'Varying Language and Opposing Creed' New Insights into Late Modern English

A review*

Rik Vosters
Center for Linguistic Research, Free University of Brussels (VUB).

Reference

Pérez-Guerra, J., D. González-Álvarez, J.L. Bueno-Alonso, & E. Rama-Martínez (eds.). 2007. 'Of Varying Language and Opposing Creed'. New Insights into Late Modern English. Bern: Peter Lang.

Overview

Whereas the 18th and the 19th century were only considered to be of marginal interest to earlier scholars in the field of English historical linguistics, recent years have seen a significant increase in publications based on Late Modern English language data (see, for instance, the Cambridge collection of Kytö, Rydén & Smitterberg 2006 about nineteenth-century English, and a comparable volume about the eighteenth century by Raymond Hickey, forthcoming; earlier works include e.g. Görlach 1999).

After a first edition in Edinburgh 2001, the Second International Conference on the English Language in the Late Modern Period 1700–1900 (LMEC2) was hosted by the English department of the University of Vigo in 2004, and brought together a large number of international experts in the field. This volume compiles a selection of the presented papers, which are not only interesting on account of the wide array of linguistic phenomena described, but also because they give both junior and senior researchers in any field of language studies a sound and up-to-date overview of the linguistic corpora and data collections available for this specific period.

Most contributions are relatively technical, which makes the compilation especially compelling for scholars working on the history of Late Modern English, although a wider audience of language historians will be also be interested to

---

observe the significance of relatively 'recent' linguistic data for the diachronical description of the language as a whole.

Individual contributions

The volume, dedicated as a Festschrift to Professor Emeritus Charles Jones (University of Edinburgh), opens with an introduction of the editors, where they emphasize the need to focus on Late Modern English data in order to account for many changes which have shaped the English language as we know it today. Not only do researchers have a large amount of sources at easy disposal, but this material is also more diverse and more complete than is usually the case for older stages of the language. Sociolinguistic background information is often more readily obtainable, and not only the traditional genres for linguistic research (literary texts, formal correspondence, etc.) receive the attention they deserve – as is demonstrated by the wide variety of primary sources used in the fifteen studies under review.

As a good case in point, Joan Beal's contribution about "Nineteenth-century evidence for 'recent' changes in English pronunciation" explores how evidence from Late Modern English sources and reference works can serve to falsify traditional claims surrounding various phonological attributes associated with so-called Estuary English. Features such as final-vowel tensing in words like 'happy', th-fronting and the labiodental /r/ are conventionally assumed to have originated from the south of England and spread northwards in recent years. Such assertions, however, are based on apparent-time evidence, and Beal convincingly shows, for instance, how 'happy'-tensing cannot unproblematically be taken to be an imported southern characteristic, as Thomas Spence's Grand Repository of the English Language (1755) shows this variant to be part of polite Newcastle speech in the eighteenth century already.

In the second paper, "The development of pragmatic markers in the modern period", Laurel Brinton examines the development of clausal pragmatic markers such as 'you know' and 'I say', which are especially typical for the Early and Late Modern English period. Using examples from an array of linguistic corpora, the author re-evaluates the syntactic reversal hypothesis, which traces the clause-external pragmatic marker in sentences such as "It's kind of her opinion I think" back to matrix clauses as "I think that it's kind of her opinion", where 'that' became obsolete and 'I think' turned into a parenthetical which was no longer restricted to the sentence-initial position. Further attention is given to the less well-known constructions 'what's more' and 'which is more', which are shown to have undergone a shift from clause-internal adjuncts to clause-external disjuncts.

Next, Hubert Cuyckens and Hendrik De Smet present recent work on "For...to-infinitives from Early to Late Modern English". While this structure occurs in Middle English texts already, the authors show that the 18th and 19th centuries mark important changes in the distribution of these constructions. Evidence from the 10 million word Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (De Smet 2005) demonstrates how the initial dominance of sentences with an extraposed subject clause ("It makes sense for your business to expand") give way to other similar

constructions with a different syntactic function (e.g. as post-modifiers, "Management expressed the need for a strategy to be developed") and even different semantics (a shift from benefactive to purposive meaning).

The third contribution, by Stefan Dollinger, highlights "The importance of demography for the study of historical Canadian English". The relatively underrepresented diachronic study of English in Canada has all too often solely been based on language-external evidence, leading to the general idea that colonial varieties of English are significantly more conservative (cf. Chambers 1998). Dollinger sets out to investigate these and other claims, by combining linguistic evidence from the pre-Confederation section of the Corpus of Early Ontario English (1776-1849), with sociohistorical data about the early settlement and migration history of the area. One of three variables under investigation is the then highly contentious first-person use of 'will' (rather than prescribed 'shall'), for which Ontario English proves to be more progressive from 1800 onwards. This is subsequently explained by examining the so-called second wave of immigration more closely, which is traditionally taken to have had no immediate linguistic influence on the development of Canadian English. Dollinger points towards the fact that over 90% of these new immigrants can be associated with a non-southern variety of English, which, together with the large prevalence of newcomers from the lower social strata, leads the author to conclude that "[t]he increase in WILL in the first person is likely to have been the result of this massive SIN [Scottish, Irish and Northerner – RV] lower class migration to Ontario" (p. 131).

Similarly, the earliest forms of American English are often claimed to be more conservative than contemporary British English, and Radosław Dylewski's data on root vowel leveling of strong verbs at least partially confirm this. In "Forms of tri-alternant verbs in early American writings (1662-1720)", the author works with a collection of British and North American texts split up into two subperiods (1662-1692 and 1700-1720) – for the American corpus, a significant amount of data comes from the Salem witchcraft trial records (cf. the forthcoming volume by Rosenthal et al.), yet the British subcorpus does not include comparable material for both subperiods (see below). With the historical trend then being the replacement of the traditional 'sing-sang-sung' paradigm by a leveled 'sing-sung-sung', Dylewski shows that this innovation occurs slightly less rapidly in American English, and as this change did not make its way into present-day Standard English, it is not surprisingly tied to the formality of the investigated sources as well, with leveling occurring more sporadically in cultured and stylized texts, such as the published literary works in the corpus. Contrary to this early divergence, the coming of the 18th century seems to mark a turning point in the shifting of these forms in the United States, which is rather loosely measured up to the decline of colonial Puritanism and a more general cross-Atlantic convergence from 1700 onwards.

In a particularly exhaustive contribution (75 pages), Teresa Fanego discusses the notion of "Drift and development of sentential complements in British and American English from 1700 to the present day". Based on Sapir's definition of a 'drift' as a collection of linguistic change phenomena which are long-lasting and

"cumulative in some special direction" (Sapir 1921: 155), the author presents a detailed overview of syntactic restructuring in English resulting from the rise of the verbal gerund since the 16th century. At first, this new form was restricted to prepositional environments, but other forms of sentence complementation (especially to-infinitives) have yielded to the gerundive in different contexts as well. Among other things, Fanego points towards the nominal origin of the gerundive (Old English 'wending' < 'wendan', cf. Dutch 'wending') to account for some of the observed syntactic changes, such as the gerundive in preverbal subject position, which has been gaining ground from the 18th century onwards, especially in American English (e.g. "Going home is not an option").

The next contribution, "'Worser' and 'lesser' in Modern English" by Victorina González-Diaz, focuses on the development of double comparatives in Early and Late Modern English. Most previous work on this topic seems to have focused merely on traditional inflectional and periphrastic comparatives ('richer', 'more atrocious'), while double suppletive forms ('worser', 'lesser') received far less attention. Furthermore, the phenomenon has been claimed to be marginal and to have disappeared during the 18th or 19th century as a result of prescriptivism and increased standardization. González-Diaz investigates these claims, using a 5.6 million word collection of several corpora (for a large part consisting of texts approaching the spoken register, such as personal letters, drama, etc.), but also taking into account most authoritative grammar books of the different eras. Quite surprisingly, she discovers that the traditional view generally holds true for normal double periphrastic comparatives like 'more faster' (i.e. they become marginalized and stigmatized in prescriptive grammars from the 17th century onwards), but that the situation for 'lesser' and 'worser' is entirely different. González-Diaz rejects the idea of double comparatives as a homogeneous group, not only based on linguistic differences (as, for instance, the 'more better' type can be used for emphasis, whereas 'worser' and 'lesser' are usually not), but also on sociolinguistic grounds. While both forms were already socially stigmatized before the emergence of seventeenth-century prescriptivism, 'lesser' became more and more accepted during the second half of the 19th century, and finally made its way into the standard language.

Next, Bernd Kortmann and Suzanne Wagner's attempt to provide their readership with "A fresh look at Late Modern English dialect syntax" mainly dwells on methodological problems that arise when trying to apply the principles of modern dialectology to historical data. The only major tools available are the Survey of English Dialects and the Freiburg English Dialect Corpus, where the majority of respondents was born between 1870 and 1920. By investigating several well-known features such as the northern subject rule, as well as lesser-known variables like subject/object pronoun exchange, the authors explain how older accounts of variation usually emphasize either a complete absence or a full presence of a certain characteristic, making it hard to compare to modern studies, which generally quantify variation in more detail. Also, certain features which are of interest to a modern dialectologist cannot be traced in historical sources, often because of probable underreporting due to stigmatization (as is the case for the well-known example of the double negative). In sum, Kortmann

and Wagner argue that "the problems we know about from present-day dialect syntax are multiplied when wanting to study LME [Late Modern English – RV]" (p. 296), and conclude with a plea for increased work on the compilation of regionally stratified historical corpora, as in the historical sociolinguistic tradition of, among others, the Helsinki Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change in English (VARIENG).

The following paper by María José López-Couso explores the subject of "Auxiliary and negative cliticisation in Late Modern English". Contracted forms are still present in twenty-first-century English orthography ('can't', 'isn't'), but could occur historically either with proclitics ('ne wolde' > 'nolde') or enclitics ('he is' > 'he's'), the latter being exceptionally frequent in question tags. Using the Late Modern English material from A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers (ARCHER), López-Couso inventories all cases of auxiliary ('he's') and negative cliticization ('he isn't') of 'to be' and 'to have'. The results concur with earlier remarks in the literature, showing a steady rise of the phenomenon, especially during the second half of the 19th century, with up to 35% of all forms being contracted. Although cliticization of the proclitic type has almost completely disappeared by 1800, the author still attests a wide range of possible contractions, including now uncommon forms as 'beant' and 'tisn't'. Also, earlier claims concerning the nature of the subject are confirmed, showing cliticization to be significantly more frequent with pronominal subjects. Finally, as contraction is a typical spoken language phenomenon, it may not be surprising that cliticized forms have a higher incidence in speech-related genres such as drama.

Working on the history of Composite Predicates, Meiko Matsumoto discusses "The historical development of 'take/have a walk'". Based mostly on the Chadwyck-Healey Literature Databases and on examples from the Oxford English Dictionary, she attests the earliest occurrences of this phrase in the 16th and 17th century (although not yet idiomatized into a fixed collocation), followed by a sharp rise in frequency at the start of the Late Modern English period. One of the explanations suggested by the author is the change of lifestyle after the Industrial Revolution, which would have resulted in people taking walks more frequently, and the topic thus being discussed more regularly in literary sources. Another more plausible explanation comes from Barbara Strang (1970: 101), pointing out "a more general tendency after 1800 [...] to give the verbal group more weight". Matsomoto concludes her paper with several general remarks about a different evolution of Composite Predicates in British and American English, although this was only briefly touched upon in the article itself, as no American English corpus data were consulted.

Next, Isabel Moskowich and Begoña Crespo devote their article to "Presenting the Coruña Corpus". This collection of scientific texts in Late Modern English is being developed at the Research Group for Multidimensional Corpus-Based Studies in English at the University of A Coruña, and is complementary to similar corpus gathering efforts at the University of Helsinki, where the Corpus of Middle English Medical Texts has already been published (Taavitsainen et al. 2005), and where an Early Modern and Late Modern English version

are under construction. The Coruña Corpus selects scientific writings between 1600 and 1900, and current work focuses on the subdisciplines of mathematics, astronomy, biology and philosophy. (Note that medical works have been excluded to avoid overlap with the Helsinki projects). To achieve optimal representativeness, two texts per decade have been taken up, totaling about 200,000 words per discipline each century. Also, Moskowich and Crespo discuss some of the technical aspects of the compilation process (TEI-compliant encoding, XML format), and conclude with a short overview of pilot studies already conducted at the time of writing.

The following contribution, "Aspects of the use of the progressive in the eighteenth century" by Palomar Núñez Pertejo, shows how the Late Modern period is crucial in consolidating the position of English progressive forms. Based on the Century of Prose Corpus and relevant sections of the Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers, Núñez attests an average of 7.76 progressives per 10,000 words in the 18th century, which is almost double compared to previous studies of Early Modern English, yet still rare compared to 19th and 20th century data, when the phenomenon really gains ground. Most functions of the present-day progressive paradigm are already present, except for the passive variant ("a poem is being recited"), which only emerges from around 1800 onwards. Various other aspects of the 18th century progressive are discussed as well, including its semantics (mainly verbs of movement and communication) and its more frequent occurrence in non-expository text types.

Whereas most studies in the volume emphasize issues of morphosyntactic development, Elena Orduna Nocito presents a study with a somewhat different focus, namely "The semantic field of 'manners' in the eighteenth century: A cognitive approach". As the idea of courtesy and manners becomes increasingly important in the 17th and 18th century, the author undertakes a broad semantic analysis of the terms in the field, using what she calls a cognitive approach. First, Orduna Nocito engages in a theoretical categorization of (historical) dictionary lemmas related to the topic, which she then evaluates on the basis of excerpts from a number of issues of The Spectator (1711-1712). In this way, she shows how the rise in 'manners awareness' causes many words to acquire new meanings, as well as producing shifts from a more peripheral to a more central position in a lemma's semantic field, often through metaphoric use of the word (e.g. 'culture', which evolved from 'tilling the land' to more general manifestations of civilized human accomplishments). Furthermore noting that over three quarters of the expressions in this domain are of Romance origin, Orduna Nocito discusses and emphasizes the importance of French and Latin loan words in this the field of manners.

In the next chapter, Päivi Pahta and Arja Nurmi of the Helsinki Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change in English explore "Structures of code-switching in eighteenth-century personal letters". As the few historical studies on code-switching in English tend to focus on (earlier) periods of societal bilingualism, the aim of this paper is to approach the phenomenon as a result of individual multilingualism – an unusual angle which has proven to be worthwhile, judging from the ample examples available from the Corpus of Early English

Correspondence Extension (CEECE). After thoroughly embedding the topic in the socio-historical background with a discussion on how code-switching relates to various ideas of bilingualism and cultural/linguistic contact situations, Pahta and Nurmi inspect their corpus data from different angles. On a syntactic level, instances of code-switching range from single words to entire phrases, and can occur in intersentential, intrasentential or extrasentential positions. At the macrolevel, looking at texts as a whole, code-switching is shown to function mainly as a discursive device, organizing the act of communication, for instance by signaling a direct quotation or by being used in formulaic letter-writing conventions such as leave-taking formulas. Most code-switching involves either the classical languages (Latin, Greek) or the major European languages at the time (French, Italian), although there are some occurrences of non-Western words, usually in correspondence from British territories such as India.

The last contribution of the volume takes the reader back to the domain of politeness research: "Saying 'please' in Late Modern English" by Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Fátima María Faya Cerqueiro. Arguing against the traditional view of parenthetical 'please' originating from 'if you please', the authors explore several Late Modern English sources to suggest an alternative. An analysis of Robert Lowth's incoming and outgoing correspondence demonstrates that, while in the 18th century 'pray' is still the most common politeness marker, the older 'if you please' shows a stable development without any significant rise in frequency. This leads Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Faya Cerqueiro to posit 'be pleased to' as the predecessor of modern 'please', where the final /d/ would have been weakened over time, causing the participle to be reinterpreted as an infinitive, with a subsequent drop of 'to' and the auxiliary. Several examples are provided to document each stage of this development, which is claimed to have originated in the spoken language (hence the phonetic weakening). In addition, the authors cite several occurrences of 'please' in the work of Late Modern English novelists, where this phenomenon seems to be typical of servants' speech. Noting "the ability of Jane Austen, and possibly of Mary Brunton as well, to render different social varieties of English in their novels" (p. 442), Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Faya Cerqueiro conclude that the development of parenthetical "please" is a change from below, which could spread from the lower social strata to more educated speakers by way of domestic staff's polite forms of address towards their masters.

Evaluation

Although at the time of writing this review, the editors' grievance of how little attention is given to the Late Modern period in English scholarship might not entirely hold true anymore, it must be admitted that this volume has contributed to expanding the field and eliminating part of the linguistic blind spot that traditionally surrounded the 18th and 19th century. It is characteristic for such recent scholarly interest to encompass a broad range of underlying theoretical and methodological approaches, ranging from highly technical descriptive studies on the finer points of English syntax, to more innovative work emphasizing

the relationship between language production in different genres and domains, and the sociohistorical context in which it arose. Especially these latter approaches have gained more momentum in recent years (among other things, through the emergence of research associations as the Historical Sociolinguistics Network, <http://www.philhist.uni-augsburg.de/hison/>), allowing previously unexplored areas of language history to surface, including topics such as the role of prescriptivism on the different aspects of standardization, situations of historical multilingualism and language contact, the impact of extra-linguistic factors on language development, etc.

If one general note of criticism must be provided, it should concern the relationship between the configuration of the employed linguistic corpora and the conclusions drawn from the material. While it is clear that a computerized collection of linguistic data is never more than a small sample of a nearly infinite body of language material, great care must be taken to avoid extrapolating empirical observations beyond the scope of the experimental setup itself. Accordingly, attestations in a five, ten or even twenty million word corpus cannot be taken as a basis for sweeping conclusions concerning the evolution of the English language as a whole, especially as many linguistic characteristics tend to be highly genre-specific. Preference should be given to either single-genre corpora for highly detailed analyses specific to one particular type of document (with the Corpus of Early English Correspondence as an excellent example), or to multi-genre collections that are both sufficiently balanced and complete to allow for comparisons between different text types (cf. A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers).

While most contributions in the present volume demonstrate a clear concern for these issues, we feel obliged to signal two chapters where this appears to be more problematic. For Dylewski, we already mentioned the unbalanced design of the employed subcorpora, where very specific documents such as the ample witness depositions of the Salem witchcraft material are not sufficiently counterbalanced in both parts of the British text selection. Although the author recognizes this "major handicap" (p. 154), we believe it could have clouded the observed differences between the homeland and the colonies, especially as Dylewski makes it clear that leveled forms tended to prevail in "genres reflecting the spoken medium" such as trial records (p. 153). A more balanced corpus construction might highlight the observed geographical differences even more clearly.

A second problem already mentioned regards the contribution by Matsumoto. We find it slightly concerning how the entire conclusion of this chapter can be devoted to British versus American English usage differences of the studied phenomenon ("the British use of 'take' was transplanted to a new area [= North America – RV], where it evolved in a new direction"), while all relevant source material is exclusively British, and no apparent geolinguistic dimension has been added to the empirical study presented. Although we can agree with statements such as "the British preferred 'take' to 'have' in the case of 'take/have a walk'" (p. 332), we believe more research to be necessary before any conclusions about transatlantic usage divergence can be drawn.

In spite of these limited methodological concerns, and aside from the observation that not all contributions in a volume can be of comparable quality, this collection of articles does offer a refreshing mix of intensive scholarship, not only by senior experts in the field, but also by young researchers. Apart from some minor typographical errors, such as 'Baybee' for 'Bybee' (p. 150), 'have no shorter as walk' (p. 326), 'on-line data-base' (p. 339) and 'CR-ROM' (p. 382), the volume is well-edited, and a sound introduction makes the collection more than the mere sum of its parts. An extensive 11-page section offering 'Notes on contributors' allows the reader to find out more about ongoing research projects and provides assorted references for further reading.

References

De Smet, H. 2005. A corpus of Late Modern English texts. ICAME Journal 29: 69-82.

Görlach, M. 1999. English in Nineteenth-Century England: An Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hickey, R. (ed.). Forthcoming. Eighteenth Century English. Ideology and Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kytö, M., M. Rydén, & E. Smitterberg (eds.). 2006. Nineteenth-century English: Stability and Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenthal, B., R. Trask, P. Grund, R. Hiltunen, L. Kahlas-Tarkka, M. Kytö, M. Peikola, M. Rissanen, M. Burns, M.K. Roach, G. Adams & B. Ray (eds.). Forthcoming. Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spence, T. 1775. The Grand Repository of the English Language. Newcastle: T. Saint.

Strang, B. 1970. A History of English. London: Methuen.

Taavitsainen, I., P. Pahta & M. Mäkinen. 2005. Middle English Medical Texts. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Reviewer

Rik Vosters is employed as a junior researcher at the Center for Linguistic Research at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Currently, he is preparing a doctoral dissertation in the field of historical sociolinguistics, investigating (socio-)linguistic variation in a large historical corpus of Dutch-language manuscripts from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1814-1830). More information can be found on the author's website <http://homepages.vub.ac.be/~rvosters>.