consider the proverbial genre an important discourse tradition in its own right (for medieval England cf. Schaefer, 1992; Shippey, 1994; Aurich, 2012a; for modern times cf. Mieder, 2012) and, at the same time, a (key) component of other discourse traditions (such as medieval wisdom literature, cf. Hill, 2005, or, say, modern newspaper commentaries, cf. Fiedler, 2007).

In Anglo-Saxon England the norms of the proverbial discourse tradition would, for instance, favour proverbs which are alliterative (plane of form, cf., for example, *A mæg God wyrcan wunder æfter wundre, wuldres Hyrde* in *Beowulf*, lines 930b–931), composed in vernacular language (plane of language), and which rate age and wisdom highly (plane of content, cf. Shippey, 1994). Modern newspaper commentaries (as an example of a discourse tradition) may exploit proverbs (and other fixed expressions) in prominent locations (e.g. headlines, cf. Fiedler, 2007).

The status of proverbs (that is both their overall frequency of use and their cultural importance as a discourse tradition) has mainly two effects, namely the manifestation of the rescaling mechanism and the manifestation of the back-up system (p-lexicon mark-up). Discourse traditional norms and conventions may exert immense influence in this context. They may shape the mode of how items are stored, that is which mechanisms are activated. At the same time, discourse traditions have an effect on the *extent* to which particular mechanisms are manifested. This influence on the mental representation of proverbs comes about by virtue of whether and how strongly the use of proverbs is accepted, or even required, in a larger number of discourse traditions which can be considered important for a wider language community (to rule out peripheral traditions which only reflect on very limited discourse communities).¹²

Frequency of usage can explain how lemmas gain the p-lexicon mark-up – if (on an unconscious level) a language user repeatedly finds a particular word in the context of proverbs, the memory representation of the word may acquire this information. Bybee notes that “memory storage for linguistic experience includes detailed information about the tokens that have been processed, including their form *and the contexts in which they were used*” (2013, 52; my emphasis). Such words may then, with repeated instances of an active rescaling mechanism in the

12. For example, the various important types of discourse brought together under the label of “wisdom literature” (Becker, 1975; Hill, 2005) for the medieval and Renaissance periods.

processing of proverbs, acquire what we may call a “proverbial ring” or a taste of authoritative, traditional speech without the language user becoming aware of this consciously.

In usage-based research, a number of effects have been discussed which can be correlated with varying degrees of frequency (cf. for instance Bybee, 2006). Can similar effects be identified in the context of the proverbial discourse tradition? To begin with, we need to distinguish here the level of the superlemma from the level of the p-lexicon mark-up. The level of the superlemma correlates with the individual proverb. On this level, therefore, it is very unlikely that a very high frequency of use can be achieved. The level of the p-lexicon mark-up correlates with the lexis used in a more or less high number of individual proverbs. A considerably higher frequency of use may, therefore, be reached on this level. In the following, I will briefly outline my assumptions on how usage-based effects relate to proverbs.

Firstly, an effect similar to the “reducing effect” can be found on the level of the superlemma of individual proverbs: in language variation, well known proverbs may occur often in a truncated form of the canonical full form especially in speech (*Too many cooks* for *Too many cooks spoil the broth*). In language change, frequent proverbs may be shortened in their canonical form by elliptical processes or by the introduction of structural formulae such as “better *x* than *y*” (cf. Aurich, 2012a). On the level of the p-lexicon, it may be very tentatively assumed that the reducing effect may bring about a mark-up of content rather than function words for the sake of economy.

Secondly, let us consider the “conserving effect”. Bybee describes this effect as follows: “frequency strengthens the memory representations of words or phrases, making them easier to access whole and thus less likely to be subject to analogical reformation” (2006, 715). The level of individual superlemmas is not affected by this effect very strongly. Individual proverbs are too infrequent to allow this. Nonetheless, our intuition is certainly right in assuming that very frequently used proverbs are recalled faster and more easily than is true of very infrequently used ones. The shared lexis, however, occurs more frequently and gains the p-lexicon mark-up with time. Their storage as a cluster is strengthened and builds a comparatively stable entity.¹³ Even if a language user is not exposed to a proverb with a particular word with that mark-up for some time, the mark-up will linger on in his memory to be reinforced anew once the language user is finally confronted with the use of the item again. Thus, a strong member of the p-lexicon can withstand longer periods of time when its representation is not repeatedly impacted.

13. Cf. “exemplar theory”; see Bybee, 2006 on clusters in general; Aurich, 2012a, 2012b and 2013 on proverb clusters.

Thirdly, the effect of “autonomy” needs to be evaluated. In this context, morphologically complex forms are thought to “lose their internal structure as they become autonomous from etymologically related forms” (Bybee, 2006, 715). With respect to superlemmas of individual proverbs and the p-lexicon mark-up, there does not seem to be a comparable effect as, even in Bybee’s (2006) study, only strings of extremely high frequency can be affected. Even words with p-lexicon mark-up would probably not occur with a sufficient frequency across different, commonly used proverbs to allow the effect to have any impact.

In the following, it will be discussed which implications may arise from two different settings: Firstly, the situation in medieval and Renaissance England – the “golden age of the proverb” (Mieder, 2012, 13) – shall be outlined briefly (see also the adapted model in Figure 3), then, for the sake of comparison, the situation in modern times will be considered (cf. also Figure 4).

Studying historical English texts from the medieval/Renaissance context we may encounter various peculiarities which are difficult to make sense of from a modern perspective. The use of proverbs in a variety of discourse traditions, for example, seems to differ notably from our modern practices both in view of quantity and quality.

For one thing, proverbs seem to have been used more frequently in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and, for another, they appear to have been used in a wider range of contexts in a serious, straightforward manner (cf. Aurich, 2012a). The actual frequency of use cannot be reliably established (historical corpora are too small and do not cover everyday spoken language use). Indirect evidence, however, comes from diverse sources: e.g. proverb pictures which can be found from the Middle Ages on up to the twentieth century (Mieder, 2012, 59) or from metalinguistic comments in handbooks of rhetoric which recommended the use of proverbs for amplification and for lending authority to an argument (Doyle, 2007, 1079).¹⁴

Proverbs were, first and foremost in the Middle Ages, used seriously to give authority to discourse (for “didactic and moralistic purposes”, cf. Mieder, 2012, 71) or as guidelines for the illiterate (on weather, planting crops, medical issues etc., see Taylor, 1985). This points to a different standing of the proverbial tradition when compared to modern times in which proverbs are at best used in creative language use and in which their authority is not taken for granted (Mieder, 2012, 71; Hill, 2005, 169).

Textual examples from history show that the spontaneous co-activation of proverbs on the basis of individual words seems to have been common in the

14. Cf. also the wealth of proverbs in individual texts: The 13th-century debate poem *The Owl and the Nightingale*, for example, contains 28 proverbs (see Sauer, 1983).

medieval period. This can apparently no longer be observed in modern times. Today, spontaneous co-activation appears to require longer sequences – truncated proverb forms of two or more words (cf. Fiedler, 2007; e.g. *An apple a day* rather than solely *apple* for *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*). This co-activation related to individual keywords plays an important role in purposefully crafted allusions to proverbs and – even more so – in what Shippey (1994) has called “gnomic key-word miscomprehension”: an individual word triggers in the mind of the author or translator a related proverb or even a group of related proverbs which were then included in the text even in contexts which seem ill-fitting from a modern perspective.

Allusions to proverbs seem to have been common throughout the history of English (cf. Naciscione, 2010). In such contexts, it becomes apparent that individual words – the keywords discussed in Section 3.1 above – which are used to make the allusion work out need to be tied to the proverb very strongly (otherwise they would fail to call to mind the whole unit). In Example 4 only two content words (*brent* and *fires*) from the proverb *A burnt child dreads the fire* were considered sufficient by Chaucer to evoke the whole proverb.

- (4) O! fy, for shame! they that han been *brent*,
Allas! can they nat flee the *fires* heete?

(*The Canterbury Tales*, VIII, G, 1407–1408; cf. Naciscione, 2010, 109)

Besides purposefully crafted literary allusions historical texts (often from translation contexts) can be found in which individual words in the original evoked (a) related vernacular proverb(s) which then became part of (written) language production – probably in a rather unplanned manner. This practice may indicate that proverbs were so prominent on the minds of language users, so strong in memory representation that they easily crept into language production, as it were. Discourse traditional norms of the period favoured the use of proverbs, so that this practice must have seemed acceptable to language users.

Examples 5 and 6 from a translation context may nicely illustrate this phenomenon. In this set of examples from the *Dicts of Cato*, there is a clear discrepancy between the Latin exemplar (cf. Example 6, *Disticha Catonis*, Distich I, 38) which reads *Maxima enim est hominum semper patientia virtus* (‘for patience is the greatest virtue of men’) and the Old English translation (cf. Example 5, *Dicts of Cato*, Dict no. 23) *geðyld bið middes eades* (‘patience is a part of happiness’) (cf. Cox, 1972).

- (5) *Forbær oft ðæt þu eaðe wrecan mæge; geðyld bið middes eades*

‘Often forebear what you can easily avenge; patience is a part of happiness’

(cf. Shippey, 1994, 300)

- (6) *Quem superare potes interdum vince ferendo; Maxima enim est hominum semper patientia virtus*
 ‘Sometimes win over by tolerance one you can conquer; for patience is the greatest virtue of men’
 (cf. Shippey, 1994, 300)

The translator would surely have been able to translate his Latin exemplar more closely – instead he included a vernacular proverb which happens to be recorded in the collection of the *Durham Proverbs* (no. 1). The link Shippey observed in this odd coupling is based on the equivalence of *patientia* (‘patience’) and *geðýld* (‘patience’) (cf. Shippey, 1994, 300).

In medieval and Renaissance England, numerous discourse traditions allowed, or even required, the use of proverbs (especially the various types of wisdom literature, see Hill, 2005). Proverbs seem to have been used very frequently and in many contexts in a serious manner (see above). As a result of high levels of repetition, the p-lexicon mark-up may have affected numerous words. The mark-up, what is more, might have been very strong thanks to both a high frequency of use and a high number of known proverbs.

It may be assumed that the usage-based effects discussed above, namely the conserving effect and the reducing effect, were of some impact in the medieval period. The conserving effect probably made recall of individual proverbs quicker and easier (let us recollect Shippey’s, 1994 observations on “gnomic key-word miscomprehension”). On the level of the p-lexicon mark-up, a large cluster may have formed easily in the minds of average language users given the widespread use of proverbs and their cultural salience. This large and persistent cluster of mark-up would have contributed to processing speed and correctness. It may, furthermore, be held responsible for some of the structural variability of medieval English proverbs (cf. Aurich, 2012a). This is because of the internal structure of the mark-up cluster where (near-)synonymous lemmas would be linked quite strongly allowing that similar p-lexicon words may be swapped easily in proverb use.

The workings of the reducing effect on the plane of language variation are hard to assess. Whether or not truncated forms of very common proverbs were often used in speech can hardly be decided solely on the basis of textual remains at hand. In Aurich (2012a), I observed an overall tendency towards a shortening of proverbs in the history of English. The tentative assumption that, generally, content rather than function words acquire the mark-up will be tested in the larger project this article is part of.

Let us now briefly appraise the modern English context (see Figure 4). Proverbs in the modern Western world are, on the whole, no longer appreciated that much as a discourse tradition in their own right or as a typical component of other discourse traditions (cf. Honeck, 1997, 252). The proverbial tradition has been widely called into question and is, in popular culture, often even parodied (cf. the usage of anti-proverbs discussed, for example, in Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999).

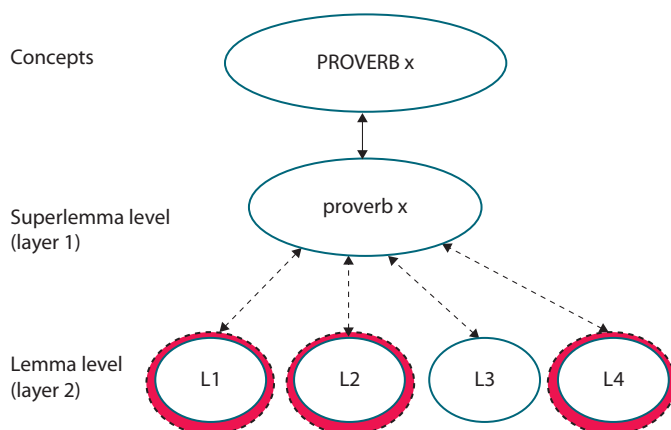


Figure 3. Storage of proverbs in contexts where the proverbial discourse tradition is highly valued (e.g. medieval England)

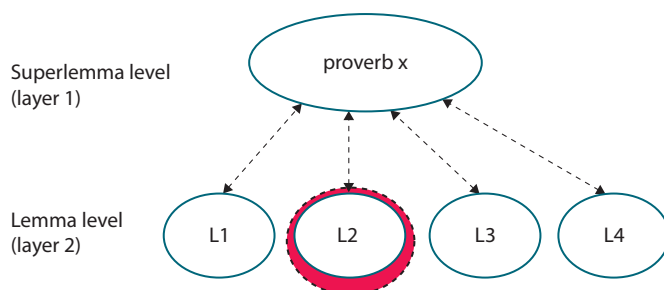


Figure 4. Storage of proverbs in contexts where the proverbial discourse tradition is not valued strongly (e.g. modern England)

It is highly unlikely nowadays that language users will resort to proverbs to lend authority to their arguments (cf. Mieder, 2012, 71; Hill, 2005, 169).¹⁵ Particular types of discourse today may allow the (sparing) use of proverbs, but they usually do not require it. Modern discourse traditions which draw quite heavily on proverbs are, for instance songs of the blues and country and western genres (cf. Doyle, 2007, 1079). Journalistic texts may also exploit proverbs for various purposes (cf. Fiedler, 2007).

As a result of an infrequent exposure to proverbs the individual superlemmas of proverbs tend to be stronger than any p-lexicon mark-up which may emerge. In general, the p-lexicon mark-up tends to be comparatively weak (or even absent). Language users are confronted with a rather low frequency of use and are

15. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting a context in which proverbs are still used to expert control today, namely parent-child interaction.

familiar with a comparatively low number of proverbs. This may find expression in production errors, in general (such as an involuntary incomplete rendering of the proverb), and proverb blends, in particular (on idiom blends see Cutting & Bock, 1997). The unplanned mixture of proverbs in language use can be ascribed to the weakness of the mental representation of the superlemmas of proverbs and their storage in clusters. All in all, we may assume that – for most language users today – the mental representation of proverbs appears to be weaker than is true for the medieval period.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that discourse traditional norms and conventions may shape the representation of linguistic entities in our mind, or on a more general level, that cultural factors may shape linguistic representation. This may seem a truism – too obvious to deserve any attention. If we consider the implications, however, of *how exactly* discourse traditional norms and conventions may shape the representation of linguistic entities in our mind, the reasoning may no longer appear so pointless: the norms and conventions may shape the mode of how items are stored, that is which mechanisms are activated. At the same time, discourse traditions have an effect on the extent to which particular mechanisms are manifested.

This paper, thus, does not hold that there are *fundamental* differences in our mind's organisation of language. It is assumed here, rather, that the differences we seem to observe are a matter of *degree* and of whether particular mechanisms (in this study the rescaling mechanism) are activated in the first place.

For this discussion of the effects of discourse traditional norms I have presented a new model of mental representation with respect to a specific kind of fixed expression – proverbs. A further aim has been to explain likely differences in the overall strength of their memory representation in the history of English. It needs to be borne in mind that these conventionalised sayings appear to be characterised by a low token frequency if we rely on language corpora (see Section 2).¹⁶

I do not want to argue that the back-up system in the mental lexicon described here is the most important, or even only, factor that increases memorability. Proverbs are surely memorable on account of striking metaphors (e.g. Lewandowska & Antos, 2015) and various stylistic features (such as alliteration

16. It is very likely that corpus evidence fails to realistically represent the actual frequency of use of proverbs – given that not all relevant kinds of communication may be included there (say private conversation within a family). The overall frequency of use of individual proverbs, however, would, in all probability, still be very low, even if it could be calculated soundly.

or rhyme). The back-up system discussed in this article may, however, contribute to an increased memorability to some extent.

Proverbs survive best in a group: the repeated exposure to an individual proverb in language production or reception enhances this proverb's individual memory representation. The repeated exposure to various proverbs enhances also the storage of lexical material shared by these groups of proverb items. Words which, with time, have acquired the p-lexicon mark-up (cf. Section 3.1) sound authoritative, or may be said to have a "proverbial ring" to them (on an unconscious level).¹⁷ In usage-based theory, it is commonly assumed that detailed information, say on form and on the typical contexts of use, is included in the memory representation of linguistic experience (cf. Bybee, 2013, 52). It does not seem too far-fetched to me to assume that this is true of proverbs as a particular type of context.

With respect to the present study, a brief glance at some problematic issues is surely in order. The problems lie, in particular, in the reliability of the data in view of the cultural importance and frequency of use of proverbs (this applies especially strongly to the medieval period).

A further limitation lies in the manifestation of the back-up system: the p-lexicon mark-up may differ across different individuals – even within the same language community at one point in time. And this is, in all probability, true of both language users from the medieval and the modern period (cf. Steyer, 2015, 207 on the subjectivity of proverb knowledge across different speakers).

The empirical evidence on the assumed p-lexicon mark-up is, at present, still limited to corpus results and preliminary results of the experimental study (cf. Section 3.2). Last but not least, it is not entirely certain whether a mark-up of the kind proposed in this article would be restricted to proverbs or whether similar sentence-like multi-word units may show the same effects (see Section 2).

Past research has already adopted interdisciplinary perspectives bringing together, for instance, historical linguistics and cognitive linguistics (an important line of research has looked into grammaticisation processes, cf. e.g. Bybee, 2006 who has analysed language change processes against the backdrop of usage-based theory). Further interdisciplinary work may, however, try to combine even further, more disparate strands of research (cf., for example, Schaefer, 1997), say historical linguistics, medieval studies and experimental psycholinguistics. It is my conviction that, indeed, psycholinguistic research can benefit from research on the history of the English language (in the case of the present article with regard to observations on the historical use of proverbs that may reflect on their representation in the mind) – and vice versa (in providing models that may help to explain language change realised in proverbs, for example).

17. This "proverbial ring" may be exploited for allusions (cf. Example 4) or even influence our language production involuntarily (Examples 5 and 6).

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Testing a stylometric tool in the study of Middle English documentary texts

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This article is about testing Stylo, a stylometric script for R, in the study of Middle English documents. The main aim of the paper is to be able to discriminate between Middle English documents and document groups with the help of an automatic classification script. The basic assumption is that stylometric tools, and Stylo in particular, may provide new insights into affinity between Middle English texts. In other words, stylometric tools in general help to identify text groups the members of which have something in common in their parentage; Stylo for R is no exception in this.

Keywords: stylometry, Middle English, corpus linguistics, unsupervised analysis, spelling variation, genre, text categories, documents

1. Introduction

Stylometric analysis, or authorship attribution on texts has been practiced for a long time; of late, automated and semi-automated processes in the same vein have become commonplace (Juola, 2008, 235). Stylometry is of interest to anyone faced with a text written by “Anonymous”; however, stylometry may also yield results in areas of textual studies where the common denominator is not necessarily an author, but the purpose for writing, or the geographical origin. This area is less studied, even though the effect of dialect or genre has been acknowledged by many a stylometrist (e.g. Juola, 2008; Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2014).¹

This paper investigates the usability of Stylo, a stylometric package written for R (Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2015) in the study of Middle English diatopical

1. Eder (2011, 101) also acknowledges the effect of genre, gender, etc. on the variant of language attested to by a text, even if he thinks that the individual idiolect is the most pronounced factor detectable in variation.

and functional variation. The aim is to test the potential of character n-grams in mapping interesting groups of texts in advance of in-detail, traditional analysis of texts, based on the geographical or other variation of the spelling.

The material used in this study is *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD), version 2015.1, containing English documentary texts (legal instruments, administrative writings, and personal letters) from the period between 1400–1525. The analysis will be based on the extraction and comparison of character n-grams,² the assumption being that each Middle English text of the defined period will attest to a unique set of n-grams. Such unique sets are also assumed to be more similar among texts that share a similar variant of Middle English, which is either diatopically or functionally conditioned (Jensen, 2010; Stenroos & Thengs, 2012). In the analysis of the data, the choice of Stylo functions has to be tested as Stylo provides several approaches for the analysis of n-grams. In this paper, multi-dimensional scaling, consensus tree, and dendrogram approaches will be used (Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2014; cf. Embleton, Uritescu & Wheeler, 2009). The expected results will show different groupings of texts, and some of them will be conditioned by the purpose of writing or other extra-textual variables, not only by the location of composition.

2. Theoretical background

Middle English spelling variation has been the object of dialectal studies for a long time, and until recently the approach that employs the concept of “linguistic space” has prevailed, which provides a relational map of attested spelling variants, but does not pin-point the text on a location on the map (LALME; Williamson, 2000, 144–146). Of late, also the real, absolute linguistic continuum of medieval England has been raised as an object of interest, in particular to answer questions that are related to the actual provenance of the extant texts (Stenroos & Thengs, 2012). *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD), compiled at the University of Stavanger, is aimed to answer questions of the latter type. The current study draws the material from MELD, but adopts a computational approach more akin to the approach of LALME, thus the study is situated in the middle ground between the two.

Stylometry usually takes into account several linguistic features in the analysis of the affinity between texts. Often the prevailing question is “Who is the author

2. A character n-gram is formed by *n* consecutive characters in order of appearance, i.e. a character trigram is an n-gram of three characters. To exemplify this, the word “shelf” will give us the trigrams SHE, HEL, and ELF.

of so-and-so text?”, even though stylometry can be applied in other questions as well. These questions can address the identification of a dialect, the relative age of texts, or the genre of a text. These possible questions also entail that a stylometric system benefits from a design that can disregard the other possible variables in the analysis (Juola, 2008, 246).

2.1 N-grams in the analysis of Middle English

The analytic unit in stylometric analyses is often a word n-gram, as it combines information from both the author’s syntactic and lexical usage (Juola, 2008, 265). This is not a viable choice for an unlemmatised Middle English corpus, due to the spelling variation of Middle English. The common attempt to catch morphologically related words by using the word stems only in a stylometric analysis (Juola, 2008, 266) will also fail in Middle English as also word stems are affected by spelling variation.

Earlier literature has recorded an extensive debate of the use of words and characters³ as the basis of n-grams in authorship attribution (Hoover, 2002, 2003, 2012; Koppel et al., 2009; Stamatatos, 2009; Eder, 2011; Alexis et al., 2014). If one treats style as an idiosyncratic manifestation of linguistic elements (syllables, morphemes, and words), character n-grams have little to offer. Nevertheless, Eder (2013) argues for the usefulness and accuracy of character n-grams with “dirty” corpora, i.e. with corpora that contain a lot of spelling variation, due to e.g. sub-standard optical character recognition in corpus compilation, or other reasons (Juola, 2008, 285). Thus the current article argues that character n-grams may be useful in the analysis of Middle English texts as well, which are riddled with spelling variation. The current approach provides an unsupervised investigation of Middle English spelling variation. The result of the analysis is the “spelling fingerprint” of individual texts and their similarity to other such “fingerprints”.

The investigation of “spelling fingerprints” resembles a paternity test based on a DNA analysis in that what is calculated is the likelihood of two or more texts belonging in the same text “family”. As in a DNA analysis, also in the analysis carried out with Stylo there is a lot of irrelevant code, either something that is too common to discriminate between texts, or too rare to link them. This requires defining the margins of investigation within which the method is most effective, and that requires plenty of testing. This type of exploratory analysis was envisioned also by Juola (2008, 318) in his discussion of the different methods of stylometric analysis.

3. A character n-gram is a string of letter places in text. A character 3-gram of letter places formed at the break of the words “FIT TECHNIQUE” could be e.g. IT_, T_T, or _TH, the underscore marking a space.

3. Material: A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents

The material for this study is drawn from *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (henceforth MELD), which is being compiled at the University of Stavanger. It contains documentary texts from 1400 to 1525. The version used for this study is 2015.1, consisting of 1,003 localizable scribal documents, and c. 436,000 words (MELD). Localizable documents either indicate the provenance of the document in the document text, or provide enough information about the provenance through the use of personal and place names to make locating the place of origin by some certainty possible (Stenroos & Thengs, 2012).

MELD was started as a resource to help answer the question “What was actually produced in a given place?”, by way of types of texts and linguistic variants of medieval English (Stenroos & Thengs, 2012). As such it is not contrary, but complementary to LALME, which provides a reconstructed linguistic continuum⁴ based on the linguistic similarities of texts. Thus MELD is intended for research questions that are not possible to be studied through the LALME methodology.

4. Method

The analysis is based on the extraction of character n-grams and the comparison of the n-gram standard scores. The choice of character n-grams as the object of study is based on the following assumptions: (1) Any Middle English text of the defined period attests to a unique set of character n-grams. (2) Such unique sets are more similar among texts that share a similar variant of Middle English, conditioned either diatopically or otherwise (Jensen, 2010; Stenroos & Thengs, 2012). (3) Documents carry somewhat restricted vocabulary, which may enrich the occurrence of certain spelling forms, and thus also the occurrence of certain character n-grams, which makes them analytically a reasonable choice. (4) Documents are more homogeneous with other documents written for the same purpose, i.e. the structure of agreements, grants, leases etc. would have followed a more or less similar pattern. Therefore occurrence of the same lexical items in documents for similar purposes is more likely than in texts from more varied genres.

Stylo (Eder, Kestemont & Rybicki; currently maintained by Eder) is a script for R, intended primarily for identifying the author of a text, texts, or passages of a text. The power of Stylo is in the algorithms that recurse the input data several times in

4. The current study acknowledges the complexity of the concept “reconstructed linguistic continuum”, but the discussion of the concept is not in the scope of this article.

order to find true links between texts, and in the strong visualisation of data. The recursive nature of the algorithms makes the script look for links between texts, but it does not establish the link before it has been corroborated several times by other similarities between the same texts (Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2016, 112–117). The visualisation of the results provides the user with a selection of diagrams that describe the relative distance of texts in a 2-dimensional space (Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2013, 6).

In addition to the figures, Stylo provides the user with results in word lists (organised according to frequency), logfiles that record the texts' potential for textual affinity, and tables of z-scores (standard scores). The absolute value of a z-score represents the distance between the raw score and the population mean in units of the standard deviation: the z-score is negative when the raw score is below the mean, and positive when above the mean (Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2013, 4, 6).

In authorship attribution, one often looks for the unique “fingerprint” of the author through a complex preprocessing of the texts studied: normalization, tokenization, POS tagging, lemmatization, syntactic parsing, and named entity recognition are processes that often take place prior to the stylometric analysis proper (Tanguy et al., 2014). With Stylo, the process is mostly unassisted: the script requires text files, either in ASCII or UTF8 format, but the rest of the analysis can be run without further preprocessing of the texts.⁵

In the analysis, Stylo first creates a list of all the unique words or n-grams in the corpus, with frequencies per individual text. The frequencies are then normalized to z-scores, which are fed to various multivariate analyses (e.g. cluster analysis, multidimensional scaling, or principal components analysis, according to the scholar's choices). In the end, Stylo will produce graphs that represent the similarity or relative distance between the corpus texts. (Eder, Rybicki & Kestemont, 2013, 4, 6)

4.1 Stylo and Middle English

Stylometric analysis has been applied on Middle English texts before, e.g. in an authorship attribution contest on identifying the letters by Margaret Paston, John Paston II, John Paston III, and Agnes Paston (Juola, 2008, 289–290), or in an authorship attribution study on Middle English *Pearl* poems (McColly & Weier, 1983), but this is the first attempt at distinguishing between Middle English dialects through an unsupervised stylometric computational method. Stylo itself has been used to analyse historical texts before (e.g. Kestemont, Moens & Deploige, 2015),

5. Stylo does rely on the tokenization of texts, but it is a function embedded in the script.

and it has been used even on early phases of English (Evans' 2016 study on the style and identity of in the letters and prose of Queen Katherine Parr and Princess Elizabeth), but so far never before on Middle English texts.

As has already been mentioned, Stylo compares either the z-scores of word n-grams per text, or z-scores of character n-grams per text with each other. As Stylo was not developed for use with the historical variants of English, it is relevant to ask whether Stylo is suited for the character n-gram analysis of Middle English texts. The spelling in Late Middle English texts (c. 1350–1500) shows diatopically conditioned variation: this is the basis of Middle English dialectology as we know it (LALME).

Diatopically conditioned variation in spelling entails that the lemma of any lexical item is necessarily lengthy if all the dialect areas are accounted for, but a lemma per one lexical item per one distinct area or one distinct writer/author is usually limited to only a few spelling variants, even only one. Thus it is understandable that the first research question that arose in the course of this paper was “Can Stylo group texts from one dialectal area together?”

Some of the documents in MELD are very short, at times just a few words, and this is problematic for the analysis.⁶ As the analysis is based on the extraction and comparison of character n-grams and their standard scores, the character n-grams of a longer text will become overrepresented in the corpus, mostly due to the idiosyncratic nature of spelling variation: many spelling forms, even if they are frequent in the corpus population, may only appear in one single, lengthy text. Therefore, for analytical purposes, a further selection from the MELD texts was made (see the following section).

5. Analysis

Stylo provides several analytical algorithms and graph types to choose from. In the current exploratory analysis both Burrow's and Eder's Delta, and Cosine distance measures will be used. The graph types tried are multi-dimensional scaling, dendrogram and consensus tree.

6. Another earlier identified problem affecting stylometric analyses that can be anticipated is the potential imbalance of any historical corpus (cf. Eder, 2015b). Even if the compilation process of a historical corpus aims at a representative sample of dialect areas, genres, and other textual factors, the fact that only extant texts can be sampled delimits and guides the corpus compilation.

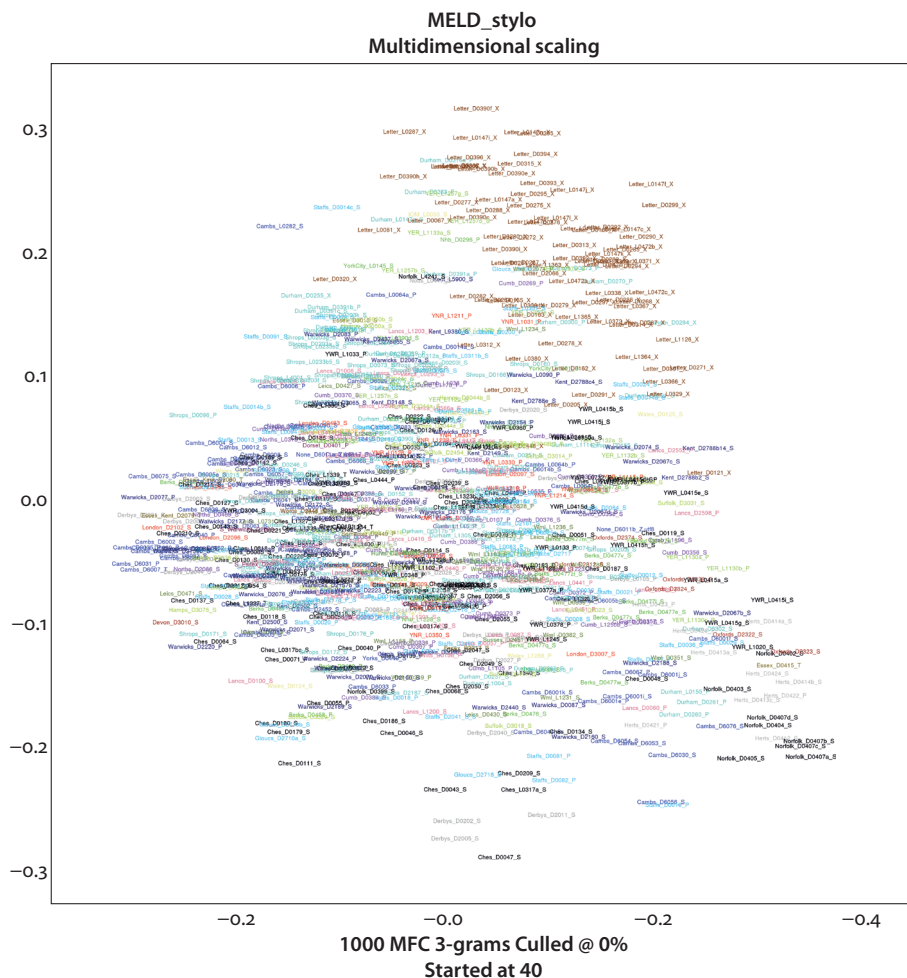


Figure 1. MELD subcorpus, 1000 most frequent 3-grams, started at 40, Eder's Delta

Figure 1 presents a multidimensional scaling (MDS) graph⁷ on the MELD subcorpus created for this study. The figure shows the affinity between the corpus texts, analysed with 3-grams, including 1000 most frequent grams minus the 40 top-ranking grams. The top of the list, 40 most frequent 3-grams, were ignored as that helped to diminish the unbalancing effect of very long texts. The graph created has no connections to the real geography of the historical counties of England: the texts

7. An MDS graph places texts in a space of a previously defined dimensions (here 2D), at a distance from the other texts that describes the similarity or dissimilarity of them (Juola, 2008, 275).

are presented in linguistic space (Williamson, 2000, 144–146) in relation to each other, according to the criteria used, not in relation to the places of the texts' origin.

For the creation of Figure 1, a subcorpus of 890 texts/c. 432,000 words was created, leaving out the shortest documents. This selection was made in order to enhance the comparability of the text files in terms of word count, and to lessen the impact of very long texts on the results. The cut-off point for text length was defined according to the file size: the subcorpus includes all text files (UTF-8 formatted) over 500 bytes in size. This provided for texts that, at their shortest, have 91 words. In earlier literature the length of text files to be analysed has been discussed at length, and often the recommendation has been not to work on text (extracts) shorter than 2,000 words (Kestemont, 2012, 67), as it will have an effect on statistical inference. Nevertheless, choosing character *n*-grams as the object of study yields at least c. 500 units of analysis per text in the current corpus.

In tests, 3-grams were found to be the most effective in discriminating the texts, as compared to other potential *n*-grams. The cut-off point of 1,000 most frequent 3-grams was chosen because the sample had to contain enough words in order to provide a reliable result: according to Eder (2015a), graphs begin to stabilise after 300 items, i.e. after that point the additional *n*-grams do not add to the resolution of the graph.

As such, the graph in Figure 1 is a bit unwieldy, even though it shows some expected affinity between texts of the different dialect groups. Clustering among Cambridgeshire texts can be detected in the lower left quadrant of the graph (text labels in dark blue), and there is a small cluster of Norfolk texts in the lower right quadrant (text labels in black). However, the clearest cluster is that of letters, and that can be found in the upper right quadrant, with brown text labels. Thus it can be inferred that some Middle English dialectal features can, possibly, be mapped with the help of Stylo, but that genre is maybe the feature that is most clearly detectable with this approach.

The result is problematic as it tells us that we cannot separate the dialectal features from the genre features in an unsupervised Stylo analysis. Therefore we can only conclude that Figure 1 seems to be amalgamating all kinds of variation: not only diatopically conditioned, but also at least genre, and maybe also temporal variation are at play. Earlier studies have identified several more layers of factors affecting the unsupervised analysis of written (and spoken text) (Eder, 2015a, 4): authorship, chronology, personality, gender, topic, education, literary quality, translation, intertextuality, and literary tradition are all factors that have been distinguished. These layers interact and are interdependent upon one another; thus, for example, cross-genre authorship attribution has earlier been deemed as challenging (Kestemont, 2012, 59).

5.1 One genre: Letters in MELD

As the MDS graph in Figure 1 showed us some identifiable groupings but also an overall spread of texts, other approaches to the material must be tried out. Analyses are needed on smaller groups of texts, i.e. groups of texts from just a few counties and genres must be defined. Also other graph forms may be more suited to this approach. Thus algorithms that produce dendrograms and consensus trees were used next in the analysis. These tests were needed in order to gather evidence for Stylo being able to group Middle English texts according to just one feature set, not many, as was seen in Figure 1.

Smaller groups of texts were tested, according to the hints in Figure 1, and the reasons for the results in the emerging groupings was sought after in the texts themselves. A fruitful approach with the smaller text sets was the consensus tree analysis, which is based on repeated dendrogram analysis. Figure 2 presents a consensus tree of texts labeled as *letter* in MELD. In a consensus tree, all texts the script relates to one another can be found in one branch. If a text can be found alone on its own branch, then it does not share similarities with any other text of the tested batch.

For this test, a new subselection of texts from MELD was prepared. The selection includes all the texts labeled as letters. They are 86 in all, totalling c. 27,000 words. All the letters exceeded the file size of 500 bytes: the shortest letter is 106 words.

In Figure 2 we can see several interesting results. First, the branch with most texts on it shows texts that are from Durham, either from Small Prior's registers (all items of D0390 and L0147), or from Dean & Chapter Muniments (D0393–7).⁸ This branch (in the graph starting between 7 and 8 o'clock) may show the effect of local origin, scriptorium style, or topic. Secondly, in a branch with letters L0472a–c⁹ we see a genuine authorship attribution: they are all letters from William Partrik, a Durham monk, to his personal friend. The letters contain mostly Partrik's complaints to his friend.¹⁰

8. There is also a branch of Durham L0147 letters starting at c. 4 o'clock.

9. LALME information on the letters L0472a–c: (1) Durham, Prior's Kitchen, Dean and Chapter Muniments: Locellus IX.11. 1446–9. Letter (autograph) from William Partrik [to Thomas Harper], n.d. but 1446–9. (2) Durham, Prior's Kitchen, Dean and Chapter Muniments: Locellus IX.30 (cf. Locellus IX.11 and 67.). 1446–9. Letter (autograph) from William Partrik [to Thomas Harper], n.d., but 1446–9. (3) Durham, Prior's Kitchen, Dean and Chapter Muniments: Locellus IX.67 (cf. Locellus IX.11 and 30). 1446–9. Letter (autograph) from William Partrik [to Thomas Harper], n.d. but 1446–9. Locellus IX.11 and 30).

10. This branch is joined by the letter D0271, a short request written by Sir Robert Babthorp. The similarity is probably due to the letter formulas used.

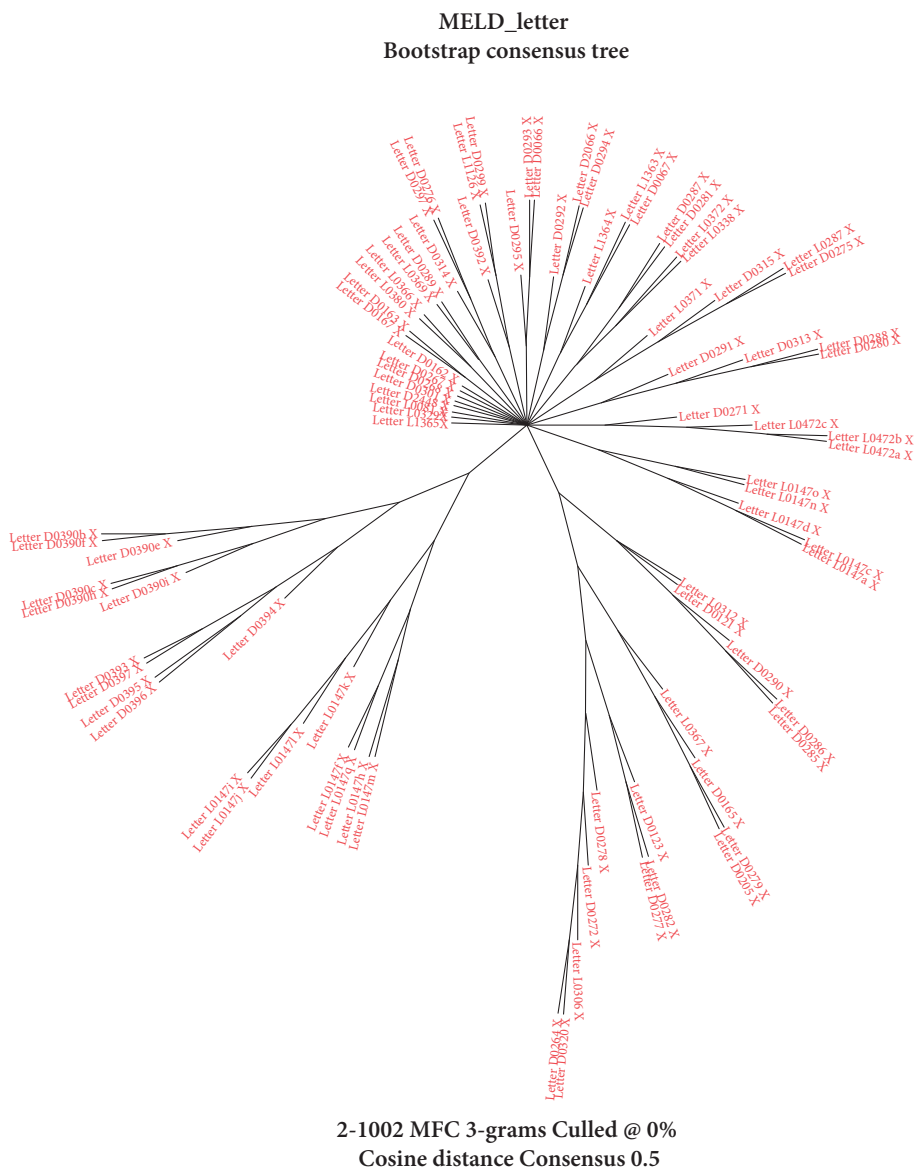


Figure 2. MELD subcorpus of letters, 1000 most frequent 3-grams, Cosine

Thirdly, we can see a branch of three letters at roughly one o'clock (D0067, D1363–4),¹¹ one of them written by a Welshman, and two by an Englishman. The letters share topical links, as two of them have been addressed to the Prince Regent, and one of them, D1364, paraphrases or quotes most of the content of letter D1363. The joining factor here is thus the purpose for writing, i.e. the genre, expressed through the topic that is covered in the letters. Therefore we can infer that the consensus tree in Figure 2 attests to authorship, (possibly) house style, and topic as conditioning criteria. Thus there is evidence for the claim that also some elements of genre variation can be detected with Stylo.

5.2 Two genres: Letters and wills

As Figure 2 hinted that genre variation can be detected by Stylo, the next step in the exploratory analysis of this study was to test two genres together: letters and wills. For this, the same selection of letters as before was used; new texts in this sub-selection are wills, 12 texts in all. The total word count of the texts for this graph is c. 34,000.

In Figure 3, everything with a black label is a **letter**, and the labels in other colours represent **wills**. There seems to be a clear division between the two, i.e. we are observing a genre division. Note that all the wills (save one, Staffs_D0015) are in a branch of their own, with just the intrusion of letter D0121. Also the letters on the lowest branch of the dendrogram constitute a genuinely separate entity: the branch holds only the Durham letters studied earlier in Figure 2.

The case of letter D0121 is explained by its similarity with the closest will in the dendrogram, Lancs_D2552: they both deal with sums of money to be paid (in D2552 to the heirs, and in D0121 to the writer of the letter), and thus similarity

11. Letter D1363 (LALME): London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra F iii, f. 104 (olim f. 72). Letter from Gruffuth ap David ap Gruffuth [to Lord Grey], 'Iwrettin in grete haste at þe parke of Brinkiffo. þe xj day of Iuine'. Brinkiffo is Brynkiffe in the parish of Derwen. 1411. Grid 307 351. Wales, Denbighs. (north Wales, Ruthin area).

Letter D0067: Not localised in LALME; Lord Grey to Gruffud ap David; Stenroos and Mäkinen (2011) find features from South to North Midlands and further north, and conclude the usage to be that of an Englishman in Ruthin area. The two letters, D1363 and D0067, provide us a rare glimpse into historical correspondence, as we have access also to the recipient reaction in form of a reply. The letters were preserved as they were sent to the Prince Regent as pieces of evidence.

Letter D1364: Lord Grey to Prince Regent; the letter relates Gruffud ap David's letter. Also this letter has not been localised in LALME.

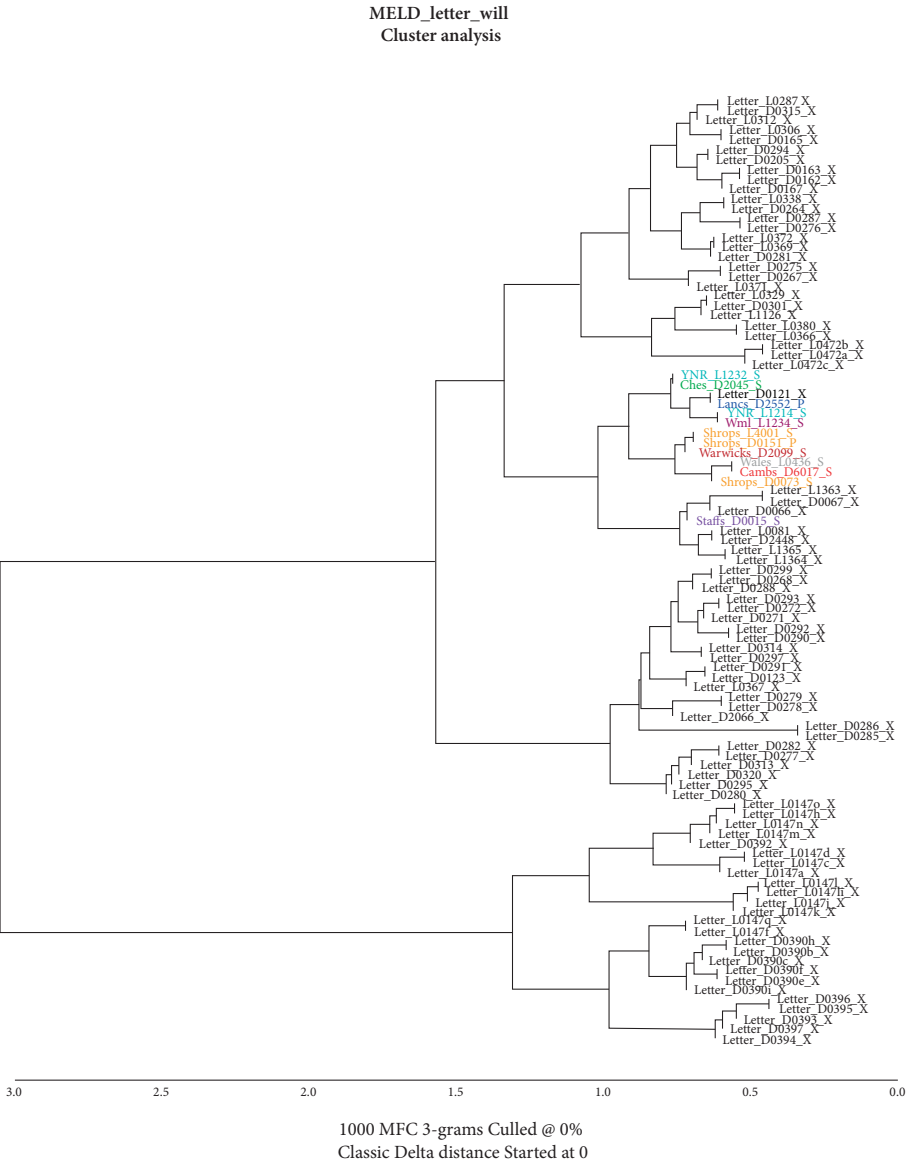


Figure 3. MELD subcorpus of letters and wills, 1000 most frequent 3-grams, Burrows Delta

in the vocabulary detected. Staffs_D0015 is the will of Wulfrike Pott, founder of the monastery of Burton; the text is probably a translation of the original will. The closest text in the graph is D0066, which is another letter by Lord Grey to Prince Regent. Both texts mention the king several times, and that is the probable link between the two.

The dendrogram in Figure 3 seems to suggest that division of texts according to textual categories is detectable by Stylo. This calls for one more test with several categories or genres at play.

5.3 Several genres simultaneously

The final test of Stylo is an MDS graph of several functional categories (including letters)¹² and encompassing texts from four counties: Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, and Kent. Note that letters are not allocated to their counties of origin, even if that could be done.

Figure 4 was drawn with a subset of MELD of 389 texts, totaling c. 172,000 words.¹³ The texts form an interesting pattern with letters in black labels up, texts from Kent mostly on the left (in blue), a cluster of red-label Cambridgeshire texts down on the left, and a mixture of Lancashire (orange labels), Cheshire (green labels), Cambridgeshire, and a few Kent texts on the right, in the middle. The initial impression of texts according to county division proves to be false when one pays attention to the functional labels. Texts from Kent are mostly testimonies, and that is the group in blue we see on the left. The Cambridgeshire texts lower left are mostly receipts, i.e. we see another group defined by a textual function.

The mixed group on the right is almost everything else: leases, conditions of obligation, agreements, marriage articles, bonds etc. (see fn. 12.) The division between left and right in the Figure 4 is that between **statements**, the umbrella term for testimonies, receipts, inventories and financial accounts, and **conveyances**, enfolding everything else except letters. The division on the up-down axis in the graph is that between correspondence and other, showing most likely the difference in the letter formulae and document formulae. Therefore also Figure 4 attests to the power of Stylo and its ability to distinguish between functional categories or

12. The functional categories included (36 in total) are: accord, affidavit, agreement, attestation, award, bond, commission, complaint, condition of obligation, declaration, defeasance, deposition, enfeoffment, exchange, financial account, gift, grant, inventory, lease, letter, marriage articles, note, pedigree, petition, power of attorney, quitclaim, receipt, rental, request, rule, sale, terrier, testimony, use, will, wow of betrothal. Some of these labels have been shortened in the legend for Figure 4, in order to make the graph more legible.

Letters can, naturally, carry several functions; nevertheless, in this study they are treated as a separate functional category, even though also they reflect the writer's idiolect and could thus be also divided according to their provenance.

13. For Figure 4, additional texts from MELD version 2016.1 was used, in order to increase the text mass, but still maintain only a few dialectal areas in the analysis. The analysis used all the available texts for the named counties, and also all available letters.



Figure 4. MELD subcorpus of letters, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Kent and Lancashire texts, 1000 most frequent 3-grams, Burrow’s Delta

Legend: Counties: C = Cambridgeshire, Ch = Cheshire, K = Kent, La = Lancashire / Functional labels: A = award, AGR = agreement, ATT = attestation, COO = condition of obligation, DEP = deposition, ENF = enfeoffment, EX = exchange, FA = financial account, INV = inventory, L = lease, M = marriage article, POA = power of attorney, R = rental, RE = receipt, T = testimony, WOB = wow of betrothal.

genres and even registers, but less so dialectal groupings of Middle English texts. As has been mentioned earlier, documents would be platforms for reoccurring terminology and formulae, and that is what we see in particular in the testimonies and receipts in Figure 4. Both testimonies and receipts are very short texts, often less than 100 words, and therefore the formulaic beginning and ending of short

documents become very powerful links between texts: in principle, the proportion of identical or similar diction in texts is higher than in longer texts. The same is true for letters as well, which seldom exceed 1,000 words in length.

The results presented in Figure 4 also depict well the vulnerability of historical corpora: not all genres in MELD are equally represented in all counties. That need not be a problem, as long as it is acknowledged as a characteristic of the material. The latest version of MELD, 2017.1, doubles the number of words and tests in comparison with version 2015.1, which more than likely remedies the vulnerability.

6. Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the Stylo algorithm compares between the z-scores of each item. Also, the algorithm is recursive, i.e. it requires several instances of similarity between two texts before an affinity is established. Therefore the more frequent items figure more prominently in the analysis, as was seen e.g. with Figure 4.¹⁴

The results of this study tell us a lot about both the use of content words (or content n-grams) in one functional text category and the frequency of diatopically conditioned variants in Middle English. As documents tend to be somewhat formulaic, it leads to the enrichment of functional category-specific features to the extent that Stylo can use them in the analysis. Also the incipient standardization of English spelling would have been attested early in formulas that reoccur from one document to the next. However, the forms that distinguish between local or idiolectal spelling variants of Middle English seem to be too infrequent to make a difference in a Stylo-driven analysis. Often it is the case that if a spelling is attested in a Middle English text once, the likelihood of finding the same spelling again increases, but only within the same text. Therefore the findings corroborate also the LALME methodology and provide a reason for the relatively few items in the LALME questionnaire: the items need to be frequent enough to be found in most texts, but infrequent enough to differentiate between texts.

In order to make Stylo to distinguish between texts according to diatopically interesting spellings/n-grams, one should probably focus on the tail of the n-gram list where the infrequent items reside, or then experiment with the culling settings

14. Whether the Stylo algorithm pays attention also to the absence of a form needs still to be explored: if an attested spelling is computationally equally important as no spelling form, then two texts with no shared attested spellings may seem very similar, due to the way Stylo treats the z-scores in the analysis (a z-score can, hypothetically, receive the value 0, when the item in question has a frequency that coincides with the population mean). That would entail that very infrequent items “disappear” in the analysis.

of Stylo, a feature that was not applied in this study.¹⁵ Currently, the graphs Stylo can produce on Middle English documents contain (at least) both the information of items conditioned by text categories (mostly content words in formulas) and items conditioned by the idiolects of the writers (spellings), be they then variants that can be traced to a location or not. Therefore, in the Stylo graphs we are looking at a multidimensional feature set projected onto a two-dimensional presentation, and as such we cannot distinguish between them, i.e. between dialectal and genre features. Nevertheless, there is a good reason to think that the diatopically conditioned variants are in the minority. The question that remains is: How to separate the two sets of features?

7. Conclusion

The current study explored the ways in which one can analyse and study Middle English documents with the help of Stylo, a stylometric script intended for Authorship Attribution in R. Stylo seems to be able to tackle Middle English spelling variation, as long as the margins of analysis are provided, i.e. the most effective unit of analysis seems to be a character 3-gram. With the help of Stylo, even diatopically colourless documents can be allocated to a register or genre; nevertheless, one cannot study regional variation and genre variation at the same time in an automated system, thus Stylo is unable to group texts according to their regional spelling variants.

Originally, Stylo is intended for Authorship Attribution, and as such it is reliant on the idiolectal style an author would produce. However, in the analysis of Middle English documents, the settings used are somewhat unusual as compared to regular authorship Attribution Analysis, but this can be justified as the goal is to identify spelling variation rather than the individual style of an author. However, that entails that the infrequent items of personal style or of diatopical significance are maybe hidden behind the mass of purpose-of-writing-specific vocabulary that may have already been somewhat standardized in the formulaic language that accompanies many a document and letter.

In the future, ways to normalise the feature sets that are active in each analysis must be investigated: one cannot fully study regional variation and genre variation at the same time in an unsupervised system. The means to distinguish the feature sets, and simultaneously the dimensions of the different styles are obvious lines of research to follow. Also, exploratory investigations can provide us with inventories for the various factors that are reflected in the spelling variation of Middle English.

15. Culling in Stylo means setting the minimum and maximum percentage of texts in which any given n-gram occurs. That would provide a way to adjust the sensitivity of Stylo for diatopically conditioned items that have diagnostic potential.

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Pragmatic and formulaic uses of *shall* and *will* in Older Scots and Early Modern English official letter writing

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Letters of the Early Modern period are typically composed of set parts, such as a salutation or letter-closing formulae, and of less conventionalised passages. In both conventional and non-conventional parts predictive and intentional *shall* and *will* are regularly used. This comparative study of Early Modern English (EModE) and Older Scots (OSc) official letters investigates how formulaic conventions and pragmatic function influenced the use of *shall* and *will*. The findings show that in OSc official letters written between 1500 and 1700 *shall*, irrespective of whether it has a predictive or an intentional meaning, is favoured over *will* for conventionalised commissive speech acts. Outside such conventional uses, *shall* became rare in the 17th century. In the English letters, the commissive uses of *shall* declined after the first half of the 16th century. *Will*, by contrast, is preferred for non-commissive uses in both English and Scots letters.

Keywords: *will*, *shall*, formulaic convention, pragmatic function, letters

1. Introduction

In English, both *shall* and *will* are available to express intentions and predictions. Although the prescriptive tradition ties the choice between the two modals to grammatical person (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009, 89–90), in Present-Day English the difference between them is primarily one of frequency. Whereas *will* is very frequent in all varieties of English, *shall* is only seldom used in Southern British English and even more rarely in varieties such as American English, Irish English or Scots (Biber et al., 1999, 488; Beal, 1997, 366). For Scottish Standard English it is even claimed that *shall* is avoided in the spoken usage of the middle classes (Miller, 2008, 52).

Regarding the historical development of *shall* and *will*, there has been continuous research interest over the last few decades with studies investigating the use of the two modal auxiliaries across different varieties of English and various genres (e.g. Gotti, 2002; Kytö, 1991; Ronan, 2014). Some analyses placed a particular focus on their use in letter-writing. Nurmi (2003), for instance, explored the sociolinguistic variation of the two modals in 16th-century letters from the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* and McCafferty & Amador Moreno (2012) conducted a quantitative study of first-person *shall* and *will* in *CORIECOR*, an 18th-century letter corpus of Irish English. However, in none of these analyses have letter-writing conventions and pragmatic motivations underlying the use of *shall* and *will* been taken into consideration. Therefore, this study aims to find out how the pragmatic function of the two modals in combination with polite formulaic conventions informs their use in Scots and English official letters written between 1500 and 1700.¹

16th-century English and OSc letters still largely followed the polite formulaic conventions of the medieval *ars dictaminis* (Nevalainen, 2001).² To Renaissance letter-writers a mixed model of dictaminal influence was available in the vernacular, with one strand descending from the Latin dictaminal style (Richardson, 1984) and the other from the French model (Davis, 1965). Letter-writers thus heeded the guidelines laid out in printed letter-writing manuals more or less closely (Nevalainen, 2004, 182) so that letters often display a particular structure with set parts such as a form of address (e.g. *Madame*,...), a notification (e.g. *ye sall wit* ‘you shall know’) or a letter-closing formula (e.g. *I sall remaine* ‘I will remain’). Although not every part had to be present in a letter, the majority of letters written in the 16th century still conform to a conventional order, often achieved by resorting to formulaic phraseology. By the beginning of the 17th century, the formulaic conventions had loosened, which can, for instance, be seen in the simplification of address formulae, e.g. the use of *sir* rather than the more complex *right worshipful sir* commonly found in the 16th century (Nevala, 2004, 144; Raumolin-Brunberg, 1996, 584–587).

Data gathered for two previous cross-genre studies investigating the diachronic development of the modal meanings expressed by *shall* and *will* in Older Scots (Elswailer, 2016; Elswailer, 2018), suggested that the two modals are regularly employed in conventional formulaic phraseology. To illustrate the different usage

1. This paper primarily explores the uses of predictive and intentional *shall* and *will* and although the Union of the Crowns in 1603 falls into the time span under investigation, and is taken into account in this analysis, the focus is not primarily on anglicising influences on Scots.

2. Cf. also Richardson (2001), who argues, however, that non-clerical letter-writers of the 15th and 16th centuries disregarded the requirements of the *ars dictaminis* because they neither met their professional demands nor the needs of their social interaction.

patterns of the two modal auxiliaries in letters of the Renaissance period, I will take a comparative look at two short OSc official letters, both addressed at the Scottish Queen Dowager, Mary of Guise. In the first letter, written by Patrick Hepburn, 3rd Earl of Bothwell, *shall* occurs four times throughout the letter. The single instance of *will* is found in the letter-closing formula *quhom to it will ples your grace gyf credens* ‘to whom it will please your Grace give credence’. In the second letter, written by Sir George Douglas, the main body of the letter has no occurrences of either *shall* or *will*. The sole instances of both modals are confined to the letter-closing formula (cf. 1).

- (1) *Qwhat service yowr grace ville command me vith sall be redde at all tayms as knawis God qwha hawe yow in his kaypping*
 ‘What service your Grace will command me with shall be ready at all times as God knows who may have you in his keeping’³
 (SC1, Sir George Douglas to Mary of Guise, 1544)

These examples demonstrate that, whereas neither *shall* nor *will* are restricted to particular parts of a letter, the two modals nevertheless seem to be part and parcel of polite conventional formulae in Scots official correspondence. Based on these premises, this comparative study focuses on the motivations underlying the choice of *shall* or *will* in English and Scots official letters, pursuing the following research questions:

1. Which linguistic factors in general influenced the choice of either *shall* or *will* in official letters written between 1500 and 1700?
2. To what extent did conventional formulaic and pragmatic uses motivate the choice of modal auxiliary?

In Section 2, I provide details about the corpora used for the analysis and the method applied. The two modal functions which are in the focus of this investigation are the shared meanings of *shall* and *will*, namely the expression of intentions and the prediction of future events. Section 3 focuses on predictions, exploring first how the two modals are employed for certain and non-certain predictions and what this implies in terms of the pragmatic and formulaic uses. Secondly, their distribution across different time periods in the English and Scots letters is discussed. Finally, in Section 4, it will be discussed how the two modal auxiliaries are employed for the expression of intentions.

3. I translate the OSc and EModE examples into Present-Day English.

2. Source material and method

The source material for my comparative investigation of OSc and EModE letters is drawn from three corpora. The letters contained in the sub-section ‘Official Correspondence’ of the *Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots (HCOS)*⁴ formed the point of departure for my analysis. Overall, they cover the period from 1500 to 1700 with three sub-divisions into SC1 (1500–1570), SC2 (1570–1640) and SC3 (1640–1700).⁵ Since the second sub-period, SC2, contains letters written both before and after the Union of the Crowns in 1603, I considered the possibility of a change of usage due to the removal of the royal court to London in particular in the correspondence of King James VI during the analysis.

In a next step, I matched the OSc letters in *HCOS* by letters from the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (HC)*, which has the advantage of having the same sub-periods as *HCOS*, and the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECS)*.⁶ Table 1 details the word count of the official letters in both varieties over the three time periods.

Table 1. The word count distribution of EModE and OSc official letters in the different sub-periods

Official letters		
1500–1570	E1: 34,911 words	SC1: 34,903 words
1570–1640	E2: 11,533 words	SC2: 11,364 words
1640–1700	E3: 7,900 words	SC3: 7,820 words

The letters in all three corpora are taken from editions. Whereas the letters forming part of the correspondence of Mary of Guise are marked as being holographic or written by a scribe (Cameron 1927), this type of information is not available for all the letters under investigation. Nevertheless, where such information was obtainable, I have taken possible scribal influence into consideration in my analysis.

In order to retrieve the instances of *shall* and *will* from my source material, I read every letter closely so that I could classify the respective modal meanings, taking the context of the letter as well as the linguistic co-text into account.

4. Cf. Meurman-Solin (1995) for more detailed information on the corpus.
5. Given the low word count of approximately 1,500 words in the sub-period SC0 (1450–1500), I decided to exclude those letters from my analysis.
6. For a description of the *HC* and the *CEECS* cf. Kytö (1996) and Nurmi (1998).

3. Predictive *shall* and *will*

3.1 Certain vs non-certain predictions

Many of the standard textbooks treating the modal auxiliaries denoting future time, remain rather vague about what constitutes a prediction for them. Coates (1983, 179), for instance, gives the paraphrase ‘I predict that...’ as an indicator of prediction and states that there is also future reference in the main prediction, but she does not offer a definition. The treatment of *will* in the *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, 188–191) avoids the term prediction, rather considering it as a futurity use within the area of epistemic modality because there are “limitations to the speaker’s knowledge” (2002, 190). Leech describes prediction as “something involving the speaker’s judgement” (2004, 56), which acknowledges the importance of the speaker’s evaluation but nonetheless remains relatively imprecise. Predictions as a speaker’s judgement are a linguistic means of expressing subjectivity (cf. Lyons, 1982, 102). From a diachronic perspective, the development from less to more subjective meanings of the modal auxiliaries, i.e. from deontic to epistemic modality, has been described as subjectification by Traugott (1989, 1995, 2010, 33) and Traugott & Dasher (2002, 106–108, 113–116; cf. López-Couso, 2010).

Since the concept of prediction is only rarely addressed in detail and to bring all the different strands together, I base my own concept, which I took as a theoretical premise for the classification of predictions in this study, on the definition given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) s.v. *predict*. On this basis, I define prediction as “a statement or estimation, based on a speaker’s knowledge or reasoning, that an event, an action or state will happen in the future”. The prerequisite that the statement about the future is *based on the speaker’s knowledge or reasoning* underlines the subjective nature of predictions. As Haegeman (1983) points out, objectively there is always an uncertainty about the actual realisation of future events, which she terms ‘non-factuality’. The speakers, however, may well be certain about their predictions. This subjective speaker-based certainty is labelled ‘actuality’ (Haegeman, 1983, 62–63).

In my analysis, I used the concept of speaker-based certainty, extending it into a distinction between (a) certain predictions and (b) non-certain predictions. With certain predictions, the speakers are certain or confident about the fulfilment of the prediction in the future, generally because they can ensure its realisation. With non-certain predictions, ranging from completely not knowing to having doubt about its outcome, the fulfilment lies outside of the speaker’s realm of influence.

During my analysis of both EModE and OSc official correspondence a clear pattern emerged for the letters of the first half of the 16th century, showing a strong preference for *shall* for the expression of certain predictions and for *will* for non-certain

predictions. Before providing more details about the distribution of certain and non-certain *shall* and *will* in both varieties and across different time periods, I will elaborate on some of the criteria which helped me (a) differentiate between predictions and intentions and (b) identify certain and non-certain predictions.

3.2 Modal meanings

In Older Scots and Early Modern English, *shall* and *will* express a number of modal meanings, some of which are exclusive to either one of the two modals, such as the meaning of obligation denoted by *shall*, e.g. *youe shall gyve notyce* ‘you are required to give notice’. The expression of willingness, e.g. *I wolbe hordered* meaning ‘I am willing to be ordered’, is confined to *will*.

Both modals are, however, used to make predictions about the future and to express intentions in the first person (cf. Gotti et al., 2002, 207; 282; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, 195).⁷ These two shared meanings are in the focus of this analysis. For the classification of *shall* and *will* by modal meaning certain linguistic criteria were applied.⁸

Animate subjects

A prerequisite for the expression of intention is an animate subject, e.g. the first person personal pronoun *I*, usually representing the letter-writer, in (2).

- (2) *and in the mean tyme I vill goe one in effecting all that I possiblie can*
 ‘and in the meantime I intend to go on effecting everything that I possibly can’
 (SC2, Colonel Alexander Leslie to James, Marquis of Hamilton, 1631)

An inanimate subject cannot have volition and its presence therefore signals a prediction, as in (3).

- (3) *Nocht the les this is my pure consell according to my mest bundent dewte qwhilk sall ewer be redde to do hir grace servis*
 ‘Nonetheless, this is my poor advice according to my most bounden duty, which will always be ready to do her Grace service’
 (SC1, Sir George Douglas to William Bell, 1544)

7. Although *will* is most frequently used in the first person to express intentions, the intentional meaning is also found in the second and third person. Intentional *shall*, on the other hand, is only used in the first person, except for a few instances in reported speech.

8. This account focuses on the two modal meanings intention and prediction. The classification of modal meanings is, of course, more complex, since the other meanings, which are not shared by the two modal auxiliaries, must be ruled out, too.

Similarly, a passive construction, such as in (4), where the subject is the patient without agency, rules out a volitional reading.

- (4) *Thay haif ane profecy that the [{town?}] of Carleill and castell salbe won bot nocht the setadell ...*

‘They have a prophecy that the town of Carlisle and the castle will be won but not the citadel...’ (SC1, Henry Methven to Mary of Lorraine, 1545)

Epistemicity

a. Private verbs

A further indicator of the modal notion is the meaning of the main verb. Private verbs, i.e. verbs expressing intellectual states such as belief or knowledge, which are private because they are not directly observable from the outside (Biber, 2012, 242; Quirk et al., 1985, 1181), cannot express intention on the part of the speaker. In (5) it is the use of the verb *beleu* ‘believe’, expressing an opinion, that precludes an interpretation as an intention.

- (5) *Ye vol not beleu this langadg til I be deid*

‘You will not believe this language until I am dead’

(SC2, Juliana Ker to her husband, Thomas Lord Binning, no year)

Other private verbs denoting e.g. feelings, such as *feel* or *repent*, cannot express a speaker’s intention, either, cf. (6).

- (6) *I aduerteis yov that your houss vill repent it for sic resouns as I vill not wreit.*

‘I warn you that your house will repent it for reasons that I am not willing to write.’

(SC2, Jane, Countess of Sutherland to her son Sir Robert Gordon, 1616)

b. Stance complement clauses

Finally, the indication of the speaker’s subjective stance through a stance verb in the matrix clause, such as *think*, *trust* or *hope* (Biber et al., 1999, 969), suggests a reading as a prediction, cf. (7).

- (7) *I hopp all vill goe verry veell in evry thing yow or your frinds ar concernnd.*

‘I hope all will go very well with respect to everything concerning you and your friends.’ (SC3, George 1st Duke of Gordon to the Laird of Grant, 1685)

By using a stance verb, the Duke of Gordon makes a prediction about the likelihood of a future event.

3.3 Linguistic criteria signalling subjectivity

Certain predictions based on the speaker-perspective can be indicated by the presence of a first-person subject, as in Example 8, where the English Queen Dowager Catherine Parr makes a prediction about her own feelings in the future.

- (8) *I wyll kepe⁹ in store tyll I speke with yow my lordes large offer for Fausterne, at wyche tyme I shalbe glad to knowe your further pleasur therein.*
 ‘I will keep my lord’s large offer for Fausterne in store until I speak with you, at which time I will be glad to find out your further choice therein.’
 (E1, Catherine Parr to her husband, 1547)

However, even if there is a second- or third-person subject, *yt* in (9), the speaker-perspective can be conveyed by means of a first-person pronoun as a constituent in the sentence, cf. (9).

- (9) *and yf I may have the free gyft and dyssposycion of the benefyces, yt shalbe gretly to my comfort.*
 ‘and if I may have the free gift and disposition of the benefices, it will contribute considerably to my comfort.’
 (E1, Cardinal Wolsey to Secretary Stephen Gardner, 1520s)

The first-person possessive determiner *my* in the prepositional phrase *to my comfort*, referring back to *I* in the subordinate clause, is an indicator that Cardinal Wolsey believes in the future benefit of the benefices to his well-being.

Moreover, the speaker-perspective may become evident in the co-text, as in (10), where the letter-writer Gavin Douglas is going to enclose the letter written by the queen in the envelope and therefore can be sure that the recipient Adam Williamson will receive it along with his own letter.

- (10) *And to that effect hes the Quenys grace wrytyne for me to the Papis halynes, and cardynalis, quhareof ze sall wyth this ressave the copy.*
 ‘And to achieve this aim, the Queen’s Grace has written for me to the Pope’s Holiness and cardinals, of which you will receive a copy with this.’
 (SC1, Gavin Douglas to Adam Williamson, 1515)

There are two further linguistic contexts that commonly point towards certain predictions. The use of stance verbs expressing certainty in the matrix clause, such as *doubt not* or *trust*, signals that speakers feel confident in their prediction. This is illustrated in (11).

9. In *I will kepe*, *will* expresses an intention rather than a prediction.

- (11) *I shall tomorrowe send lettres¹⁰ to all the noble men and gentilmen..., trusting that and all men come accordinge the seid Duke shall fynd more sharp recistance than he doth loke for.*

‘Tomorrow, I will send letters to all the noblemen and gentlemen..., trusting that, if all men come accordingly, the aforesaid duke will find sharper resistance than he is expecting.’ (E1, William Burbank to King Henry VIII, 1514)

A similar effect is achieved by the use of adjectives or adverbs expressing certainty, e.g. *surely* or *undoubtedly*, cf. (12).

- (12) *and that, nowe, newly in maner commyng to the world, ther may be such respect had (...), wych undowttydly shal folowe yf ye extende yowr benyvolence towards me and mine.*

‘and that now, newly in manner coming to the world, such respect may be had (...), which will undoubtedly follow if you extend your benevolence towards me and my men.’ (E1, Cardinal Wolsey to Dr. Stephen Gardner, 1520s)

Adjectives and adverbs can, of course, also express non-certainty, as is manifest by the use of *paraventure* in (13).

- (13) *bicause paraventure your Lordeship and the rest of the Counsel wil thinke that I favor her ivel doinge*

‘because perhaps your Lordship and the rest of the Counsel will think that I approve of her evil deeds’

(E1, Princess Elizabeth to the Protector Somerset, 1548)

In Example 13, taken from a letter by Princess Elizabeth in which she defends her governess Kat Ashley, the writer employs *paraventure* to signal that she thinks it likely that the counsel may accuse her of approving of her governess’s wrongdoing.

Just like adjectives and adverbs, stance verbs can also signal non-certainty, as is the case in (14):

- (14) *and I houpe all our cuntrymen will thinke it their dewty to assist us att this teme*

‘and I hope that all our countrymen will think it their duty to assist us at this time’

(SC3, Sir John Cochrane to Sir Andrew Melville, 1685)

The stance verb *hope* in the matrix clause expresses the expectation on the part of the letter-writer Sir Cochrane that their fellow countrymen will lend them support. The agents expected to fulfil the prediction made by Sir Cochrane are *all our cuntrymen*, the subject of the subordinate clause, which is non-identical with

10. *I shall tomorrowe send lettres* expresses an intention of the part of the letter-writer.

the letter-writer. Therefore, the fulfilment of the prediction lies outside of his influence, as indicated by the use of a third-person subject, signalling a non-speaker perspective.

3.4 Certain vs non-certain predictions in official letters and their pragmatic uses

In the following section, I will demonstrate how the concept of certain vs. non-certain predictions informs the choice of *shall* or *will* in two letters representative of both OSc and EModE official correspondence of the mid-16th century.

Certain vs non-certain predictions

The Earl of Bothwell's letter (see above) is dated the 7th November 1544 and forms part of the royal correspondence of Mary of Guise. The historical background of this letter is to be found in the repeated invasions of Scotland by the English king Henry VIII, known afterwards as the 'rough wooing', which had started in May 1544 (cf. Marshall, 2004). Earl Bothwell served the queen but had a history of alternating allegiance between Scotland and England. In addition, Bothwell seems to have hoped to wed Mary of Guise, the Queen Dowager (cf. Merriman, 2004a). In his letter to her he reports on the havoc the English have wrought on his lands in Teviotdale as well as his estate in Ancrum and remarks that he is likely to be ambushed on his way to the queen's household in Stirling.

Earl Bothwell makes three predictions in this letter, two using *shall* and one with *will*. The first use of predictive *shall* is illustrated in (15).

- (15) *bot nother he nor the tribull I have in Taviotdail sall be ony stoip to me*
 'but neither he nor the trouble I have in Teviotdale will be any hindrance to me'
 (SC1, Earl of Bothwell to Mary of Guise, 1544)

Bothwell is very confident that neither an ambush nor the destruction of his lands will hold him back in his service for the queen. This certainty is signalled by the personal pronoun in the first person *me*. The earl wishes to stress his own determination and dedication and therefore subjectively considers the outcome of his prediction as certain.

In his next predictive use of *shall* in (16), after urging the queen not to give up her intentions, Earl Bothwell also confidently predicts that the queen's plans will succeed.

- (16) *nocht dowting bot all salbe as at your henes plesour*
 'not doubting that all will be to your Highness's pleasure'
 (SC1, Earl of Bothwell to Mary of Guise, 1544)

In this case, the confidence of the prediction derives from the use of the negated stance verb *nocht dowt*.

After reassuring the queen about his service and the situation in Scotland, Bothwell makes the final prediction of the letter by means of *will* in Example 17.

- (17) *In suche uther thingis as occurris I have schawin my mynd unto this berar quhom to it will ples your grace gyf credens*

‘As to such other things that occur I have shown my mind to this messenger to whom it will please your Grace to give credence’

(SC1, Earl of Bothwell to Mary of Guise, 1544)

This sentence is the first in a series of three conventional letter-closing formulae. The earl refers the queen to a messenger, the so-called *berar* (cf. *OED* s.v. *bearer* n.), who he has entrusted with secrets he does not want to disclose in his letter. By way of the formulaic phrase *quhom to it will ples your grace gyf credens* Earl Bothwell voices his hope that the queen will believe the letter bearer’s message. Unlike in the predictive instance of *shall* in (15), where Bothwell expresses trust in his own abilities, here the fulfilment of the prediction is beyond his influence. He does not know whether the queen will really lend credence to the messenger, which makes this prediction non-certain.

Will in directive speech acts

In (17) Bothwell does not merely assert his expectation regarding the queen’s reaction, but what he intends to achieve is for the queen to believe the messenger. Therefore, this conventional turn of phrase represents a polite request, i.e. a directive speech act, on the part of Bothwell.¹¹ This conventional formula recurs frequently in the letters with ten instances, some of which display slight variation, e.g. the substitution of *grace* with *excellence* and the use of the synonymous *credit* instead of *credence* (cf. *it will pleis your excellence to gif him credit*). The widespread use of formulaic phraseology for directive speech acts is confirmed by Fitzmaurice, who found that, in Late Modern English letters, the purpose of the communication influenced whether letter-writers employed formulaic conventions. Requests, which involve face wants on the part of the writer and the addressee, make “extensive use of conventional formulae and humiliative discourse” (Fitzmaurice, 2008, 104–105). As Taavitsainen & Jucker point out, “indirect requests indicating negative politeness, i.e. a consideration for, or at least a token acknowledgement of, the addressee’s wish not be imposed upon” had become common by the EModE period (2008, 8).

11. Cf. Jucker & Taavitsainen (2008, 1–10) for a concise overview of the development of historical speech act studies. Archer (2010) provides a useful overview of studies on various speech acts in different periods of English.

The request in (17) should be interpreted in the context of the Earl's aspiration to wed Mary of Guise, thus accessing the highest echelons of Scottish nobility. According to Palander-Collin (2010, 655), social hierarchy is an important factor regarding the standardised composition of a letter in the dictaminal tradition and consequently letter-writers would first of all ask themselves what the rank of their addressee was. As it stands in November 1544, since Bothwell is the queen's servant and tries to woo her, it is in his interest not to be too imposing in his request. By presenting his prediction that the queen will give credence to the message as non-certain through the choice of *will* over *shall*, Earl Bothwell manages to save the queen's negative face.¹² He signals that he is not absolutely certain that she will heed his request and thereby leaves her the option of not complying with his wish.

I argue that it is exactly this association of *will* with non-certain predictions, which is corroborated by the fact that it is predominantly employed in this use in official letters of the first half of the 16th-century, that makes it particularly fit for polite directive speech acts. The fact that the formula analysed here frequently recurs in the official letters of the 16th century, with only slight variation, and that *will* is also employed in other polite requests,¹³ shows that it was perceived as a conventional means of expressing deference and humility. In such routinised requests *will* combines with other mitigating devices such as the verb *please* and the use of honorifics, e.g. *your grace/excellence/highness* etc.¹⁴

Shall in commissive speech acts

Whereas *will* frequently figures in polite requests, *shall* has a different pragmatic function. In order to exemplify this, I would like to refer to a second letter, also forming part of Mary of Guise's royal correspondence, composed by Sir George Douglas of Pittendrie in June 1544. George Douglas, much like Earl Bothwell, had a history of wavering allegiance between Scotland and England (cf. Merriman, 2004b). In his letter, Douglas, who depicts himself as a servant of Mary of Guise, reports on a Scottish traitor. This report is framed at the beginning of the letter by a commendation (cf. 18) and at the end by a letter-closing formula (cf. 1, reproduced

12. The notion of face and the concept of positive and negative politeness were introduced by Brown & Levinson (1987). Whereas the positive face is a concept referring to a person's wish to be respected by others, the negative face of a person pertains to their wish not to be hindered in their actions (cf. for diachronic data Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2013, 115).

13. E.g. several further constructions with the verb *pleis*, such as *sua it will pleis your hienes to send ane commissioun to me* 'so it will please your highness send a commission to me' (SC1, Earl Bothwell to Mary of Guise, 1544).

14. Cf. Del Lungo Camiciotti (2008, 123) for similar findings regarding mitigating devices in 19th-century business correspondence.

here as 19), in both of which Douglas conventionally underlines his role as the queen's servant.

- (18) *Efter mest humblele recommendations off my service on to yowr grace*
 'After most humble recommendations of my service to your Grace'
 (SC1, Sir George Douglas to Mary of Guise, 1544)

- (19) *Qwhat service yowr grace ville command me with shall be redde at all tayms as knawis God qwha hawe yow in his kaypping*
 'What service your Grace will command me with shall be ready at all times as God knows who may have you in his keeping'
 (SC1, Sir George Douglas to Mary of Guise, 1544)

In the letter-closing formula in (19), the prediction with *shall* is portrayed as certain, which is signalled by the use of the first-person pronoun *me*. Douglas is sure that he will be ready and prepared to provide service to the queen. Furthermore, with this conventional formula recurring in many variations, Douglas undertakes a commitment to Mary of Guise to serve her *at all tayms*. By employing *shall*, the prediction is presented as certain to happen, which makes the promise particularly binding. The illocutionary point is further reinforced by employing the positive adjective *redde*. This was also common practice in 19th-century English business letters, where commitments with *shall* are regularly reinforced through positive adjectives, circumlocutions or other devices (Del Lungo Camiciotti, 2008, 124).

It is the fact that *shall* is commonly associated with certain predictions in official letters of the 16th century that makes it an appropriate choice for commissive speech acts, in which the commitment stems from the certainty of the prediction.

The use of *shall* in such conventional commissive speech acts is found in both EModE and OSc letters. However, it is especially common in the OSc official letters of the first part of the 16th century and proves to be a factor of choice for *shall* in the Scots letters. Since some of the letters in the SC1 sub-corpus are holographic and others are written by scribes, the question of a possible scribal influence in particular with respect to the insertion of commissive formulae arises. My investigation indicates that some formulaic uses of commissive *shall* may well have been part and parcel of the scribal repertoire of deferential phrases, e.g. variations of the formula (*I/what service you command me with...*) *shall always be ready...* as in the letter-closing formula in (20).

- (20) *As to my awne part ye shall fynde me of the awlde maner redy to do your grace service at the wtermost of my lytill power.*
 'As to my own part, you shall find me ready of the old manner to do your Grace service at the uttermost of my little power'
 (SC1, Lord Maxwell to Mary of Guise, 1550–51)

This formula is predominantly employed at the end of a letter, which may further corroborate its popularity with scribes. It is, however, also found in holographic letters such as Sir George Douglas's letter to Mary of Guise discussed above (cf. 19).

Moreover, since different letter-writers evince slightly different styles and preferences, other commissive phrases with *shall* are featured in holographic letters, which are nonetheless formulaic, e.g. (21).

- (21) *Madame, gif youre grace will command me with ony service ye sall fynd me obedient;*
 'Madam, if your Grace will command me with any service, you shall find me obedient.'
 (SC1, Adam Otterburn to Mary of Guise, 1546–47)

To sum up, respecting scribal influence on the use of commissive *shall*, it is, on the hand, possible that scribes helped spread certain formulae such as *I shall be ready...* and its variations. On the other hand, commissive *shall* is used extensively in both holographic letters and letters written by scribes, so that it is safe to conclude that the association of *shall* with commissive speech acts is not primarily propagated through scribal influence.

3.5 Distribution of certain and non-certain predictions

In this section, I will discuss the distribution of certain and non-certain predictions over the different time periods in EModE official letters on the one hand and in OSc official correspondence on the other. The findings will then be compared to one another and the implications on the use of *will* and *shall* in the respective varieties will be considered.

Figure 1 represents the distribution of certain predictions made with *shall* and *will* in English and Scots official letters over the three sub-periods 1500–1570, 1570–1640 and 1640–1700.

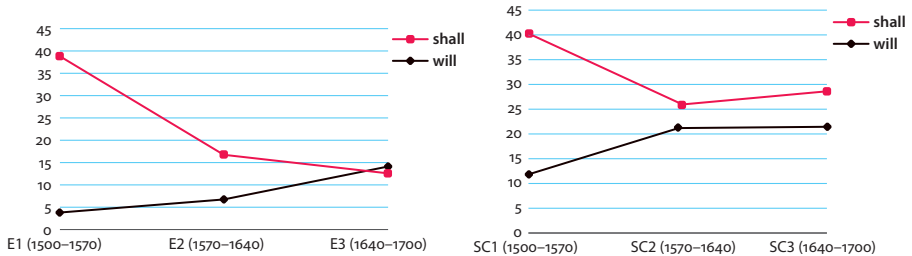


Figure 1. Distribution of certain predictions in EModE and OSc official letters (normalised frequencies per 10,000 words)

The charts in Figure 1 clearly show that in the sub-period between 1500 and 1570 *shall* is by far preferred over *will* for certain predictions in both varieties. However, in Scots it is as early as SC2, between 1570 and 1640, that both *shall* and *will* are used relatively equally for certain predictions. This change in the distribution of certain *shall* and *will* between SC1 and SC2 is significant (chi-squared = 4.5279, p-value = 0.03335). In the English letters, on the other hand, in E2, the gap between *shall* and *will* is closing, but *shall* remains the preferred modal for making certain predictions about the future, although, overall it is used less frequently than in E1.¹⁵ Only in the E3 sub-period do *shall* and *will* both become available for certain predictions in the same degree.

With respect to non-certain predictions, in English and in Scots official letters alike a preference for *will* over *shall* can be observed from 1500 to 1700 (cf. Figure 2). In the Scots letters, this preference is much more pronounced between 1500 and 1640 than in the English letters and remains stable throughout the whole time period under consideration.

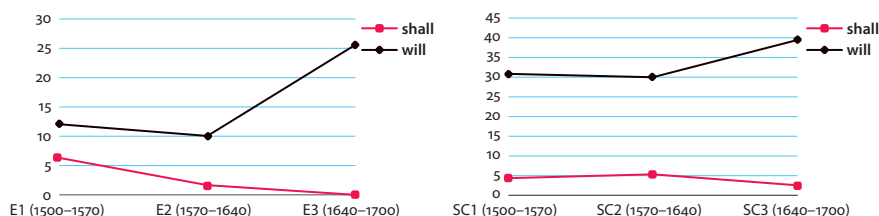


Figure 2. Distribution of non-certain predictions in EModE and OSc official letters (normalised frequencies per 10,000 words)

Overall, we witness a rise in the instances of *will* in the 17th century for certain and for non-certain predictions alike in both the English and the Scots official letters. *Shall*, on the other hand, decreases steadily in the English letters, both in its use for certain and for non-certain predictions. In the Scots source material, non-certain *shall* is rare throughout all sub-periods. Certain *shall*, however, seems to hold its own, although *will* encroaches on *shall* for certain predictions in SC2 and SC3.

3.6 The distribution of commissive and directive speech acts

The distributions shown in Figures 1 and 2 include all uses of either certain or non-certain *shall* and *will*. They illustrate a change in progress in the 16th century respecting the association of *shall* with certain predictions.

15. There is no significant change (chi-squared = 3.0343, df = 1, p-value = 0.08152).

As delineated in Section 3.4, *shall*, due to its association with certain predictions, is particularly apt to express commissive speech acts. As a politeness move, such commissive expressions mostly figure in letters written by inferiors to superiors. The composition of the letter sub-corpus in the HCOS is, however, biased in this respect. In SC1, the majority of the letters are addressed to the Queen Dowager Mary of Guise, thus representing an imbalanced power relationship between an inferior and a superior. In those letters commissive uses of *shall* mostly take the form of conventional formulae such as the variations of the *I shall be ready...* formula (cf. Section 3.4).

In the subsequent two sub-periods the letter corpora are more balanced in terms of the power relationship between the correspondents. In all sub-periods, commissive uses of predictive *shall* may also be found in letters between equals (cf. 22) and rarely even in letters in which the social distance is marked as “down” (cf. 23).

- (22) *your lordship gyff ewir I may do ony steid sall fynd me ane trew servand*
 ‘If ever I may do any service, your Lordship will find me to be a true servant.’
 (SC1, Sir Adam Otterburn to the Earl of Bothwell, 1543–44)

- (23) *[I] have usit this freedom with your Lordship, which I desire yow may construe to have proceidit from that value I bear to yow, and freindship which yow shall alwayes have, if yow will leave Your very affectionat freind and servant Sct. Andrews.*

‘I have used this liberty with your Lordship, which I would like to believe to have come from the value I attach to you and the friendship that you will always have, if you will leave allow your very affectionate friend and servant St. Andrews.’

(SC3, James Sharp, Archbishop of St. Andrews to Sir George MacKenzie, 1665)

Figure 3 charts the development of the respective shares of commissive and non-commissive uses of *shall* in EModE and OSc official letters, allowing an easier assessment of the role such conventional commissive speech acts play in the two varieties.

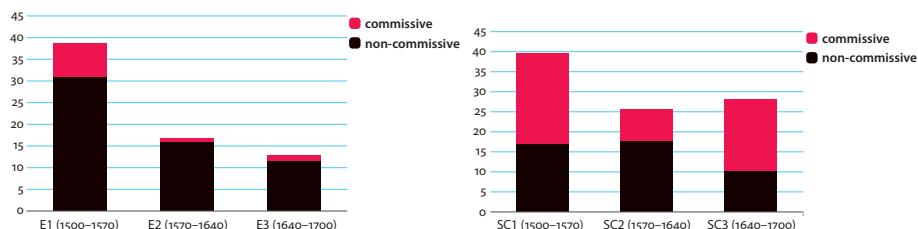


Figure 3. Distribution of commissive uses of predictive *shall* in EModE and OSc official letters (normalised frequencies per 10,000 words)

In English letters, commissive uses of *shall* only played a role in official letters of the E1 sub-period from 1500 to 1570. The commissive uses account for approximately one fifth of the overall instances of certain *shall*. In the subsequent sub-periods the share of commissive *shall* drops considerably.

Conversely, the distribution of commissive and non-commissive *shall* in the OSc official letters shows that in SC1 (1500–1570) and SC3 (1640–1700) the commissive uses account for well over half of all the instances of certain *shall*. In the SC2 sub-period, however, the non-commissive instances outnumber the commissive ones. This apparent decline of commissive *shall* is due to the fact that the SC2 sub-corpus of official correspondence contains 24 letters by King James VI, written both before and after the Union of the Crowns, in which, throughout, i.e. before and after 1603, certain *shall* is not used commissively.¹⁶ This lack of commissive *shall* is to do with the power relationship between the king, a social superior, and his addressees, who are social inferiors. King James VI does not undertake commitments towards his addressees of the type found in the official letters of the SC1 sub-period, in which the letter-writers e.g. frequently affirm their continued availability to do service (cf. *our prayeris and service salbe evir to your grace* ‘our prayers and our service will always be for your Grace’). If the letters by King James VI are taken out of account, the ratio of commissive to non-commissive uses of certain *shall* in the other letters of the SC2 sub-corpus is almost equal, with nine instances of commissive *shall* compared to eight non-commissive ones.¹⁷

In sum, in English official letters pragmatic function and conventional formulaic use play a minor role. In the Scots letters, however, it seems to be the conventional commissive function of *shall* that keeps it in use. If these commissive uses are excluded, it can be seen that certain *shall* became relatively rare in the 17th century, with seven non-commissive instances compared to fifteen commissive ones.

Gradual restriction of shall to commissive uses in Scots letters after 1570

A letter written by Thomas, Earl of Haddington, to William, Earl of Menteith, illustrates well how predictive *shall* is becoming progressively restricted to conventional commissive usage. Haddington reports on the session of parliament that he had been ordered to convene. Further, he entreats the addressee to maintain his course of action if the rumours about some influential men at court not fully

16. Regarding the use of predictive *shall* and *will* King James VI's no considerable differences appear in the letters written after 1603.

17. All figures in this paper are based on the total number of instances of predictive and intentional *shall* and *will*, respectively. I only excluded the instances from King James VI's letters here, since this provides a plausible explanation for the low number of commissive uses of *shall* in SC2.

supporting the crown were to be true. In this letter, *will* is used to make a certain prediction, cf. (24):

- (24) *The conclusion wes that... nothing rested but forbearance of farder prosecution till his Maiesties pleasure sould be more particularlie signified by my lord chancelar at his returne,..., which will be done.*

‘The conclusion was that... nothing remained but abstaining from further prosecution until his Majesty’s will is signified in more detail by my lord chancellor at his return,..., which will be done’

(SC2, Thomas, Earl of Haddington, to William, Earl of Menteith, 1629)

Given that the decision had been taken in parliament, this particular context suggests that Haddington can be sure about the fulfilment of this prediction. The only instance of predictive *shall* is contained in a commissive formula at the end of the letter, cf. (25).

- (25) *but all that I can sall be contributed to such ends by your lordships affectionat seruant*

‘but all that I can shall be contributed to such ends by your lordship’s affectionate servant’

(SC2, Thomas, Earl of Haddington, to William, Earl of Menteith, 1629)

Declining frequency of polite directive will after 1570

The directive uses of *will* are not as pervasive as those of commissive *shall*. Nevertheless, in the period between 1500 and 1570, they account for roughly one third of all the uses of non-certain *will* in the Scots letters and for about half in the English letters. The difference between the two varieties is one of overall frequency. As shown in Figure 4, generally non-certain *will* is much more frequent in the Scots

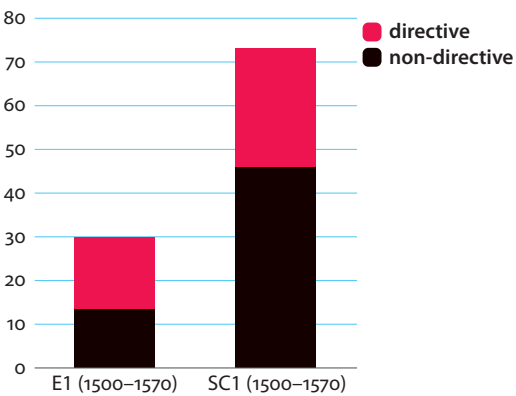


Figure 4. Distribution of polite directive speech acts with predictive *will* in EModE and OSc official letters 1500–1570

letters than in the English ones with 108 instances as opposed to 42. Consequently, they also have more instances of polite directive *will*, i.e. 40 against 23.

After 1570, polite directive uses of *will* become relatively rare in the official correspondence written in either variety. In the sub-period between 1640 and 1700, the letters in both varieties contain a few examples of less formulaic polite directives introduced by the stance verb *hope*, e.g. in (26):

- (26) *my Lord, as to the cautionrie, I hoope yowr Lordship will doe all yow can to see me fred thereof as yow have writtine*

‘my Lord, with respect to the surety, I hope your Lordship will do all you can to see me freed of it as you have written’

(SC3, Donald McDonald of Moydart to Sir George MacKenzie, 1682)

(26) is taken from a letter written by Donald McDonald of Moydart to Sir George MacKenzie, in which MacDonald thanks MacKenzie for relieving him and his family from servitude and asks him for another favour. After having expressed his deep gratitude, he adds his indirect request by making a non-certain prediction introduced by *hope*. The non-certainty is conveyed both by the meaning of the stance verb and by the use of the third-person subject of the object clause *yowr Lordship*. McDonald makes use of the non-certainty of his prediction as a strategy to save his addressee’s negative face.

4. Intentional *shall* and *will* and the role of commissive speech acts

Beside predictions, *shall* and *will* also share the modal meaning of intention in the first person. As pointed out in Section 2, in my letter corpus intentional *shall* is exclusively used in the first person. This is exemplified in the statement of an intention in the letter by Earl Bothwell to Mary of Guise, cf. (27).

- (27) *Madame, I sall fulfill your hienes commandmentis at my power*

‘Madam, I will fulfil your Highness’s orders according to my power’

(SC1, Earl Bothwell to Mary of Guise, 1544)

In this example the meaning of the main verb *fulfil* identifies this use of *shall* as the expression of an intention, since the fulfilment can be actively planned and pursued by the letter-writer. Further, by stating his intention to carry out Mary of Guise’s orders, Bothwell makes a promise to the queen. Thus, the instance of intentional *shall* here, just like the predictive use of *shall* in (1) (*Qwhat service yowr grace ville command me vith sall be redde at all tayms*), is used in a commissive speech act. The same is true of the next instance of *shall* in this letter, cf. (28):

- (28) *and with suche diligens as I ma mak salbe in Striveling at your grace but ony impediment that ma happin*

‘and as quickly as I can I will be in Stirling at your Grace’s (court) with the exception of any impediment that may happen’

(SC1, Earl Bothwell to Mary of Guise, 1544)

Earl Bothwell adds a second promise to his first one, again by means of *shall*. This instance of *shall*, however, is not so easily identifiable as an intention. Although Bothwell intends to be in Stirling, the stative quality of the main verb allows this clause to be interpreted as a prediction.

Example 24 shows that the classification of *shall* and *will* by modal meaning is not always straightforward. More importantly, however, it also becomes evident that the choice of modal auxiliary is determined by pragmatic function rather than by modal meaning. Regardless of whether *shall* is employed to express an intention or to make a prediction, in (24) it was chosen because it is an apt means of undertaking a commitment due to the certainty it conveys. For an intention to be expressed, the speaker has to be confident that the action can be carried out, which is a common denominator intentions share with certain predictions.

In Section 3.6 I showed that in Scots, if the letters written by King James VI are excluded, the conventional commissive uses of predictive *shall* account for over half of the overall instances. Figure 5, which includes King James VI’s letters, reveals that in the Scots letters written between 1500 and 1570 also the vast majority of intentional uses of *shall* are commissive.



Figure 5. Distribution of first-person intentional *shall* and *will* in EMode and OSc official letters (normalised frequencies per 10,000 words)

Only in the 17th century do the instances of non-commisive intentional *shall* outnumber the commissive ones. In the English letters of the E1 sub-period, the commissive and non-commisive uses of *shall* are nearly equal. Afterwards, intentional *shall* falls out of use, so that only *will* is used in this function.

Intentional *will* is employed far less frequently than *shall* in the Scots letters of the SC1 sub-period, with 17 instances compared to 48 occurrences of *shall*. The ratio of commissive to non-commisive uses is the reverse of the one for *shall*, which means that *will* is clearly preferred for the expression of non-commisive intentions.

5. Conclusions

This study has shown that both English and Scots official letters written between 1500 and 1570 show a division of labour between *shall* for certain predictions and *will* for non-certain predictions. After 1570, this neat division collapses, however, in the Scots letters, for which my findings indicate that *shall* and *will* are used equally for the expression of certain predictions. In the English letters this change only takes effect in the 17th century.

Overall, uses of *shall* decrease steadily in English letters, whereas *will*, which is employed for both certain and non-certain predictions, is on the rise. In Scots, *will* is clearly favoured for non-certain predictions throughout the OSc period and its overall instances rise by 1700.

Unlike in English, *shall* manages to hold its own regarding certain predictions in Scots, with twice as many instances as in the English letters. The relatively strong position of *shall* in Scots is due to its pragmatic use in conventional commissive speech acts. It is the association of *shall* with certain predictions, manifest in the official correspondence of the 16th century, that makes it particularly apt for such commissive uses. This certainty is a common denominator that certain predictions share with the intentional uses of *shall*. The association of *shall* with certainty is fossilised into a conventionally commissive use, which continues to be employed throughout the OSc period.

My findings demonstrate that in the Scots official letters it is the pragmatic function rather than the modal meaning which determines the choice of modal auxiliary. *Shall*, regardless of whether it makes a prediction or expresses an intention, is evidently preferred for commissive speech acts, whereas both predictive and intentional *will* is the modal of choice for non-commisive uses.

In the English letters, although in the 16th century roughly one fifth of the predictive instances of *shall* and just under half of the intentional uses are commissive, unlike in Scots, the association of *shall* with commissive speech acts does not seem to hold after 1570.

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Studying dialect spelling in its own right

Suggestions from a case study

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This paper addresses the question of why historical linguistics should be interested in studying dialect spelling in its own right. It deduces a number of arguments in favour of that interest from a case study of the graphical representation of Ulster Scots in the past and present. Referring to a selection of findings from that case study and relating them to central issues of written language, the paper calls for a greater interest in the general structure and the historical development of vernacular written representations. Accordingly, it sketches a systematic framework and suggests basic research questions in support of diachronic (and synchronic) studies of what the paper delineates as “dialect graphy”.

Keywords: dialect graphy, spelling conventions, written and spoken dialect, dialect (il)literacy, Ulster Scots

1. Introduction

The present-day structure and the history of (Standard) English spelling are well documented. Anyone generally interested in that particular aspect of English will find their questions answered in all those accounts that have provided us with an insight into English spelling for the past five decades (e.g. Venezky, 1970; Scragg, 1974; Carney, 1994; Upward & Davidson, 2011; Crystal, 2012; or Horobin, 2013).

In contrast to that, the present-day scholar interested in the spelling conventions of English dialects and the historical developments therein might identify with the complaint that it “is not an easy task to write about the history of dialect spelling, because there is hardly any material to draw from” and that research devoted to the structure and history of dialect spelling “seems to be one of the most neglected areas” (modelled on Kniesza, 1997, 24). Indeed, the written representation of non-standard varieties does not appear to receive the attention it deserves. With regard to comprehensive overviews of present-day varieties and traditional dialects, we find chapters on phonology, morphology and syntax, but there is none on spelling (cf. e.g. Burridge & Kortmann, 2008; Kortmann & Upton, 2008;

Meshthrie, 2008; or Schneider, 2008). If scholarly contributions approach dialect spelling, they often report on spelling in relation to pronunciation (e.g. Agutter, 1988). Accordingly, the present chapter sides with the few contributions that have genuinely taken up the study of non-standard spelling in its own right (cf. Trudgill, 1999; Honeybone & Watson, 2013; Bann & Corbett, 2015; and Moll, 2015) and should like to bring forward arguments in favour of an under-researched field, i.e. the diachronic and synchronic study of dialect graphy.

This paper falls into four parts. After this brief introduction, part two will introduce this paper's theoretical background and reflect on its basic terminology. The third chapter will report on a case study of dialect spelling and dispense its main findings. The fourth chapter is intended to put the findings of the case study into a broader perspective. It will condense observations and conclude this paper with a detailed suggestion for a research field in which "dialect graphy" could and should be subjected to substantial diachronic and synchronic analyses.

2. Concepts and terminology

One of the reasons why most research on varieties and their historical developments has not paid much attention to spelling in its own right seems to be the dictum of speech that has prevailed in modern linguistics and will, of course, continue to do so. This contribution, however, is based on a premise that allows us to go beyond the view that writing is "merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks" (Bloomfield, 1984, 21). Accordingly, written language, in this paper, is treated as autonomous and sovereign realisation of language in which specific usages as well as their possible changes are considered meaningful. The following subchapters will introduce the reader to the theoretical concepts and works that have led to the above premise.¹

2.1 Written language and spelling

There are various claims that contribute to a more balanced view whereby writing can be viewed as a realisation of language in its own right (cf. Dürscheid, 2006, 38). Most of them make clear that the distinction between spoken and written language

1. This premise is the reason why the present chapter makes a strong argument for the lack of previous research and does not refer extensively to contributions by, for example, D. Preston. In his valuable contributions, Preston discusses dialect spelling as written representation of speech in documents and texts which are, on the whole, spelt with standard orthography (cf. Preston, 1985, 2000). Here, however, the stance taken is very different. Dialect spelling is seen as a system in its own right which forms the basis of written *presentations*, not *representations* of the dialect in question.

is not solely a question of medium. It is also conditioned by contexts and, therefore, by the question of whether language is *conceptually* spoken or written. That conceptual understanding of spoken and written language is well encoded by the notions “Sprache der Nähe” and “Sprache der Distanz” (cf. Koch & Oesterreicher, 1986, 2012).² Basing their notions on the observation that speech is swift, structurally simple and transient and that, in contrast, writing is inert, structurally complex and preservative, Koch & Oesterreicher have provided us with a continuum in which utterances may be placed at any point between the extreme poles of “medially and conceptually spoken” and “medially and conceptually written”.

It is from both angles, the medial and the conceptual, that one should also address the question of function. What function(s) does writing serve? In particular, what function is fulfilled by the written representation of dialects? Unsurprisingly, such questions have already been answered, if only with reference to written language in general and to writing systems. Yet, they also apply with regard to dialect spelling, which is briefly discussed hereafter.

The 1980s appear to have been the decade in which the relationship of spoken and written language was subjected to more detailed analysis. Amongst other things, this resulted in greater objectivity towards writing. It was already at the very beginning of that decade that Coulmas emphasised the cultural value of writing: “Schrift ist nicht nur Vermittler, sondern auch Symbol einer Kultur” (Coulmas, 1981, 15).³ Almost three decades later, Coulmas’ point was taken up and reinforced. Explicitly referring to writing systems, Wyrod refines Coulmas’ view and states that “scripts can also function as salient and revered symbols of identity” (Wyrod, 2008, 41). That cultural value and identificational force of writing, however, also holds true for spelling. The opposition of <-re>- and <-er>-spellings, e.g. <centre> vs <center>, to distinguish British from American English spelling is a very basic, yet convincing illustration of the aforementioned.

A number of such spelling features may join to form a coherent system and that system, in turn, can become a particularity, or property, in which speech communities find their identity. If so, that written representation can create a collective consciousness (cf. Lindqvist, 2001, 196). Viewed from that angle, the consideration of orthography and spelling leads us to a very important observation:

Orthographies are not socially neutral exteriors of written language, but integrated parts of value clusters or systems which may differ on cultural and social grounds and, thus, go into the struggle for cultural hegemony which take[s] place continually in any society whether we choose to recognize it or not. (Wiggen, 1986, 410)

2. “Language of immediacy” and “language of distance”.

3. ‘Writing does not only transmit culture, it also symbolises culture.’ (This and all following translations by the author.)

Irrespective of this connotative value to serve in identifying or characterising processes, it is also important to consider the situational function of writing. The very notions “written language” and “writing” are bound up with the activity of producing. That function and the ensuing preservation of an utterance enabled by the graphical representation are, of course, highly important. Still, it must be acknowledged that the activity of receiving the utterance, i.e. reading, is not less relevant. This has been put into perspective by Maas (1992). His line of thought even gives primacy to reading if it comes to the functional value of writing:

‘Schreibe, wie Du sprichst’ ist nicht die Perspektive, aus der die Funktion der Schrift abzuleiten ist, die ja ihre primäre Funktion für einen Leser hat, in der Regel also für jemand anderen als den Schreiber; *das Schriftsystem soll einem Leser Sinnerschließungshilfen geben.* (Maas, 1992, 5; emphasis added)⁴

Maas’ point becomes all the more apparent if the present context of dialect spelling is considered. Whereas a native speaker of a specific regional variety would be able to produce a correct reading of any text, i.e. a reading with authentic regional pronunciation, even if that text were spelt in the standard orthography of the over-arching or adjacent norm-giving roof language, the written text itself, in terms of identity, does not reveal any regional, social or cultural attachment. It is only the text spelt out in dialect – i.e. containing reading comprehension aids relating to the corresponding regional variety – that can transmit its regional character to the reader whether that reader belongs to the respective speech community or not.

The above appears to be a truism, but it was exactly that observation that motivated the interest presented in this paper and it is the line of thought that clearly indicates that Saussure’s dictum, namely that “*langue et écriture sont deux systèmes de signes distincts; l’unique raison d’être du second est de représenter le premier*” (Saussure, 1995, 45), does not hold true in each and every context. There are conditions which clearly show that writing is much more than a physical means to conserve speech. Texts spelt out in dialect conventions form one such context. There the written representation has the potential to refer to the corresponding regional background in its own right.

4. ‘Write as you speak’ is not the perspective from which to derive the function of writing, which must primarily serve the reader, who ideally is not identical with the writer; *thus writing is supposed to provide clues to understand the meaning.*

2.2 Spelling conventions

When considering writing, orthography, etc., reference is often made to spelling *conventions*. According to the *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, conventions are practices “established by usage or agreement” (McArthur, 1992, 262). Beyond that, however, it remains almost entirely unclear what they are. What constitutes spelling conventions? How do particular conventions come into being? What makes them persist, what makes them change? To date, there has been one study that provides those interested with a convincing approach. It is Sebba’s eminent work that details the concept of “orthography as social practice”, to which I fully subscribe in my examination of written dialect. As just said, summarising his comprehensive sociolinguistic views on orthography in his 2007 monograph, Sebba recognises orthography as “social practice”. That, however, is not to be viewed along the lines that writing is a social practice because it enables people to engage in socialising processes (2007, 26). His view goes well beyond that idea:

Writing systems involve conventional relationships at multiple levels. This is why they can be seen as social practices: entire communities of users, subgroups and even individual users first have to establish these conventional relationships and then, later on, to decide whether to follow or deviate from the established conventions. This choosing between options [...] constitutes the ‘practice’ of writing system use; and sticking diligently to the prescribed standard is no less a practice than pointedly deviating from it [...]. Some choices may be interpreted in a particular social context as neutral in terms of their social meaning, but others may be socially charged, depending on particular social and historical circumstances.
(Sebba, 2007, 37–38)

Within that framework, Sebba identifies “licensed variation” and “unlicensed variation” (Sebba, 2007, 30) and these types of variation are based on conventions that “can be broken in a way that allows the original meaning to be conveyed, along with additional social meaning which derives from defying the conventions” (ibid.).

2.3 Implications

Against the background of what has been delineated in 2.1 and 2.2, dialect spelling consists of relatively complex conventions. In parts, they are tied up with a correlated standard orthography, i.e. dialect spelling may be cognate with and influenced by that adjacent standard system. At the same time, they also correspond to structures not present in that standard system. It follows that dialect spelling is no deviating form of standard orthography and may, ideally, relate to its own set of conventions. In fact, one goal of dialect spelling might be to approximate, or

achieve a legitimate and independent system that may or may not be derived from the adjacent standard orthography.

Up to this point, use has been made of the terms “spelling”, “written/graphical representation”, and “orthography”. To me, the latter is problematic. Regarding the very narrow, etymological reading of the notion (Greek *ορθογραφία* ‘correct spelling’ from the roots *ορθός* ‘straight, right’ and *γραφειν* ‘to write’), “orthography” is something that can be observed only retrospectively and, what is more, if that state, i.e. the fact that conventions can be regarded *correct* or *incorrect* spelling, is present, “orthography”, as a notion, should be reserved for the licensed and prescriptively promoted spelling present in standard languages. Cultures and traditions that do not (necessarily) share the characteristics of standardisation and standardised languages – dialects are taken to be of that sort – do not possess orthography. In consequence, their system of relative liberty as to writing I should like to term “dialect graphy”.

3. A case study of Ulster Scots

3.1 Why Ulster Scots?

As target variety, Ulster Scots has impressed the author with three remarkable characteristics. Those characteristics can be found in the language history of Ulster Scots, in its political connotations and in its present-day circumstances and they shall be contextualised as follows.

In language history, it can regularly be observed that occupation, colonisation, or migration have one consequence: language shift. Frequently, that means that those who are occupied or colonised abandon their native language. Sometimes a situation involving occupation, colonisation or migration might also result in the opposite, namely that the migrants, occupiers or colonisers give up their native language. Yet another result, which can be observed in post-colonial contexts, is that of discourse-related bilingualism, i.e., the native and the in-coming language, are used in specific, mutually exclusive situations and for specific purposes. For the language history of the island of Ireland, Brian Ó Cuív summarised in the middle of the past century:

The coming of the Normans in the twelfth century marked a new era in the history of the Irish language, for with it began a political struggle which has lasted all but eight hundred years and which has in effect *changed the people of Ireland from being Gaelic-speaking to being English-speaking*. (Ó Cuív, 1951, 8; emphasis added)

If, on theoretical grounds, the question of language status of Ulster Scots as well as the questions of its interwovenness with Irish English are cast aside, the historical development of the Ulster-Scots speech community is not readily represented in Ó Cuív's conclusion or in the descriptions above. Quite the contrary, the speech community has never abandoned their original language, nor forced it upon the native Irish, for instance, in the sense that Scots-speakers insisted that their language be used for public administration, etc. It also goes without saying that Ulster Scots has not been handed down to us exclusively as spoken language. Throughout its intricate history, Ulster Scots has been a fairly versatile medium of literature, i.e. of prose and lyrical writing. Of course, recently, i.e. since the late 1990s, Ulster Scots has been used in non-fictional contexts too.

The political and ideological dimensions of Ulster Scots are apparent from a number of issues.⁵ Here, it may suffice to allude to the label's origin and its successive development. It appears that "Ulster Scots" emerged as a cultural label in the second half of the 19th century. Towards the end of that century, opposition to the Union of Britain and Ireland grew and the appeal for Home Rule began to dominate political thinking in Ireland. Although having been used before that time, it is in this context that the notion of "Ulster Scots" appears very clearly as a counter-reaction. It is more than probable that publications such as Harrison's *The Scot in Ulster* (1888) added the political/ideological dimension to the notion. There is no denying that this is what can be read in Harrison's preface:

Their English and Scottish origin seems to me to give to the men of Ulster an inalienable right to protest, as far as they are concerned, against the policy of Separation from Great Britain to which the Irish – with the genius for nicknames which they possess – at present give the name of Home Rule.

(Harrison, 1888, [v])

When, about a century after Harrison, a booklet titled *Ulster – An Ethnic Nation?* describes its goal as "an inquiry into the *national identity* of the Ulster loyalist folk" (Ulster Society, 1986, 3; emphasis added) and contains a chapter on Ulster Scots called "The Ulster Dialect – The Distinctive Speech of a Distinctive People", it is unquestionable that the ideological dimension already in place in Harrison has successfully been carried into the present.

The paradigm of rivalry which Ulster Scots has to face is obvious. It is basically defined by the linguistic repertoire of Ulster and neighbouring regions. For almost 400 years, Ulster Scots has existed vis-à-vis English, Irish English, Ulster English,

5. For detailed accounts as to ideology and Ulster Scots, see e.g. Kallen, 1999; Mac Póilin, 1999; McCoy & O'Reilly, 2003; or Falconer, 2007.

Irish Gaelic as well as Scots in Scotland. Another factor which, in terms of rivalry, adds fuel to the fire is alluded to in one of the publications that cannot be cleared of ideological biases and, thus, could do more damage than good to the language variety:⁶

The marginalization of Ulster-Scots for social and political reasons has led many modern-day linguists [...] to consider it a variety of Hiberno-English rather than Scots (as it is more properly classified), and it has led many Ulster-Scots to consider their native speech to be ‘bad English’, as schools have often – and erroneously – asserted that it was. (Michael Montgomery’s foreword in Robinson, 1997, v)

As holds true for most traditional varieties and vernaculars throughout the world, the general development of Ulster Scots is determined by language-external realities. Those are frequently destabilised by economic priorities that more often than not consider *languages* only.

To summarise: (1) historically, Ulster Scots is a vernacular transplanted abroad with its own emerging graphical representation; (2) Ulster Scots is a variety in which identity cannot be detached from political or ideological positions; (3) Ulster Scots is a variety whose present-day attempts at scripting and textualisation take place in a paradigm of rivalry, whereas in the past Ulster-Scots texts served to indicate continuation and coherence.

3.2 Data and methodology

The data that form the empirical basis of the case study have been drawn from three very different sources. The present-day data derives from the *Miscellaneous Ulster-Scots Texts Corpus* (MUST-C), which was specifically compiled for this purpose. The corpus is of an experimental nature and represents work in progress. To date, the corpus consists of 224 texts covering the period from 1995 to 2014. They total some 310,598 words. At the moment, MUST-C comprises written texts only. The majority of these are taken from the internet, where they are readily available

6. In a brief chapter about the history of Ulster Scots, Robinson appears to labour under the delusion that the beginnings of Ulster Scots can be found in the 4th and 5th centuries (Robinson, 1997, 3–4; also in Robinson, ³2018, 5–6). This attempt to antedate the beginnings is related to assertions that Ulster Scots are *the* legitimate population of the north of Ireland. Such assertions can be found in amateur historical contributions in which the heritage of Ulster is discussed and the Cruithne are popularized as the rightful natives of Ulster (e.g. Adamson, 1986, ²1987). Historical accounts of this nature have been identified as works of “national mythologists” (Finlayson, 1996, 99), and it has been shown that the ideas that generate the mentioned assertions “form part of generalized *Loyalist* discourse” (Finlayson, 1996, 102; cf. also Crowley, 2005, 199; my emphasis).

from blogs, private webpages, organisations' presentations and webpages related to Northern Ireland government. In order to extend the compilation, printed material was also included. Wherever possible all retrievable metadata were added to the compiled texts. The second set of data represents written Ulster Scots as it surfaced in the late 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. It is the literary heritage of Ulster Scots and comprises 28 literary works from the period between 1753 and 1920.⁷ The works collected by and made available at the Ulster University constitute in many ways an unconscious attempt to form an historical corpus of Ulster Scots, which is why they have been considered as a precursor to all material compiled in MUST-C. The third set of data is lexicographical material. It consists of 13 amateur or professional glossaries and word-collections, ten of which are explicit records of Ulster Scots. All accessed wordlists total 17,200 entries. They are named in abbreviated form in Table 1 below; full bibliographical details are given in the references.

Table 1. Accessed glossaries and wordlists in chronological order

Year	Author	Abbreviated title
1880	Patterson	<i>Glossary of Words in Antrim and Down</i>
1892	Fischer	<i>Wörter im nord-irischen Dialekt</i>
1904	Marshall	<i>The Dialect of Ulster</i>
1905	Marshall	<i>The Dialect of Ulster</i>
1906	Marshall	<i>The Dialect of Ulster</i>
1923	Lutton	<i>Montiaghism</i>
1990	McIntyre	<i>Dialect Heritage of North Ulster</i>
1990	Todd	<i>Dictionary of Northern Ireland English</i>
1991	O'Kane	<i>Book of Ulster Dialect</i>
1993	Montgomery/Montgomery	<i>Barnish, Co. Antrim Dialect Dictionary</i>
1997	Robinson	<i>English/Ulster-Scots Glossary</i>
2000	Fenton	<i>Ulster-Scots in Antrim</i>
2012	Robinson	<i>English/Ulster-Scots Glossary</i>

The set of data retrieved from the wordlists is crucial and it was accessed for the following reason. In my analysis, I am interested (a) in whether speech features are represented in written dialect material or, at least, whether they are intended to be portrayed; and (b) in what the representation or, to be more precise, the sum of represented features is able to tell us about the development and the nature of

7. Most of that material is readily accessible online at the *John Hewitt Online Collection of the Ulster Poetry Project* »<http://www.arts.ulster.ac.uk/ulsterpoetry/index.html>« and at the book collection of the *Ulster-Scots Poetry Project* »<http://www.arts.ulster.ac.uk/ulsterscotspoetry/index.html>« (as accessed in May 2014). Note that, although there is a considerable overlap with regard to contents and logistics of these two projects, they are not identical.

dialect and/or non-standard spelling. In this regard, my considerations are based on the following lines of thought. The basic assumption that a feature needs to be established in speech before it enters the domain of spelling is fundamental. It follows that (a) not all notable speech features will appear in writing, and (b) if they do, their appearance in writing is important and, what is more, meaningful to those introducing them in spelling. Of course, it might be objected that occurrences can be singular or accidental. To rule out such objections in terms of data, the lexicographical works were accessed as further source of information. The wordlists, particularly those that are unrelated to the corpus data and the literary works, are able to indicate whether features have been considered as characteristic in the history of Ulster-Scots spelling.

Methodologically, the present-day material was subjected to corpus-linguistic analyses. The data were retrieved from MUST-C and processed for the study employing WordSmith. Several wordlist files were created to account for all of the more than 19,400 types that occur over all 224 MUST-C texts. Those files facilitated initial searches for probable targets and their comparisons. Then, against the background of the list of approachable Ulster-Scots features (see further below), a selection of phenomena was studied in detail, using the concordance feature of WordSmith. That was to verify their candidacy for more detailed analysis. Sometimes, this included further word-list processing in order to facilitate statistical assumptions. Attested frequencies have always been tested to rule out their invalidity, subjecting numbers to the chi-square test.⁸ Counter to that, the examination of the historical sources and the lexicographical material had to take a different methodological form. Although the historical Ulster-Scots texts were easily accessible, they were not available in machine-readable formats. Because of that, those texts have been subjected to close reading. Glossaries and word-collections have been treated differently again. In contrast to their general purpose (user-based consultation of single lexical items), all lexicographical material was read from first page to last. In both sets of data, relevant words and their forms were noted and then turned into registers of all crucial forms in individual sources. In a further step, cross-referencing directories facilitated comparisons and the tracking of inter-relations and of general developments. On the whole, findings have not been processed statistically. All examinations and conclusions related to the historical material are qualitative.

Chronologically, the study was carried out in reversed order. On the basis of Ulster-Scots related scholarship (most notably Gregg, 1964, 1972; Harris, 1984; Kingsmore, 1995; Fenton, 2006; Hickey, 2007; Hale, 2008; and Corrigan, 2010), relevant phonological features were singled out as candidates likely to be represented

8. This is fully documented in the original thesis (cf. Wolf, 2015).

in vernacular spelling. The selected features can be placed into four groups: group A encompasses phonological features that Ulster Scots shares with Scots; group B is made of features unique to Ulster Scots; group C can be understood as a group of default features, i.e. typical features that, from a neutral point of view, ought to be indicated in writing if a given text is supposed to be given a graphical Scots identity; group D incorporates exclusive Ulster-Scots features (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Selected Ulster-Scots features

<i>A. features Ulster Scots shares with Scots in Scotland</i>	
i.	retention of syllable final /x/
ii.	historic vocalisation of word/syllable-final /l/
iii.	retention of Older Scots /u:/
iv.	fronting and raising of Anglo-Saxon /a:/
v.	simplification of consonant cluster in final position
a.	reduction of <-ld> or <-nd> to <l> and <n>
b.	fronting of final in progressive forms, i.e. /-ɪn/ instead of /-ɪŋ/
<i>B. independent Ulster-Scots features</i>	
i.	dentalised alveolar plosive in intersyllabic position /t/
ii.	indication of short central vowel in words such as <i>big</i>
iii.	no opposition between /ɛ/ and /a/ in some velar environments
<i>C. default features</i>	
i.	negation particle
ii.	negational contraction
<i>D. exclusive features of Ulster Scots vis-à-vis Mid Ulster English</i>	
i.	distinction between /m/ and /w/
ii.	half-open back vowel in LOT and THOUGHT

Whereas all of the features in Table 2 have been studied in the original work, it is for space limitations that this paper will only refer to a selection of them. Their choice is grounded upon the fact that the features discussed here have been thoroughly investigated as speech features in Ulster Scots-related scholarship and they have shown relatively clear results, not sharing the complexity of other features which would take the discussion far beyond the limitations of this paper. The features referred to here are:

- A-(i) the full phonological realisation of the velar (and palatal) fricative in syllable-final position whose existence in Ulster Scots is claimed “to be by far the *most valuable* consonantal criterion for separating Ulster Scots from other varieties” (Montgomery & Gregg, 1997, 615; emphasis added);
- B-(ii) the Ulster-Scots correspondent of Standard English /ɪ/, described as “short vowel, noticeably centred or retracted” and “somewhat lowered, approaching [ə]” (Gregg, 1964, 165–166), and considered as “standardised” phonological feature of Ulster Scots (cf. Harris, 1984, 119);

- B-(i) the dentalised alveolar stop which is considered a significant characteristic of Ulster Scots (Gregg, 1964, 184–185; cf. also Adams, 1964, 2);
- A-(v)-(b) the fronting of the final in progressive forms and in phonologically similar contexts that, while being the general and remarkably consistent realisation of <ing>-forms around the world with regard to its social and stylistic distribution (cf. Houston, 1991, 241), in Ulster Scots, is socially acceptable or, at least, less stigmatised than elsewhere (cf. Kingsmore, 1995, 101; also Hickey, 2007, 116 and Corrigan, 2010, 46); and
- D-(ii) the realisation of “a half-open back, rounded vowel about cardinal in quality, which varies unsystematically in length, although it tends to be fully long” (Gregg, 1964, 169) in words that belong to the lexical sets of LOT and THOUGHT which is a feature exclusive to Ulster Scots *vis-à-vis* Mid Ulster English.

After the above features had been tracked and statistically analysed in the present-day material, the historical sources were examined to trace developments marked by continuation and change.

3.3 Findings

In this section, all relevant findings are given in a very condensed form.

Feature A-(i)

In present-day written Ulster Scots, <ch>-spellings are preferred when the velar fricative is intended to be indicated. Disregarding lexis of Gaelic provenance, the texts collected in the corpus contain a total of 4,037 tokens and 316 types that are relevant to the discussion of the written representation of the velar fricative. Of those, 3,252 tokens (80.5%) and 235 types (74.4%) show a <ch>-spelling, while 785 tokens (19.5%) and 81 types (25.6%) have the <gh>-spelling. It follows that the signalling of that fricative consonant in Ulster-Scots graphy is distinctive, but not homogeneous. Where words clearly belong to the shared lexicon of English and Scots, writers tend to prefer the Scots convention, e.g. <micht>, <licht> and <richt> instead of <might>, <light> and <right>. If lexis is exclusively Scots, i.e. if words are not part of the common core of Standard English vocabulary, <ch>-spellings do not prevail quite as clearly. That is because the word in question – for instance, *sheugh* – is Scots, no matter what graphical variant is chosen to refer to its phonological form.

Feature B-(ii)

There is a considerable degree of variation in positions where there is to be indicated a retracted and lowered short Ulster-Scots vowel. All attested spellings related to *big* shall serve as example. Of the latter there are 288 tokens and five types in the corpus data. The absolute and relative frequencies are as follows: <baag>

268 tokens/52%; <bag> seven tokens/1%; <big> 225 tokens/44%; <big> four tokens/1%; <bigg> nine tokens/2%. Although there is no overwhelming preference, we can still observe the clear opposition of <baag> and <big>. It remains an open question whether <baag> is intuitive. This also holds true for other spelling suggestions which are not represented in the data related to *big*: e.g. <Brätain>, <com-mättee>, <fäsh>, or <thäng>. Be that as it may, as much as the variant [i] may be viewed as a token of Ulster Scots in speech, the conscious choice to deviate clearly from <i> in KIT-words can be seen as indication of Ulster-Scotsness in written texts.

Feature B-(i)

With regard to words in which dentalised stops may occur, it is safe to state that non-standard forms are preferred. Again, a great range of variation must be stated. The majority of all 3,260 tokens and 316 types show a preference for the following theoretical spelling patterns: 579 tokens and 82 types of <tth>/<Cth> as in *butthermilk* and *wunther-tim*; and 2,630 tokens and 217 types of <Ctè>/<Cè> as in *daughtèr* or *scunnèr*.⁹

Feature A-(v)-(b)

Unsurprisingly, the representation of the alveolar nasal in final position of progressive verb forms – a “vernacular universal” (Chambers, 2004, 129) – is highly frequent and, in texts indicating that particular speech feature, omnipresent. 11,608 tokens and 1,436 types of <-in(‘)>-spellings make a clear majority in comparison to 167 tokens and 92 types of <-ing>-spellings. Indeed, the speech feature is so viable, so maximally accepted, that, for example, also {thing}-compounds, which are morphologically entirely different structures, show <-in>-spelling in final position. There are 13 types of {thing}-compounds: *ivrything*, *oniething*, *onything*, *simthing* as well as *iverythin*, *naethin*, *oanythin*, *oniethin*, *onithin*, *onythin*, *simthin*, *somethin*, *sumthin*. The latter group make 96.15% of a total of 104 tokens of {thing}-compounds.

Feature D-(ii)

As said before, the <oa>-vowel relates to words that belong to the lexical sets of LOT and THOUGHT. In Standard English, the opposition of short /ɒ/ and long /ɔ:/ applies. In Ulster Scots, that opposition does not operate. In pronunciation, the vowel is always [ɔ], its spelling most frequently <oa>, for instance in *blakthoarn*, *coancert*, *coarnfiel*, *moarnin*, *Noarth*, and *pletfoarm*. Tokens such as these are relatively frequent, they are numerically significant. The corpus texts show 196 types and 3,175 tokens of <oa>-spellings the half-open back, rounded vowel. Statistics suggest that the convention is not unfounded and that writers would consider the

9. <C> in graphemic brackets stands for ‘consonant’.

speech feature underrepresented if the convention were absent from written texts. However, it remains moot whether the convention is always consistently applied.

To summarise some of the findings as to present-day Ulster-Scots graphy, Table 3 below provides the reader with an overview of the most likely spelling patterns as represented in MUST-C texts. The table only shows examples related to the features discussed above

Table 3. Most frequent spelling variants in MUST-C texts (sample words)

-
- A. *features Ulster Scots shares with Scots in Scotland*
- i. retention of syllable final /x/ → <throch>
 - v. simplification of consonant cluster in final position
 - b. fronting of final in progressive forms, /-ɪŋ/ vs /-ɪn/ → <rinnin>
- B. *independent Ulster-Scots features*
- i. dentalised alveolar plosive in intersyllabic position → <bett^her>, <mat^her>
 - ii. indication of short central vowel in words such as *big* → <Brätain>
- C. *exclusive features of Ulster Scots vis-à-vis Mid Ulster English*
- ii. half-open back vowel in LOT and THOUGHT → <coarnmill>
-

As to the history of Ulster-Scots graphy, Table 4 below shall be given as first point of comparison. This table gives the year of publication of those works in which a feature is found to have been indicated in spelling for the first time.¹⁰

Table 4. First occurrence of selected features in the historical Ulster-Scots texts

-
- A. *features Ulster Scots shares with Scots in Scotland*
- i. retention of syllable final /x/ → 1846
 - ii. historic vocalisation of word/syllable-final /l/ → 1753
 - iii. retention of Older Scots /u:/ → 1813
 - iv. fronting and raising of Old English /a:/ → 1753
 - v. simplification of consonant cluster in final position
 - a. reduction of <-ld> or <-nd> to <l> and <n> → 1804
 - b. fronting of final in progressive forms, /-ɪŋ/ vs /-ɪn/ → 1804
- B. *independent Ulster-Scots features*
- i. dentalised alveolar plosive in intersyllabic position → 1846
 - ii. indication of short central vowel in words such as *big* → 1817
 - iii. no opposition between /ɛ/ and /a/ in some velar environments → 1901
- C. *default features*
- i. negation particle → 1753
 - ii. negational contraction → 1753
- D. *exclusive features of Ulster Scots vis-à-vis Mid Ulster English*
- i. distinction between /m/ and /w/ → Ø
 - ii. half-open back vowel in LOT and THOUGHT → 1920
-

10. Readers are asked to tolerate that the table presents first occurrences of all features even though only five of which are discussed in this paper. The purpose is to maintain the full picture in this regard.

In the main, all the relevant features except for the distinction of /w/ and /m/ have been signalled by written forms differing from Standard English orthography in the spelling of Ulster-Scots works produced during the period from 1750 to 1920. That very general statement is perhaps unsurprising and conceals what was less foreseeable. Table 4 above reveals that most of the features in sections (A) and (C), i.e. features that are unquestionably common to Ulster Scots and Scots in Scotland, have been present since the emergence of written Ulster Scots or, at least, from an early stage onwards. Surprisingly, the graphical representation of /x/-retention, for a key feature regarding the difference between English and Scots, sets in at a considerably late stage. With reference to features that are independent Ulster-Scots features, the table also gives consistent results: features exclusive to Ulster Scots can enter the written representation only after they have stabilised in speech. Axiomatically, they must be a later development than the occurrence of features that had already been in the variety before those exclusive features started to emerge. When the historical works were examined, another pattern emerged. Around 1800 and throughout the early decades of the 19th century, we find texts that mainly show *some* features from sections (A) and (C). Around 1850, we find historical texts that display *all* features from those two sections. Works with the largest numbers of features indicated in spelling belong to the first two decades of the 20th century. As a result, a general trend of increasing feature-density can be concluded if all historical texts and all texts collected in the corpus are strung together.

3.4 Interim conclusions: The history of Ulster-Scots spelling

The history of the graphy of Ulster Scots can be summarised as follows. Of course, the origins of written representation of the variety are in Scotland. The first appearance owes much to those origins and early Ulster-Scots works spelt out are – if that qualifier is allowed – almost Burnsian in spelling. Soon, however, there arise Ulster-based additions and, throughout the 19th century, Ulster-Scots graphy increasingly develops its own individual conventions. That continuous and gradual increase I should like to characterise as “natural” development that leads to a variant of spelling which deviates from Standard English as well as Scots in Scotland to a degree that the relatedness to both is still recognisable and transparent.

The latest observable additions, however, are predominantly spellings that relate to exclusively Ulster-Scots speech features. That development marks a decisive change in the general evolution of Ulster-Scots graphy. Although what is presented here can only be an abbreviated report on selected issues, it is still discernible that present-day representatives of written Ulster Scots wish to portray, in their spelling, as many features of spoken Ulster Scots as possible. If one quantifies the spelling and provides percentages of “density of Ulster Scots spelling”-ratios, the most extreme texts gathered in MUST-C show percentages between 60% and 100%,

whereas modest samples of literary Scots (e.g. Robert Ferguson and Robert Burns) or 19th-century Ulster Scots show ratios of 30% to 40%. Interestingly, the densest present-day texts have specific ideological underpinnings and, more often than not, occur in very specific editorial contexts. Highest density ratios have been diagnosed with texts by authors from regions

- a. where Irish Gaelic has retreated for a long time;
- b. where Irish Gaelic as opposing contestant is not present as everyday language;
- c. where Ulster Scots itself is regionally marginal;
- d. where, regarding Northern Irish politics, Loyalist attitudes are more common and strongest.

Highest density ratios have also been diagnosed with texts

- a. whose author is not known or unidentifiable;
- b. that are relatively untypical as far as typical text types of dialect writing are concerned;
- c. whose editing process involved a Standard English and an Irish Gaelic parallel;
- d. that were commissioned.

As already said, such texts present the reader with the highest density of “Ulster-Scotsness”, yet they also present the reader with an artificial accumulation of spelling features that goes far beyond the inherited tradition. Examples such as *eftèrnuin* ‘afternoon’, *fäsh* ‘fish’ or *kängrick* ‘kingdom’ show that the relatedness of some spellings to English and Scots is sometimes very opaque, if not caricatured.

With regard to the historical perspective, a further point shall be added. It appears that periods of considerable change in Ulster-Scots graphy fall together with time of political and societal instability. The period of Home Rule movement and of the general movement towards Irish independence coincides with the period of changes in Ulster-Scots graphy around 1900 and later. The same holds true for the recent decades that are marked by the end of the *Troubles*, the *Belfast Agreement* of 1998 and the constitutionalisation of a conflict that used to be a civil war. From that assessment of historical events springs the conclusion that the equation of “social instability, whether specific or general, aids language change” (cf. for instance Rydén, 1979) not only holds true for (standard) languages, but also traditional varieties.

4. Conclusion

This contribution has been based on a case study of Ulster-Scots graphy. It has attempted to shed light on traditional conventions and current trends in the development of that dialect. The conclusions to be drawn must, of course, be situated within a broader discussion of the scholarly treatment of spelling. To do so, the present author should like to offer a framework for the study of dialect spelling which, in comparison to other planes of language, clearly is an under-researched field.

As presented in Section 2, my approach to study the spelling of Ulster Scots in past and present was much informed by writing-related research. Influential studies were carried out in the 1980s. It is in one of the 1980s studies that we may find reasonable guidance. The work I refer to is the graphocentric volume *Schrift, Schreiben, Schriftlichkeit* (Günther & Günther, 1983). There, a comprehensive catalogue has been drafted. It suggests that five dimensions of written language be investigated in order to shed light, from a general perspective, on all complex relations that link written to spoken language. Those dimensions are the systematic, the psychological-physiological and medical, the social, the historical, and the pedagogical and therapeutic dimension. It appears that an adapted form of that catalogue would also constitute a sensible framework to find out about the intricacies of dialect graphy in relation to its adjacent standard system(s). The adapted scheme is presented in Table 5 below. In comparison to the catalogue drafted in Günther & Günther (1983) it lacks the psychological-physiological and medical dimension as a whole and disregards the therapeutic aspect. The scheme lists all issues that are thought to be relevant when studying the systematic, the social, the historical, and the pedagogical dimension of dialect graphy.

The framework makes apparent that the case study of Ulster-Scots spelling has been an attempt to study the history of the structure of the graphical representation, touching upon related points within the historical dimension. However, some findings also relate to other dimensions. An issue that promises particularly interesting insights is that of the relationship of standard-related literacy and dialect (il)literacy. From what can be gleaned from the case study of Ulster Scots, the following seems highly interesting. If we reconsider that the first phase of universal education in Britain and Ireland culminated in the Elementary Educations Act 1870 to 1893 and if we may, thus, assume an increasing implementation of Standard English in speech and in writing, the increased vernacularity diagnosed in Ulster-Scots texts at that time and shortly afterwards is neither a counter tendency to general standardisation processes nor a reflection of insecure identity. Counter to that, I am inclined to interpret that development as an increased understanding of how to best represent one's own vernacular which seems to be enabled and improved by increasing levels of standard-related education and literacy. At the moment,

however, that must remain an inclination until studying dialect spelling in its own right has its place in historical linguistics and more studies have contributed to our insight into all dimensions of dialect graphy.

Table 5. Framework for the study of dialect graphy

Systematic dimension

- typology of representational systems
- causal relationship of written standard and written dialect
- interaction of written and spoken dialect as well as interdialectal variation
- communicative conditions of written dialect

Social dimension

- awareness for written dialect as opposed to dialect speech
- forms of graphical representation in dialect communication
- function of graphical representation in dialect communication
- development of graphical representation
- dialect “illiteracy” in opposition to standard-related literacy

Historical dimension

- history of the structure of the graphical representation of dialects
- history of the literature-related function of dialect graphy
- history of dialect graphy as representation of individuals
- history of development of dialect graphies under constraints of their interrelationship and interdependence with adjacent standard

Pedagogical dimension

- acquisition of written dialect as means of communication in speech community
 - acquisition of written dialect as means of communication in individuals
 - introduction of dialect writing to originally graphyless speech communities
 - campaigns to promote dialect literacy in schools and in public sphere
-

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Index

A

- adjective 54, 79, 87, 89–90, 92
- adverb 21, 26, 80, 82, 84,
 - 89–90, 92, 175
- advertisement 76–78, 91
 - advertising 74–75, 77–79, 85, 89–92
- Age of Codification 3, 8–9
- Age of Prescriptivism 3, 7–9, 102
- alterity 1
- anti-prescriptivism 7, 9, 21–22
 - see also* prescriptivism
- author 11, 44, 50, 53, 56–58, 60, 150, 152–153, 199, 206
 - authorship 78, 149, 156
 - authorship attribution 149, 153, 156–157, 164

B

- Baker, Robert 12–14, 18, 31, 44, 71
- British National Corpus (BNC)* 18–20
- book producers 73–76, 84, 89–90
- British school curriculum 13

C

- Corpus of American English Proverbs (CAEP)* 130, 134–137
- Caxton, William 74–76, 88–89, 91, 94–96
- certain 5, 169, 171–172, 176–187
 - certain predictions 5, 171, 174, 176, 178–181, 186–187
 - certainty 5, 171, 174–176, 179, 185–187
 - see also* non-certain
- character n-gram 149–152, 154, 156

Corpus of Contemporary

- American English (COCA)* 19, 131
- Codification 8–9
- Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)* 19–20
- commissive 5, 167, 178–187
- commitment 30, 41, 179, 186
- comparative 49, 51–52, 61–63, 66, 87, 130, 167, 169
- complaint 13, 161
- community of practice 2
- consensus tree 157, 159
- convention 5, 73–75, 77–78, 89–90, 93, 129–130, 138, 144, 167–168, 177, 191, 194–196, 202–205
 - conventional formulae 169, 182
- Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECs)* 170
- correctness 9, 20, 29–30, 32, 38, 45, 49, 102
- Cramp, William 53, 57–60, 67, 71
- Crombie, Alexander 49–50, 53–59, 67, 71

D

- dendrogram 4, 150, 161
- descriptive 2, 8–11, 49, 51–52, 61, 65–67
- descriptivism 8
- dialect 5, 15, 18, 45, 149, 151, 153–154, 191, 194, 196, 199–200, 206–208
 - dialectal 16–18, 45, 156, 162, 164
 - dialect graphy 191–192, 196, 207–208

- dialect spelling 5, 191–192, 194–195, 207–208
- directive 177–178, 184–185
- discourse
 - discourse community 2
 - discourse tradition 1–2, 129–130, 137–138, 142–144
 - discourse traditional norms 132, 137–138, 141, 144
- double negation 10, 14
- dual-layer storage model 4, 132–135

E

- Early English Books Online (EEBO)* 79–80, 93
- Early Modern English (EModE) 78, 110, 167, 170–171, 172, 176–177, 179–182, 184, 186
- The Educated 40–41
- error 4, 10, 13, 29, 31, 34, 44–45, 99–101, 106–109, 111–113, 115–117, 119, 121, 144
- extra-textual 150

F

- face 177–178, 185
 - face wants 177
 - negative face 178, 185
 - positive face 178
- formula 42, 80–81, 84–86, 90–92, 139, 163–164, 167–169, 177, 180
- formulaic 77, 163–164, 167–169, 177, 179–180, 183, 185
- Fowler, Henry 7, 19–20, 24, 29, 32, 43–44, 71, 104, 114
- functional variation 3–5, 149

G

- Garner, Bryan 16–17, 19, 25,
30–32, 41–44
genre 4–5, 51, 53, 63, 66, 138,
143, 149, 151–152, 157, 159,
163–164
grammar writing 11, 49–53, 57,
59–61, 63, 65–66
graphemic variants 5

H

- hard word 104, 115, 121
Heffer, Simon 16, 22
HeidelGram 51–53, 66
*Helsinki Corpus of English
Texts* 170
*Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots
(HCOS)* 170
historical 1, 15, 50–52, 61–63,
65–66, 117, 145, 154, 163,
176–177, 191–192, 197–200,
202, 204–208
*Hyper Usage Guide of English
(HUGE)* 3, 9, 14, 31, 39,
45–47
Hurd, Seth T. 13
hyperstandard 40

I

- intention 104, 117, 167, 169,
172–174, 185–186
intentional 105–106,
167–168, 172, 183, 185–186
Ireland 196–198, 207
irregular
irregular verbs 9, 14–18

J

- Johnson, Samuel 12–13, 57, 71,
101, 109, 111, 118–119, 123

K

- Koch, Peter 1–2, 129–130, 137,
193

L

- language change 139, 145, 206
language of distance 193
see also Sprache der Distanz

- language of immediacy 193
see also Sprache der Nähe
Latinate 105, 110, 112, 114–115,
120–121
letter 5, 53, 78, 101, 107, 126,
128, 130, 150–151, 153–154,
156–164, 167–170, 174–187
letter-writing 168
lexical access 133
Lowth, Robert 10, 12–13, 16, 27,
55–60, 66, 71

M

- malapropism 3, 99–121,
124–128
many writers 29, 41–43
*Corpus of Middle English Local
Documents (MELD)* 150,
152, 154–155, 157–158, 162
metalanguage 3, 30, 32
metalinguistic 2, 52, 101, 117,
140
Middle English 154, 164
modal 168–169, 171–173, 181,
185–187
modal auxiliary 5, 186–187
modal meaning 172, 185–187
Mrs Malaprop 4, 99–100,
102–109, 112–115, 117, 121–122
multidimensional scaling
4, 153, 155, 162
Murray, Gerald 57–59, 66–67,
71
Murray, Lindley 10, 49, 50,
55–60, 66, 71

N

- negation
see double negation
network analysis 2–3, 49–53,
71
n-gram 4, 149–154, 156, 163
non-certain 5, 169, 171–172,
176–178, 180–181, 184–185, 187
non-certainty 175, 185
see also certain
non-commisive 167, 183, 187
non-standard English 41–43
normative grammar 8, 11

O

- Oesterreicher, Wulf 1, 129–130,
137–138, 193, 210
official
official correspondence 169,
183, 185, 187
official letters 167, 170, 176,
178–184, 187
Older Scots (OSc) 167, 172, 187
onomasiological 30

P

- paratextual communication
74, 76
paratextual element 73–74
phonetic 50–51, 61, 64–65, 67,
103, 119
phonology 51, 61, 64
Pinker, Steven 21–22
Poldauf, Ivan 11
pragmatic function 5, 178, 183,
186–187
prediction 167, 169, 171–174,
176, 178–181, 186–187
predictive 167, 171
preposition stranding 10
prescription 7–8, 10, 12, 20,
65–67
prescribed 30, 43, 195
prescriptive 3, 8, 10, 20, 23,
29, 31–32, 51–52, 59–61,
66, 167
prescriptivist 11–12
Prescriptivism 3, 7–12,
20–23, 30, 51, 62, 65, 102
see also anti-prescriptivism
print 73, 76, 80–82
prologue 72, 75, 85–86, 89
promotional 73–74, 76–80, 87,
89, 91–92
promotional discourse
78, 83, 87, 90
promotional strategy 79, 91
proscription 12
proscribed 30, 32, 38, 42–43
proverb 4, 129–145
mental representation
of proverbs 129–130, 132,
138, 144
Pyles, Thomas 11–12

R

register 162, 164, 200
 request 177–178
 The Rules 40–41

S

Saussure, Ferdinand de 194
 scholarly
 scholarly grammars 53, 61
 scholarly networks 53
 Scots 5, 167–168, 170, 172, 187,
 201–202, 204
 scriptorium style 5, 157
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley
 4, 99–107, 109–112, 114–115,
 117–121, 124–127
 Sheridan, Thomas 102, 104,
 124
 shibboleths 29, 42
 SNOOTS 41
 sociolect 103
 some readers 29, 40–43
 speech error 4, 99–100, 105–
 106, 115–116, 121
 spelling
 spelling conventions
 5, 191, 195

spelling variation

3, 150–151, 154, 164

Sprache der Nähe 193

see also language of
 immediacy

Sprache der Distanz 193

see also language of distance

Standard English 15, 18, 23,

40–43, 167, 191, 203, 207

standardisation process

8–10, 12, 23

see also hyperstandard

stigmatisation 15

stigmatized 42

Stylo 4, 149–154, 157, 159, 161,

163

stylometry 149–150

stylometric 4, 149, 151,

153–154, 164

subjectivity 171, 174

subjective 171

substitution 108, 113–115, 120

T

target 38, 93, 99, 101, 108–109,

112–113, 115–116, 119–121,

124–128

teaching grammars 53, 60

title-page 73–82, 84–85, 87,
 89–93

Tooke, John Horne 54–56,
 58–59, 66, 71

U

Ulster 197–198

Ulster Scots 196–198, 200–207

usage guide 2–3, 7–10, 12–16,

18, 20, 29–31, 40–41, 44

see also Baker, Fowler, Hurd

usage problems 2–3, 7, 13–14,

16, 18, 21–23

V

vernacular universal 203

W

Walker, John 102, 107, 109–111,
 118–120

wills 159–160

wordlist 199–200

This volume explores changing norms and conventions in the English language, as displayed in a broad range of historical data from more than five centuries. The contributions discuss the interplay of sociocultural conditions, specific discourse traditions and structural aspects of language, paying special attention to the communities where norms and conventions are displayed and shaped in verbal interaction. The volume is enriched by systematic terminological clarifications, interdisciplinary approaches and the introduction of new methods like network analysis and advanced analytical tools and forms of visualisation into the diachronic investigation of historical texts.

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