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Sounds, Words, Texts and Change

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Introduction*

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The Eleventh International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (11 ICEHL) was held at the University of Santiago de Compostela between 7th and 11th September 2000. The number of participants exceeded 250, while the papers delivered within the conference's main programme came to 120. The distinguished panel of plenary speakers featured Douglas Biber, Laurel J. Brinton, Santiago González Fernández-Corugedo, Raymond Hickey, Chris B. McCully, Frans Plank, Irma Taavitsainen, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Anthony Warner. There were also several events running concurrently with the main programme, notably a workshop on historical word-formation, a para-session on electronic corpora and a poster session.

This volume is a companion to another one also containing papers from the same conference: *English Historical Syntax and Morphology. Selected Papers from 11 ICEHL, Santiago de Compostela, 7–11 September 2000*, edited by Teresa Fanego, María José López-Couso and Javier Pérez-Guerra (CILT 223). The two volumes together offer a representative sample of the contributions presented at the conference, including some of those delivered during the workshop on historical word-formation. The papers that have survived the successive selection procedures for presentation and publication[1] quite accurately reflect the various concerns of English historical linguistics at the turn of the millennium and the different methodologies applied to address them. Largely for this reason, we have made no attempt to organize the papers thematically and have simply presented them in alphabetical order. However, so as to give the reader some preliminary idea of what this volume has to offer, we will give a brief summary of the main issues in each individual paper.

Although most papers in one way or another address theoretical and methodological issues, in some papers theoretical aspects are placed in the foreground more than in others. A case in point is Hickey's "Ebb and Flow: A Cautionary Tale

of Language Change". The article's title alludes to the fact that the trajectory along which linguistic change proceeds within a community is not always unilinear: a change can move in one direction and then reverse its course, as happened with the vowel in the TRAP lexical set in British English. Early twentieth-century descriptions of British English pronunciation record a raised realization of the vowel, but by the middle of the twentieth century this trend was reversed and there is currently a noticeable tendency for the lowering of the vowel. Such shifts of transmission across generations, which Hickey refers to collectively as 'ebb and flow', have important implications for the special status accorded in sociolinguistic studies to so-called 'remnant communities' (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2002), that is, communities that for reasons of geographical isolation are usually assumed to still embody a stage of a language which has long been superseded in other more central, urban areas of the language in question. As Hickey notes, one cannot automatically assume that feature values in the remnant community which differ from feature values in more central areas have been transmitted unchanged throughout history: a contemporary realization of a feature may be similar to a first input, but not necessarily a direct reflex of this if ebb and flow has taken place.

Another paper with a sociolinguistic orientation is Bax's "Linguistic Accommodation: The Correspondence between Samuel Johnson and Hester Lynch Thrale". This is a pilot study testing the applicability of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT; cf. Giles et al. 1987) to historical sociolinguistics. CAT was originally developed in the context of present-day sociopragmatics to analyse face-to-face conversations and the ways in which speakers adapt their language and communication towards others. Bax stretches the concepts of speaker/listener and applies the model to the analysis of historical correspondence, as illustrated by the correspondence between Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) and his close friend Hester Lynch Thrale (1741–1821). He discusses three types of accommodation: accommodation through content, lexical convergence and syntactic convergence. Lexical convergence is examined in terms of the ratio of Latinate polysyllables employed by each of the two correspondents, while the criterion used to test syntactic convergence is the ratio of paratactic vs. hypotactic constructions. Bax shows that Johnson converged to Thrale's colloquial style by using simple, paratactic structures and by refraining from his heavy Ramblerian, Latinate diction. Thrale, for her part, converged to Johnson's writing chiefly through the content of her letters, but she did not converge lexically, nor did she adopt a syntactically more complex style. These differences in accommodative behaviour are accounted for by Bax with reference to some of the principles of Accommodation Theory.

The papers by Durkin, Kay & Wotherspoon, Lutz, Vennemann, and Culpeper & Kytö (for this last paper see further below), testify to the continued interest in lexis and semantics among English historical linguists. In "Changing Documentation in the Third Edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*: Sixteenth-century Vocabulary as a Test Case" Durkin examines the implications that the complete revision of the *OED* now in progress has for studies attempting to assess the nature and extent of the accessions to the English language in a given period. Taking as a sample items with a sixteenth-century first date in *OED2* or *OED3*, he shows some of the possible pitfalls in making uncritical use of dictionary data, especially where such data is to be used for statistical purposes. Durkin also discusses changes in the etymological component of the *OED*, which is also the central topic of Vennemann's "*Key* Issues in English Etymology". He is concerned with unetymologized English words, i.e. words whose etymologies in the *OED* end with statements such as "of obscure origin" or "derivation uncertain". In all, there are some 4,696 entries characterized in this way, and Vennemann argues that comparing such words to Basque and Semitic can lead to fruitful new etymologies and can also throw light on the stratal, cultural relationships between English or Germanic, on the one hand, and Basque and Semitic on the other. The word *key* in the title of the paper, whose etymology the *OED* qualifies as "unknown" but which Vennemann traces back to Vasconic, is a case in point.

Kay & Wotherspoon ("Wreak, Wrack, Rack and (W)ruin: The History of Some Confused Spellings") examine changes between ⟨r-⟩ and ⟨wr-⟩ spellings, as in the unetymological *wrack* for *rack* 'instrument of torture'. This occurs considerably later than the actual simplification of the cluster /wr-/ in the history of English and thus involves the addition of a silent letter, despite the trend towards spelling pronunciations evident in English since the sixteenth century (Scragg 1974: 55). Since a high proportion of the English words beginning with ⟨wr-⟩ have meanings with components of torment, distortion or discomfort (witness *wreak*, *wreck*, *wrench*, *wring*, *writhe* or *wrought*, among others), Kay & Wotherspoon suggest that their semantic and visual associations may have encouraged the movement from *rack* to *wrack*, or that from *rapt* to *wrapt*. On the model of *phonaesthesia* and *phonaestheme* (cf. Samuels 1972: 46) they propose the terms *graphaesthesia* and *graphaestheme* respectively to designate the phenomenon underlying such semantically motivated spellings with ⟨wr-⟩ and the group ⟨wr-⟩ itself.

In another paper on lexis ("When Did English Begin?"), Lutz addresses the vexed question of the periodization of English and argues that the conventional

tripartite division into Old, Middle and Modern English, which is based on the degree of morphological synthesis, cannot be applied to the lexical development of the language. By carefully considering a selection of texts (such as Laȝamon's *Brut* or *The Owl and the Nightingale*) that are otherwise considered to exemplify the so-called Early Middle English period, she shows that, whether one makes 1100 the dividing line between Old English and (Early) Middle English (see eg. Hogg 1992: 9), or brings it forward to around 1200, as proposed by Henry Sweet (1892: 211)[2] and, more recently, Kitson (1997: 250), both from a lexical and a cultural point of view, 'Saxon' English ended long after Middle English as the period of levelled inflexions began. For the lexicon, she therefore proposes a separate, bipartite periodization distinguishing Anglo-Saxon (a period of essentially Germanic vocabulary comprising Old and Early Middle English) from English (a period of heavily gallicized vocabulary comprising all later stages).

Several of the issues discussed by Lutz are taken up by Scahill in "Dan Michel: Fossil or Innovator?". His analysis of the language of the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (1340) reveals a text showing the integration of native and foreign components at the level of orthography, but otherwise offering a striking mixture of lexical innovation (with a substantial number of exotic borrowings from French) and grammatical conservatism (with very few signs of morphological transition). Thus, though we tend to think of the transition from Old English to Early Middle English as characterized by morphological collapse, in the case of the *Ayenbite* the transition affects the morphology last, such that it belongs in the later of the two periods distinguished by Lutz (see above) lexically, but early in the Middle English period morphologically. This confirms that different modules of language — including orthography, as Scahill argues — can change at different rates cross-dialectally; in the particular case of Middle English, "externally-driven lexical change and internally-driven morphological change proceeded rather independently" (p. 197).

Another area of research that found favour at the 11th ICEHL was text types and genres. Four of the papers in this line — by Taavitsainen, Görlach, Claridge & Wilson, and Culpeper & Kytö — appear in this volume. Taavitsainen ("Historical Discourse Analysis: Scientific Language and Changing Thought-Styles") looks at the evolution of medical discourse from Late Middle English to the Royal Society period. Starting from the hypothesis that the different styles of thinking represented by scholasticism and empiricism will be reflected in the linguistic repertoire of medical texts, she examines evidential features, especifically the use of speech act verbs of reporting (*say, tell*) as opposed to 'private' verbs (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: §4.29) of processes that can only be subjectively verified (*know, think*). The former are found to be an important feature of scholastic writings, which are logocentric and rely on axioms ("X says/claims that Y"). By contrast, empirical science relies on sensory evidence, hence verbs of observation and cognitive processes become prominent, and there is also an overall shift to a more subjective, involved way of writing marked by the use of first person pronouns and past tense verbs. Görlach ("A Linguistic History of Advertising, 1700–1890"), in turn, is concerned with the development of the modern commercial advertisement as a text type. He considers in detail the linguistic components (vocabulary, formulaic expressions, syntax, etc.) of early advertisements, and also extralinguistic parameters such as the topics advertised, the audience addressed or the role of non-verbal constituents, especially illustrations.

Like Görlach, Claridge & Wilson focus on the modern period. In "Style Evolution in the English Sermon" they look at how sermons as a text type have changed linguistically from the seventeenth century to the present day, using Biber's factor analysis (1988) and concentrating on three of the factors or dimensions proposed by Biber, namely 1 (Involved vs. Informational Production), 4 (Overt Expression of Persuasion) and 6 (On-Line Informational Elaboration). Sermon style appears to have remained constant over time with respect to both factors 4 and 6, while there is a general tendency for sermons to exhibit greater involvement. Overall, however, the stylistic evolution in sermons seems to be more closely tied to linguistic distinctions which, for the most part, do not figure on Biber's factor scales, such as the formality of vocabulary (Anglo-Saxon vs. Latinate), sentence length, or the use of rhetorical figures. Claridge & Wilson thus suggest that a full account of the evolution of sermon style would involve making use of more features than are available on Biber's dimensions.[3]

Finally, in "Lexical Bundles in Early Modern English Dialogues: A Window into the Speech-related Language of the Past", Culpeper & Kytö examine lexical bundles[4] — recurrent word-combinations that commonly go together in natural discourse — such as *in order to, you know what* or *the fact that.* Occurrences of these and similar combinations in the Corpus of English Dialogues (1560–1760) are organized by Culpeper & Kytö into broad functional categories modelled on the three functional dimensions — ideational, interpersonal and textual — recognized by systemic-functional grammar (Halliday 1994). This enables them to show the grammatical properties of the different classes of lexical bundles, their relation to particular pragmatic and discoursal functions, and how they distribute across the texts examined, as well as how they compare

with those word-combinations identified in studies of present-day spoken and written English.

This brings us to the last two papers in the volume: Williamson's "The Dialectology of 'English' North of the Humber, c. 1380–1500" and McCully's "What's Afoot with Word-final C? Metrical Coherence and the History of English". Williamson's paper applies the methods of historical dialectology to the analysis of Older Scots and Northern Middle English during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Up to the fifteenth century these two language labels are used to distinguish from a geopolitical viewpoint what is perceived as a common speech area, with actual linguistic divergence between Lowland Scotland and Northern England starting roughly from the fifteenth century. Williamson uses data drawn from *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* and the Edinburgh Corpus of Older Scots to reveal patterns of phonological and morphological variation in Scots and Northern English texts. He shows that, in addition to literary texts, local documents, such as record books and charters, constitute important sources of evidence for dialectology studies because they are usually datable and can be localized.

McCully's contribution, like Hickey's discussed at the beginning of these pages, is primarily theoretical. He examines recent work in generative phonology that accounts for the distribution and development of stress in Old English, Old High German and some of the Nordic languages by appealing to the so-called Germanic foot (Dresher & Lahiri 1991; Lahiri, Riad & Jacobs 1999) and argues that evidence for the postulation of the Germanic foot is problematic. First, iterative assignment of such feet over-generates and leads to merely mechanical destressing, thus complicating the grammar. Secondly, the Germanic foot would be a specific addition to a universal foot inventory and thus suspicious. Moreover, the Germanic foot crucially relies on interactions with extrametricality in order to play an interesting role in phonological processes (which interactions are largely stipulative). McCully attempts to show how the Germanic foot might be replaced by the moraic trochee, and sketches the consequences of such a move for the organization of the stress phonology of Old English (in particular), modelling those consequences in optimality-theoretic terms. More generally, McCully's discussion of right-edge effects traditionally handled under the rubric of extraprosodicity contributes to the ongoing debate concerning the explanatory power of rule-based and constraint-based phonological frameworks.

We would like to close this brief introduction by thanking the many people and institutions that helped to make the 11th ICEHL a success. Among the

former, we are grateful to all those who delivered papers, as well as to the several academics who helped us in the difficult task of selecting from the large number of abstracts submitted the contributions that were accepted for presentation at the conference. Our thanks also to the students who collaborated with the Organizing Committee both before and during the conference. Sponsorship was gratefully received from the Xunta de Galicia (Secretaría Xeral de Investigación e Desenvolvemento and Dirección Xeral de Turismo), the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, the University of Santiago de Compostela, the Department of English, the City of Santiago de Compostela, the British Council, the Spanish Association for Canadian Studies (AEEC), and the Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza.

Notes

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1. The selection process was not an easy task, for the number of papers submitted for publication came to 55.

2. Sweet gives Late Old English 900–1100, Early Middle English 1200–1300, and 'Transition Old English' the whole century 1100–1200.

3. This ties in with similar suggestions put forward by other researchers that have applied Biber's multi-dimensional model to the analysis of historical registers; see e.g. González-Álvarez & Pérez-Guerra (1998: 338).

4. For the label cf. Biber et al. (1999: 990 ff.).

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