Uncovering layers of meaning in the history of the English language

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1.   Introduction

English, like any other living language, keeps changing, and always has, throughout its history. Some of these changes are more obvious. On the level of orthography and vocabulary, for instance, modern readers immediately detect unfamiliar spellings and unfamiliar words in older texts. Other changes are more difficult to recognize, most notably changes on the level of meaning. A Shakespearean word, for instance, may look deceptively familiar, except that it may feel a little incongruous in its context, and it may turn out, upon closer inspection, that the word has kept its shape but has changed its meaning since Shakespeare's times. It has always been one of the challenges of dealing with older texts, be it as a casual reader or as a scholar, to uncover layers of meaning. How, for instance, can we establish the meaning of a particular word in an older text? We may deduce a possible reading on the basis of what would make sense in the given context, but the notion of what makes sense is very

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likely to be influenced by our modern reading habits, which may differ significantly from the reading habits of past readers. Moreover, the context itself is a notion which is more problematic than may appear at first sight. For the analyst it may seem easy to refer to a particular aspect of the context in order to disambiguate a particular passage in a given text or to fill in aspects of meaning that are not explicitly stated (enrichment), but it is difficult to give a principled account that is not based on a hind-sight analysis as to what the exact dimensions of the relevant context are (see section 3 below).

In one way or another all the contributions to this volume argue that the uncovering of meaning is a complex process that needs to take into consideration the multiple interactions of linguistic organization including orthography, morphology, syntax and, ultimately, pragmatics. We can reach a better understanding of historical texts if we pay close attention to these interactions and if we assess both the details of the texts and entire texts within their relevant contexts. Some of the following papers achieve this by reassessing old evidence from new perspectives or by asking old questions in a new way while others employ new analytical tools and new types of corpora. All the papers deal with data from the history of English, and they cover a wide range from Old English manuscripts to Early Modern English letters and medical texts to Late Modern English cant vocabulary.

Before we give a brief overview of the contributions in this volume, we would like to highlight some of the common themes, contextualizing the contributions against the background of some thoughts on the layering of meaning, i.e. the interactions between the different levels of linguistic structuring, on the concept of context and its dynamic nature, and finally on some of the modern tools that currently allow new ways of asking questions and suggest new insights into the uncovering of layers of meaning in the history of the English language.

2.   Layers of meaning

Linguists traditionally distinguish between several levels of meaning. Löbner (2002, chapter 1), for instance, distinguishes between expression meaning, utterance meaning, and communicative meaning. Expression meaning in itself is a cover term for word meaning and sentence meaning. Both words and sentences are linguistic expressions and their meanings can be studied in isolation. At this level of analysis, the context of use is abstracted away. What is at issue is the meaning potential of simple or complex expressions and how they relate to one another. Complex expressions are analyzed on the basis of the simple expressions they contain and on the basis of the compositional rules that combine the meanings of the simple expressions.

Utterance meaning concerns the meaning of an expression – simple or complex – when it is actually used in a specific context. At this level, referring expressions, such as personal pronouns or definite noun phrases, are linked to specific referents, tenses are linked to specific times in relation to the actual production of the utterance, and utterances that report some fact can usually be assessed as to whether they are true or false in the specific situation in which they are uttered. The same sentence can have very different utterance meanings if it is used in different situations. Löbner (2002, 4) gives the example of the sentence "I don't need your bicycle", which has a different utterance meaning if it is uttered by a person who was originally planning to borrow her neighbor's bicycle for a trip to town or if it is uttered by a child who – in a game of cards – is offered a card with the picture of a bicycle.

Communicative meaning, finally, concerns the meaning of an utterance as a communicative act in a specific situation. It includes the speaker's intention of what he or she tried to achieve with this particular utterance in this particular social setting, and it includes effects of the utterance on the audience. These aspects are often even more difficult to discern for the outside analyst than those on the other two levels.

These distinctions between different levels – or layers – of meaning are often used to distinguish between semantics (which deals with expression

meaning) and pragmatics (which deals with utterance meaning and communicative meaning). At the level of communicative meaning, the analysis must also include models of the speaker (or writer) and the addressee.

> Linguistic pragmatics irreducibly involves the speaker's model of the addressee, and the hearer's model of the speaker (potentially recursively). For George to understand Martha's utterance of "X" to him, he must not only recognize (speech perception, parsing) that she has said "X," he must have beliefs about her which allow him to infer what her purpose was in uttering "X," which means that he has beliefs about her model of him, including her model of his model of her, and so on. (Green 2011, 88)

For the historical linguist who is interested in an overall understanding of linguistic material that has survived from the past, access to the possible "purposes" of the writers is even more limited than for the linguist dealing with current material in which a certain amount of introspection may be available. In fact, for the historical linguist it is the interaction between the different levels that provides the essential key to a better understanding of linguistic testimonies of the past. In the contributions in this volume, layers of meaning are uncovered by focusing very closely on the interfaces between meaning and other levels of

linguistic description, starting from palaeography and graphemics to morphology, syntax, and the analysis of entire texts and text genres.

In order to reach a better overall understanding of the linguistic testimonies that have come down to us – their communicative meaning – it is necessary to pay close attention to the minutiae of the linguistic resources at different levels and to study their contribution to both the overall meaning of the communicative act and the communicative act at all its levels of linguistic organization. And this is what the contributions in this volume set out to do. Chapman, for instance, demonstrates that more than just the semantic level has to be taken into account for a comprehensive understanding of the development of the meanings of the two words *infer* and *imply*. Their change in meaning is connected to structural preferences (e.g. *that*-clauses vs. noun phrases), to pragmatic aims (politeness), and to prescriptivism. Stanley's study highlights how an interpretation of difficult Old English verb forms relies on an analysis of the levels of graphemics, phonology, and morphology, as well as on lexical semantics. Durkin assesses the relationship of phonology and semantics in his discussion of the etymology of the word *road*. Iyeiri illustrates how syntax and pragmatics interact when the ordering of clauses is revealed to be governed by information structure. And Lehto shows the close connection between the levels

of genre, syntax, and layout for the meaning of Early Modern English proclamations.

3.   The significance of context

As soon as we move beyond expression meaning, the meaning of a linguistic entity always depends on the context in which it occurs. Words are disambiguated by their context. Sentences derive their illocutionary force at least in part from their context, and entire texts are interpreted against the context in which they occur. However, it is far from trivial to specify in each case what exactly constitutes the context. Potentially it is unlimited, comprising not only the linguistic context, often called the co-text, i.e. the words and sentences preceding and following a particular utterance, but also the wider communicative context in which it occurs together with the speaker's and the addressee's wider knowledge of the world. In present-day pragmatics the importance of the context for an understanding of face-to-face interactions and communication in general has received a lot of attention (see, for instance, Fetzer 2004; 2007; Fetzer and Oishi 2011; Mey 2011).

Fetzer (2007, 4-5) points out three important aspects of dealing with context. First, context is not seen as an analytic prime but as a multi-layered entity containing sub-entities, which together frame and delimit content. Second, context is seen as a concept that is dynamically constructed in the

process of interaction, i.e. it is both a process in itself and a product. And third, context is seen to also include the common ground shared by the interactants. The third aspect is arguably the most difficult one in the context of a historical analysis. Access to the common ground of the interactants can only be very indirect via the evidence that can be found in the relevant texts of how a writer took his or her common ground with the addressee into consideration while formulating the text. The second aspect mentioned by Fetzer may also often defy a thorough linguistic analysis. Historical texts are often to a large extent monologic and do not reveal the interactants' joint construction of dynamic context. Thus it is the multi-layered and complex nature of the context that provides a handle for a more fine-grained analysis of historical linguistic material.

Wallis provides a particularly rich view into the complexities of the production context of an Old English manuscript. She is able to trace the work of different scribes, correctors, and glossators who all approached the text in different contexts and for different tasks. Moreover, the text is adapted to a different dialectal context, which further complicates the creation of a meaningful text. Ruano-García looks at the context in which a nineteenth-century dialect dictionary was compiled by assessing how one particular source was used by the author. But's study illustrates how the meaning of a Late

Modern English cant term is affected by various facets of contexts, i.e. the
linguistic, textual, sociohistorical, and cultural context. Grund, finally,
discusses the importance of the sociohistorical and situational context for the
interpretation of evidentials. His data comes from Early Modern English
witness depositions, and the context of the court setting is crucial for
understanding the evidential strategies of the deponents.

4.   New resources for old and new questions

On the methodological level, the contributions in this volume illustrate a broad
variety of approaches that can help uncover layers of meaning in historical
texts. In several cases, new insights are gained through the use of new or
recently published corpora. In recent years, a trend could be observed from
second-generation corpora towards third-generation diachronic corpora (see
Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013, chapter 3). Rissanen (2000, 9) described what
came to be known as first-generation corpora as "long and thin". Corpora such
as the *Helsinki Corpus* cover a long diachrony (more than 1000 years) and
cover a wide range of genres and text types, but each of these has only a very
limited representation in the entire corpus. On the analogy of Rissanen's term,
Kohnen (2007) called the second-generation diachronic corpora "short and fat".
These corpora comprise a very limited range of genres and cover only a short
period of time. The *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* and the *Corpus of*

Early English Medical Texts, for instance, contain material from relatively restricted domains – public and private letters, and medical writing, respectively – and they both cover a relatively short period from Middle English to Early Modern English. In his programmatic paper Kohnen called for corpora that close the gap between the two, i.e. corpora that cover a long diachrony and a broader but still limited range of genres and, as an example, he proposed his *Corpus of English Religious Prose* (COERP) that was to cover more or less the entire duration of the history of English and to comprise a broad variety of text genres from the religious domain.

However, in the meantime two different solutions appear to complement the first- and second-generation corpora. On the one hand, there are the third-generation purpose-built corpora that are compiled for very specific research tasks. Corpus compilation has become easier, and it has become increasingly possible to create customized corpora for very specific research questions. On the other hand, there are mega corpora comprising hundreds of millions or even hundreds of billions of words, such as the *Corpus of Historical American English* with 410 million words, the Chadwyck Healey Corpus consisting of several very large subparts, or the Google Books project containing 361 billion words of English texts.

The corpus-based papers in this volume mostly rely on second- or third-generation corpora. The second-generation corpus of *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (EMEMT, published 2010) provides the basis for three of the studies (Kopaczyk, Sylwanowicz, and Tyrkkö). *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, used by But for her investigation of cant and slang words in eighteenth-century English, is also an example of a second-generation corpus because it was compiled without specific research questions in mind. Grund's investigation is based on the *Electronic Text Edition of Depositions 1560–1760* (ETED, published 2011), and Lehto studies texts from the *Corpus of Early Modern English Statutes* (1491–1707). These purpose-built corpora are probably better described as examples of third-generation corpora, but the boundaries between second- and third-generation corpora are not clear-cut. Moreover, some papers also use mega-corpora, e.g. But, who in addition to the Old Bailey Proceedings also uses *The Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO), and Chapman, who uses two of the recent mega-corpora for his investigation of the development of meaning of the verbs *infer* and *imply*: the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA, published 2010) as well as the *Early English Books Online* corpus (EEBO, published 2013), each consisting of 400 million words.

The potential of these resources is further enhanced by innovations in computer-assisted methodology. Corpus approaches to historical data have to cope with a large range of problems. One of the more obvious ones is spelling variation, which poses serious problems for computer-assisted methods like the identification of lexical bundles and cluster analysis. The contributions by Kopaczyk and Tyrkkö illustrate that – at least for Early Modern English – automated spelling standardization with VARD (see for instance Lehto et al. 2010) has recently opened new avenues of research in this area. Corpora like the EMEMT, which include both a standardized and a non-standardized version of their texts, may soon become the state of the art in historical corpus compilation.

5.   Overview

The thirteen articles of this volume all deal with uncovering layers of meaning in the history of English. They are arranged according to the particular interface of their analysis. The first part contains papers that deal with the significance of spelling and phonology in the uncovering of meaning. The papers of the second part are concerned with semantic issues in the narrow sense, i.e. the meaning of lexical items. The third part contains papers that explore the contribution of syntax to our understanding of old texts. And the last part, finally, comprises papers that extend the perspective to issues of genre conventions and their

contribution to text interpretation and understanding. Together the papers from all sections span the history of English from Old English to Late Modern English.

The two papers in the first part of this volume focus on the graphemics and phonology of historical English texts, both dealing with Old English. While the linguistic levels of graphemics and phonology are commonly considered to consist only of form without content, the two papers in this section demonstrate how relevant these levels are to the meaning generated by the texts in question. Furthermore, they show that paying attention to seemingly insignificant details is highly profitable. Christine Wallis in her paper "Layers of reading in the Old English *Bede*: The case of Oxford Corpus Christi College 279B" investigates the scribal production of one particular manuscript of the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS. 279B (O), which, though almost a century younger than the well-known Tanner manuscript, still retains more Mercian features than other eleventh-century Bede manuscripts. Wallis unravels layer after layer, identifying a number of – what she calls – scribal performances. These include not only the work of the principal scribe and the rubricator, but also of the corrector, who is responsible for erasures, corrections, and additions to the text, and the glossator, who added scratched glosses to the manuscript. Wallis reveals that what has

been considered a deficiency of manuscript O in fact allows us to "see the scribes at work". First of all, her study proves that the main scribe of the manuscript did not always adhere faithfully to the exemplar he was copying from: repetitions of text passages, which were afterwards crossed out by the corrector, reveal that there is graphemic variation as well as fluctuation between West-Saxon and Mercian forms. In particular, the joint work of scribe and corrector shows hesitancy in dealing with the Mercian personal pronoun forms *þec* and *mec*, which must have appeared strange in an eleventh-century West-Saxon context. At least one later user of the manuscript was apparently also troubled by some aspects of the language of the text: in several instances scratched glosses bring some of the non-West-Saxon features in line with this dialect. Each scribal production testifies to the effort of the people involved to create a meaningful text.

A struggle to make texts meaningful is also at the basis of Eric Stanley's paper on "Unlikely-looking Old English verb forms". Stanley investigates five verb forms that have caused problems for editors and translators of Old English. In each case there are good reasons to emend the forms, but Stanley warns against putting too much reliance on them. Special caution should be exercised when verbs are rare since, if a form was not frequently used, an Anglo-Saxon poet or scribe might have felt doubtful about the "correct" form to be used. For

example, the form *strade* in *Beowulf* could have been substituted by the scribe for the expected 3rd person preterit subjunctive *strude* 'plundered' because it might have appeared very similar to the present subjunctive *strūde* at a time when the Old English verbal system was in decline. Or in the case of the unlikely-looking verb form *æge fille*, a gloss to Latin *ad implebo* 'I will fill up' in the Eadwine Psalter, the scribe may have been trying to translate the Latin text as closely as possible; the puzzling interpretation might well be a combination of both *afyllan* and *gefyllan* as a parallel to the double prefix of the Latin lemma. With his careful analysis of unlikely-looking verb forms Stanley demonstrates that not only modern readers of Old English have to engage in a struggle to make sense of the texts, he reveals that also the Anglo-Saxon scribes had to make an effort in order to cope with different aspects of Old English as a written language. By taking the spelling of the manuscripts seriously, Stanley uncovers new potential meanings for the unlikely looking verb forms discussed in his paper.

The second part of this volume moves on to the next linguistic level; it contains four papers that deal with words and their meaning, with etymology, lexicology, and lexical semantics. They show how much there is to be gained from sifting through the layers of meaning created by previous generations of scholars. Furthermore, they demonstrate the importance of context for lexical

semantics as well as for meaning change. Philip Durkin assesses various
potential etymologies and hence "original" meanings of one single word in his
contribution "On the importance of noting uncertainty in etymological research:
Some implications of a re-examination of the etymology of *road*". Even though
the Modern English meaning of the word *road* is attested only in 1580, it is
generally believed to go back to OE *rād* 'a ride etc.' Durkin, however, points
out that this etymology is by no means certain: on the one hand, it is not clear
when the semantic change from 'a ride, journey' to 'street, road' took place –
there are some indications that the change might have happened early on, but
there is no conclusive evidence. On the other hand, the evidence from Older
Scots does not fit well into the picture from a phonological point of view.
Durkin weighs the merits of alternative etymologies, most importantly OE *rodu*
'clearing', which appears to have been restricted to linear clearings and whose
meaning might therefore have developed from 'clearing' to 'road'. Expressions
in charters such as 'along the clearing' could have opened up the pathway for
semantic change. This would account for the phonology of both Modern
English and Scots forms, but problems arise from large chronological and
geographical gaps in the attestation of this word. This means that the etymology
of road cannot be proved with certainty. Durkin uses the case of the word *road*

to remind the reader that all etymologies are ultimately hypotheses, and that it is important to highlight uncertainties.

Going to the other extreme, an entire dictionary forms the topic of Javier Ruano-García's paper entitled "'A Wiltshire word, according to Kennett': The contribution of MS Lansd. 1033 to Halliwell's *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* (1847)". Ruano-García investigates different layers of early lexicology by analyzing in detail the amount of material in Halliwell's *Dictionary* that derives from an unpublished collection of dialect vocabulary compiled in the late seventeenth century by White Kennett. Halliwell's *Dictionary* represents the antiquarian trend of the nineteenth century to use dialect vocabulary to uncover historical layers of language. Ruano-García demonstrates that Halliwell relied heavily on Kennett's work: Kennett is cited in 346 entries of Halliwell's *Dictionary*. The contribution is particularly significant with respect to dialectally marked items: almost 70 per cent of the references to Kennett concern dialectal words. Among these words, Northernisms are most frequent, but also words of Kentish origin. This contrasts with Halliwell's own statement that he used Kennett's collection as a source for Wiltshire and Oxfordshire vocabulary; furthermore, the number of words derived from Kennett that actually comes from these two counties is very small. By analyzing the contribution of Kennett's *Etymological Collections* to

Halliwell's *Dictionary*, Ruano-García unravels the creation history of such a repository of meaning and raises awareness of how knowledge is generated.

Don Chapman investigates the influence of prescriptive rules on meaning change in his paper "Enforcing or effacing useful distinctions? *Imply* versus *infer*". He starts out with a detailed description of the history of the meaning of the two verbs from the 1500s to the present day. It is interesting to note that for both verbs a sense of 'impersonal entail' (i.e. a necessary conclusion based on facts) seems to have existed very early on and that both developed new meanings in a process that can be described as subjectification. Chapman characterizes the new senses of the verbs as 'personal suggest' (i.e. a conclusion which is hinted at but not necessarily correct). For *infer* this usage is not very frequent, but it makes the verb into a synonym of *imply* in certain contexts. What is even more important is that *infer* can be substituted for *imply* as a politeness strategy since *infer* appears less offensive than *imply*. Chapman shows that this usage probably gained currency in the 1920s and 30s but that it seems likely that the progress of this use of *infer* was stopped by a prescriptive rule which requires that the two verbs should be used with reciprocal meaning, with *implying* as the active part and *inferring* as the passive one. He suggests that rather than enforcing a useful distinction, this rule may be responsible for eradicating the use of *infer* for 'polite attribution'. However, Chapman also

demonstrates that actual language usage has never been as neat as the language guides suggest. Many instances of *infer* are ambiguous and allow of different interpretations; often it is only the context that allows the intended sense to be deduced.

Roxanne But's study on "The role of context in the meaning specification of cant and slang words in eighteenth-century English" discusses the interplay between context and meaning of cant lexis ("thieves' slang"). According to But, meaning can be described as the "function of context and background knowledge"; or put another way, the meaning of words is prone to change spontaneously as soon as they are uttered in new contexts and new speech situations. Accordingly, the chapter begins with a detailed definition and description of different levels of context. On the broadest level, But distinguishes "linguistic", "textual", "sociohistorical", and "cultural" context but, at the same time suggests more specific, finer grained classifications for each category in order to enhance the discussion of findings. In the main part of the chapter she draws on material from the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* corpus and on fictional texts from the *The Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO) database to analyze the situational meaning of the cant term *cull*. The discussion of the findings shows well how different layers of context add to the construction of meaning in each speech situation and how the

traditional meaning and collocations provided in contemporary cant dictionaries do not necessarily have to correspond to the actual use in the transcriptions of trials in the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* or in the fictional texts of the ECCO database.

The third part of this volume is devoted to interactions between syntax and meaning. The three papers illustrate well how this interplay may have different manifestations. The first two papers uncover layers of meaning down to the level where lexical items are devoid of any meaning and contribute to our understanding of grammatical or textual structure only through their morpho-syntactic properties while the third paper in this section illustrates how syntax might contribute to the transmission of meaning in a text at the level of discourse organization. Linda van Bergen's paper "Let's talk about *uton*" reassesses the morpho-syntactic properties of a lexical item that is characterized through a conspicuous absence of meaning. The form *uton* is a well-known example of semantic bleaching and grammaticalization, and its role in an adhortative construction with bare infinitive is generally regarded as grammatical rather than lexical; however, the question remains as to which word class *uton* belongs. Originally, it developed from a form of the verb *wītan* 'depart, go', but the earliest Old English records suggest that semantic bleaching had taken place and that the connection with the main verb was lost.

The first part of the paper provides an in-depth discussion of several morphological and syntactic aspects of the form *uton* which strongly support the view that the form should not be regarded as a finite verb form. The second part addresses some of the problems that arise from such a classification. One of the issues at stake is the fact that one would have to accept clauses without a finite verb, but the author compares her Old English data to similar constructions in German or Dutch and reaches the conclusion that infinitival adhortative constructions in Old English might have been possible. Irrespective of the way in which the form *uton* is analyzed, it appears that speakers of Old English were probably not aware anymore that *uton* was a verb after it had grammaticalized.

While *uton* had gradually lost its meaning in the course of the grammaticalization process, the next paper presents a method for authorship attribution in which all lexical items in a text are deprived of their semantic properties intentionally, as only morpho-syntactic tags are considered for analysis. Jukka Tyrkkö's contribution "Exploring part-of-speech profiles and authorship attribution in Early Modern medical texts" introduces an innovative method for evaluation the authorship of texts by anonymous authors based on the standardized frequencies of word classes. It relies on the assumption that the relative distribution of individual word classes within a particular text is distinct

for each author's style of writing. Tyrkkö describes a simple and quick method for detecting anonymous texts likely to be written by the same author through the comparison of the proportional frequencies of twelve word classes such as nouns, lexical verbs, modal verbs, all forms of the verb *be*, or existential *there* within each individual texts by means of a hierarchical cluster analysis. The description of the method is complemented by a case study in which Tyrkkö successfully tests and evaluates the usefulness of such an analysis for authorship attribution by applying it to texts from the *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (EMEMT) corpus.

The third paper in this section addresses the ordering of clauses, which contribute to the meaning of the text as an entity. Yoko Iyeiri's paper on "The positioning of adverbial clauses in the Paston letters" investigates the behavior of causal, conditional, and temporal clauses in this fifteenth-century letter collection. This includes clauses introduced by the conjunctions *if*, *(al)though*, *when*, *because*, and *till/until*. One central research question investigates how far the ordering of clauses in the Paston letters differs from Present-day English, where conditional clauses tend to precede the main clause, causal clauses normally follow the main clause, and temporal clauses occur in both positions. Iyeiri can show that the same principles apply to the Paston letters: whereas clauses with *if* are attested mainly before the main clause, clauses with *because*

– but also those with *till/until* – are positioned after. Clauses with *though* and *when* are regularly used in both positions. Iyeiri sees information structure as the driving force behind these regularities: *if*-clauses, for example, are an "essential premise for the realization of the main clause" and, therefore, precede the main clause. Another factor that turns out to influence the positioning of adverb clauses is the length of the clause involved: short clauses are significantly more frequently inserted into the main clause than long clauses.

The last group of papers deals with the interfaces between specific genres and the meaning of textual elements. All four contributions analyze Early Modern English data from one text domain or from one genre, and they investigate how the topic, the situation, and the conventions of text production are reflected in the texts in the form of patterns and meanings that are specific to the respective context. In her contribution "Complexity and genre conventions: Text structure and coordination in Early Modern English proclamations" Anu Lehto analyses the complexity features of coordination and textual structure in Early Modern English proclamations, which contribute to the meaning of the texts at the levels of preciseness and all-inclusiveness. Complexity features are very characteristic of contemporary legal writing and it is one of the aims of her study to investigate the development of complexity in historical texts by analyzing ten clausal coordinators and correlatives such as

and, for, *yet,* or *either–or*. The data for the study derives from the self-compiled corpus of national legal documents, the Corpus of Early Modern English Statutes (1491–1707), and the analysis is complemented by a discussion within the framework of genre studies and historical pragmatics, e.g., taking into account also the layout and textual structure of the proclamations. Lehto's findings suggest that there is a shift from a predominance of clausal coordination before 1550 to more frequent phrasal coordination (i.e. between clause constituents such as coordinated noun phrases) in the seventeenth century. The author shows that such changes must not be studied in isolation, but should be embedded in the sociohistorical context of the period. The findings of the study are discussed in relation to the beginning of the printing of national legal texts, the abrupt language shift from Latin or French to English in this genre, and the humanist idea of maintaining order in society through laws.

The next two studies both work with data from the Early Modern English Medical Text corpus (EMEMT). Joanna Kopaczyk, in her contribution "Formulaic discourse across Early Modern English medical genres: Investigating shared lexical bundles", studies formulaicity in Early Modern medical discourse. She focuses on 3-grams, i.e. stable lexico-syntactic three-word patterns, which occur in at least three text categories of the EMEMT. The text categories were defined by the corpus compilers on the basis of the subject

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matter of the text and include, for instance, text books, treatises on specific topics, and recipe collections. By limiting her analysis to 3-grams appearing in several of these categories, Kopaczyk is able to investigate to what extent different categories of texts share the same lexico-syntactic resources and to what extent the lexico-syntactic patterns are related to the thematic context of the texts. The main part of her analysis is devoted to the classification of the meaning of the shared 3-grams. She identifies eight semantic areas, five functional areas, and two structural frames for which 3-grams can be found. Her analysis reveals that some of the text categories are more likely to contain the same 3-grams than others. Moreover, highly specialized text categories like texts on plague and texts on therapeutic substances are less likely to share 3-grams with other text categories, especially for 3-grams with referential meaning. This suggests that there are systematic relations between the thematic context of texts (which builds the basis for their categorization in the EMEMT) and the lexico-syntactic resources they employ.

 Marta Sylwanowicz's study, "'Treasure of pore men', 'countrymans friend' or 'gentlewomans companion'? On the use of interpersonal strategies in the titles of Early Modern English medical texts", deals with the role of titles of Early Modern English medical texts. Her starting point is the function of titles, which inform readers about the content of texts and, at the same time, help

select a specific target audience. Sylwanowicz investigates the linguistic strategies that are employed in titles to signal the intended audience, focusing in particular on the differentiation between professional and lay audiences. Her analysis shows that the intended target audience is often clearly reflected in the title. Interpersonal strategies, especially overt references to readers, occur more often in titles of texts directed at lay audiences. Based on the expressions that are used, lay readers can further be subdivided into groups like "a curious reader", "women and young girls", "seaman and travellers", and "the poor". In addition, terms such as *friend, companion, jewel,* and *mirrour* are commonly used in names of medical compilations addressed at lay audiences. These terms adopt specialized meanings in this context, signaling a highly accessible writing style. Sylwanowicz explains her findings with the fact that lay readers had to be assured that medical texts were not restricted to specialists. The texts had to be presented as being accessible to individuals without medical training, and titles fulfilled important functions in this respect.

In the final paper of this volume, entitled "'I saw ye Child burning in ye fire': Evidentiality in Early Modern English witness depositions", Peter Grund studies evidential markers from all word classes with respect to their semantic categories and their pragmatic functions. Four main semantic categories of evidentiality are distinguished, namely "quotative", "sensory", "assumption",

and "inference". A comparison of the findings with those of a previous study on the Salem witch trials shows many similarities, and the differences can mostly be attributed to the different types of court cases in the two sets of data. Context plays an important role in two ways in this study. On the one hand, evidentials are used to contextualize information by indicating its source. Evidentials can thus be seen as a way to create (or re-create) the context of a situation in the past in which the witness came into possession of the reported information. On the other hand, the situational context of the court case plays a crucial role for the use of evidentials, since witnesses have to indicate the source of their information. As Grund demonstrates, deponents and scribes use evidentials as resources for presenting their statements as reliable evidence, and he repeatedly shows that the situational and sociohistorical context plays an important role for the interpretation of evidential strategies. Grund concludes by arguing for the importance of studying evidentiality also in languages in which it is not an obligatory marking since, as his study illustrates, evidential resources are nevertheless used for various strategic and pragmatic purposes.

Conclusion

As pointed out above, the contributions in this volume all share a fundamental concern to achieve a better understanding of aspects of the meaning of the English language from the past. Corpus technology has become a routine tool

of historical linguistics, and a large range of historical corpora – from the small-scale, purpose-built third-generation corpus to the vast, general-purpose mega-corpus – is available for each specific task. But several papers also demonstrate that it is not always computer technology that leads to new insights. Sometimes it is the meticulous re-evaluation of data and the critical reassessment of what appears to be common knowledge results in a deeper understanding of the data. All the papers uncover layers of meanings, as it were, and they all show in one way or another how important it is to consider the language of the past within the many complex facets of its context: linguistic, situational, social, historical, and so on. Whatever the focus of the study is, whether it concerns a single obscure Old English word form or lexical bundles derived from large amounts of texts, the aim is always to uncover additional layers of meaning of the language of the past.

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