ABSTRACTS

Laurel Brinton (University of British Columbia) *'I wonder if* and *I would be grateful if': The rise of new conventional indirect directives in Late Modern English*

The most common (and most highly conventionalized) indirect directives in Present-Day English are *can/could/would you* DO X? (see Aijmer 1996: 147), addressing the preparatory condition on directives. These arise after 1900 in British English (Culpeper and Demmen 2011), becoming frequent in American English only in the second half of the twentieth century (Jucker 2020: 172–82). Late Modern English also sees the appearance of a large number of other (semi-)conventionalized indirect directives, including *I wonder if, Do you think?, Would you mind?, I was hoping, The best thing for you to do, I would/should be grateful/glad if, I would/should appreciate it if, Would you be so good/kind as to?, May/can I ask you to? You don't happen to?, Do you happen to?,* and others. Based on corpus evidence, these all appear for the first time in the middle of the nineteenth century. They function as "external modifiers" (Aijmer 1996: 170) and are classified by Leech (2014: 162–168) as belonging to the classes of "deliberative openings", "appreciative openings", "hedged performatives", and "happenstance indicators".

   I wonder if (a deliberative opening) and *I would be grateful if* (an appreciative opening) are found to be the most frequent external modifiers of directives in the London-Lund corpus (see Aijmer 1996: 150). Neither usage is recognized in the OED. For Aijmer (1996: 153), *I would be grateful if* is "extremely tentative and formal", and *grateful* is often intensified. Leech (2014) sees *I wonder if* as occupying "the most indirect and most polite end of the pragmalinguistic politeness scale"; Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 941, 974) analyze it as a "doubly indirect directive", hence highly polite. *I wonder if* and also *I am wondering if/I wondered if* show a range of tentativeness (hedging) and are polite and formal (Aijmer 1996: 153, 163, 164). Wierzbicka (2006) proposes a scale of "scripts" which allow the "Anglo" speaker to avoid imposing or "putting pressure" on others. Beginning with imperatives and performatives (which place maximum pressure on the hearer), the language sees the rise of "whimperatives" (i.e. *can/could/will/would you* DO X?) and then a range of "suggestive" constructions (e.g. *you might like to/consider, would you be so good as?, would you mind?, perhaps you could*). These two stages place progressively less pressure on the hearer. The final stage beyond suggestions consists of *I was wondering if*; this serve to "avoid the impression that some pressure, however light, is being put on the addressee" (p. 53). Although Wierzbicka implies that her scale is diachronic, she gives no evidence for this.

   This paper will examine the origin and development of these forms and their variants in Late Modern English, probing their frequencies over time, their pragmatic and stylistic functions, their genre distribution, and their degree of conventionalization. The study will be primarily qualitative. A variety of Late Modern English corpora will be searched (CLMET3.1, CEAL, COHA, Founders) for the relevant directive search strings (*I/we wonder if you*, *I/we would be grateful if you*) and variants (*I was wondering/wondered if you*, *I wonder if it might be possible*, *I would be very grateful if you*, etc.) using either the in-built search programs or *AntConc*. Results will be manually post-edited.

   The paper will speculate about the reasons for the exuberant rise of externally modified indirect directives in the nineteenth century, as part of the general shift towards non-imposition (negative) politeness in contemporary society (see Jucker 2011, 2012, 2020), the ethos of individualism (Culpeper and Demmen 2011), and democratization (Farrelly and Seoane 2012).

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Claudia Claridge (University of Augsburg) *From 'pray' to 'please': Sociopragmatic patterns in the Old Bailey Corpus (1720-1913)*

Late Modern English (LModE), in particular the nineteenth century, is the crucial period for the switch from *pray* to *please* as the typical politeness marker in requests. Jucker (2020: 171), for example, shows the steep rise of *please* in the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA). *Pray* (originally *I pray you*) shows speaker-orientation and fairly bluntly marks the requesting intention. *Please* (originally *if you please*), in contrast, pays attention to the face needs of the hearer, has a tentative nature, and works within the negative-politeness / non-imposition approach that is typical of LModE (Culpeper & Demmen 2011).

Despite its restriction to the formal courtroom situation, the *Old Bailey Corpus* (OBC) offers an ideal opportunity to investigate this change. It contains speech-based interactive material from the courtroom and quotes from everyday interactions, all produced by socially diverse speakers within a mostly asymmetric power situation. Formally, *pray* appears only in its most pragmaticalized form, while *please* proceeds through verbal uses like *an't please you, if you please, if it please you, please you* (etc.) to the one-word marker *please*. The first unambigous instance of the latter appears in 1839, only shortly before the last occurrence (of only 16 in the 19th century) of *pray* in 1851. The paper will document the frequency distribution of the forms across time and across speaker groups. *Pray* is preferred by higher social classes (marginally) and especially by judges and lawyers, i.e. speakers with institutional power in the courtroom,

who therefore do not have to consider hearer face needs. *Please* is preferred by lower-class speakers, as well as lay speakers, i.e. victims, witnesses, and especially defendants. These speakers usually address superiors in the courtroom and for defendants a less confrontative requesting behaviour might have been appropriate. Beyond the courtroom the instances quoted by speakers may further offer insights into changing conventions.

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Rachele De Felice (The Open University) *Stability of pragmatic markers: The case of 'sorry' in organizational emails from the Clinton Email Corpus*

The focus of this study is the pragmatic variation across different writers and situations in their use of *sorry* (both as a stand-alone word and in phrases such as *I am sorry*). This presentation looks at the use of the word *sorry* in the Clinton Email Corpus. This is a collection of over 33,000 emails dating from Hillary Clinton's tenure as US Secretary of State, which has been released to the public following an investigation by the FBI. The dataset is an invaluable source of insights into organizational communication, not just because of its size, but also because it contains a wide range of senders and recipients whose identity, and therefore role within the organization, is publicly known. This in turn allows us to easily incorporate variables such as status and gender into any linguistic analysis.

All 545 occurrences of the term in the corpus are examined, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Each occurrence is manually annotated for the type of action being apologised for, such as misunderstanding, unfortunate event, minor mishaps, and so on. Results show that, the majority of instances of *sorry* refer to minor incidents such as misunderstandings, missed calls, and problems with emails, as well as being used for events ranging from typos to sad news regarding someone's poor health. In other words, it is more of a rhetorical or discursive device than a true pragmatic act. This holds regardless of the status of sender and recipient.

I argue that, beyond providing useful examples of typical email phraseology, the real value of corpus-based studies such as this one lies in unlocking the expected behaviour norms of the organization by showing us what its members deem necessary to be excused or apologised for (an overlong email, repeated missed calls, a lost schedule). The quantitative corpus investigation is the way into a broader qualitative interpretation of the context it reflects.

Christine Elsweiler (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) *The organisation of macro-requests in early 18th-century Scottish and English letters*

Previous research has shown that requests in early modern Scottish and English non-private letters manifest pragmatic variation regarding the use of internal modification through modal auxiliaries (Elsweiler 2021, 2023). In this study, I aim to complement this micro-level perspective on pragmatic variation in the realisation of requests by taking a macro-level approach. Requests in letters typically do not occur in isolation but are frequently organised into hierarchically structured speech act sequences (see van Dijk 1980: 184), i.e., macro-requests, which comprise

different individual speech acts supporting the core request as pre- and post-moves, as is illustrated in the following example from an early 18th-century Scottish letter:

(1)   Tho I haue not yet ben soe happy as to recue the anceuer of mine to you, yet I cannot but giue you this trouble,
        to beg not only your aduis
        which I find is the best to me of any,
        but your assistance to uptaine what I desier, which is an act of councell in my faour,
        (Francis Herbert, Countess Dowager of Seaforth to unspecified addressee, 1701)

In this macro-request, the discontinuous core request in (1) (in boldface), through which the writer seeks the addressee's advice and assistance, is supported by a preceding apology for troubling them with her petition. This is combined with a compliment for the addressee (*which I find is the best to me of any*), a convivial move to gain their favour.

Addressee-oriented expressive speech acts such as the compliment in (1) as well as, e.g., thanking and congratulating have been found to be central to 18th-century polite linguistic behaviour (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010: 159), whose ideal is encapsulated in the phrase "the art of pleasing in conversation" (Jucker 2020: 120). Since in the 18th century, letters were conceptualised as written conversation (Klein 1993: 35), in a previous study (Elsweiler under review) I explored whether addressee-oriented expressive speech acts also feature prominently as supportive moves in Scottish letters from the first half of the 18th century. Specifically, I investigated whether their use saw an increase in Scottish letters written between 1570 and 1750. However, no such increase was discernible. Instead, letter-writers manifested a preference for writer-oriented speech acts such as commitments and apologies as supportive moves.

The present study will build on these findings to approach macro-requests from a variational pragmatic perspective by comparing the organisation of longer speech act sequences in Scottish and English letters written between 1700 and 1750. Since most research on 18th century politeness has been conducted for English data (e.g., Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010), this study aims to explore if addressee-oriented expressive speech acts are more centrally represented as supportive moves in macro-requests in English letters than in the Scottish letters.

The correspondence data for this study are drawn from the 18th century sub-section of *ScotsCorr* and from *CEECE*. The comparison is based on 80 Scottish and English letters, respectively, from which the macro-requests are manually retrieved and categorised according to a classification scheme developed for the analysis of macro-speech acts (see Elsweiler 2024).

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Peter J. Grund (Yale University) *The where, when, and how of speech: Variation and change in the direct speech representation formula in Late Modern English*

Much research has been devoted to reconstructing the spoken language of the past (e.g., Culpeper and Kytö 2010). As we only have access to written representations for most periods of the history of English, such reconstruction inevitably has to contend with the limitations of the written medium to capture facets of speech. While the writing strategies that language users employ to represent speech in historical periods are often seen as mere "filters" to be removed in the search for the underlying spoken language (e.g., Schneider 2013), they are in themselves important objects of study: they reveal significant variation and change over time as language users experiment with and hone linguistic tools and their functions to represent the voices of others (Grund 2023; forthcoming).

This paper focuses on one such aspect of speech representation that has received little attention in historical linguistic research: what I here call the "direct speech representation formula," as in the italicized formulation in "'What is it, Darwin? speak up!' *said Wharton, dropping at once into the colloquial tone, and stooping forward to listen*." (CLMET 3.0; 1894, Ward, *Marcella*). This "formula" involves the indication of the speaker and the speech representation verb as well as any concomitant description of time, place, manner, concurrent action, etc. of the speech represented. Some research has investigated aspects such as the nature of the verb and the order of the subject and verb (e.g., Ruano San Segundo 2016; Cichosz 2019), and some scholars have pointed to the presence of various features together with these speech representation expressions, usually in passing (e.g., Oostdijk 1990; Busse 2020; Hauff 2021).

Drawing data from the narrative fiction texts in CLMET 3.0, which covers the period 1710–1920, I bring these aspects together, charting the nature of the "formula" and the frequency and function of its various components. I consider change over time and across different authors, as well as a range of potentially influential.

Overall, this paper provides a systematic picture of the variation and change in the appearance of the direct speech representation formula and the strategic use of components of the formula for communicative and pragmatic purposes. As such, it contributes to the study of variation and change in Late Modern English influenced by pragmatic and communicative needs, which has received relatively little attention (cf. Lewis 2012). The paper also illustrates how literary texts offer important data for the study of speech representation in the history of English.

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Theresa Neumaier (TU Dortmund University) '*One of these things must be done*' – *Move structure variation in Late Modern English threatening letters*

Threatening letters can take a huge variety of different forms: they might consist of a single sentence scribbled on a piece of paper but can also involve several pages of text. Nevertheless, they constitute a highly recognisable albeit illicit genre (Bojsen-Møller et al. 2020) with a clear underlying social function – the speaker declares their intention to carry out a harmful action against the recipient of the threat. While this main function seems to be shared by all types of threatening letters, additional functions, such as venting anger or manipulating the target into doing a specific action, can be identified for sub-categories of threats. As has been found in previous research, these more specific functions seem to influence the structure of the letter. The structure of extortion letters, for instance, can be compared to that of business letters, as it involves similar functional moves, such as a demand and declaration of consequences, an allocation of responsibility to the target, or a statement of sincerity (Busch 2006; Bredthauer 2020). However, research has mainly focused on present-day data so far, and genre conventions can change over time. Hence, is not yet clear whether these findings also hold for previous periods of English.

In this paper, I analyse variation in the structure of rhetorical moves in a small corpus of 100 threatening letters which I extracted from Old Bailey trial records as well as postings in the *The Gazette*, which regularly printed anonymous threatening letters with the promise of royal pardon to anybody willing to provide information about the letter writers. All of the letters were

written between the 18th and early 20th century. The dataset is balanced with respect to whether the letter contains explicit conditions which the recipient is to fulfil to prevent the threat from being carried out or not. Hence, half of the data consist of extortion letters; the other half can be categorised as retaliative letters which lack a conditional element.

I show that the letters vary considerably with respect to the type and number of structural elements which are realised. As expected, some of this variation can be attributed to the overarching function of the letter, and hence appears to be linked to the writer's intention to manipulate the addressee or express a desire for revenge. However, other, more specific, factors also seem to play a role. These include the social circumstances in which the letter was written; for instance, when a writer is explicitly situating their text within the context of larger social grievances, such as agricultural protests of the time. This additional move widens the intended audience of the letter beyond the actual recipient themselves, which makes this particular type of threatening communication more similar to genres related to political protest. The study shows that threatening letters in the Late Modern English period form a clearly recognisable but nevertheless multi-faceted genre whose conventions are creatively negotiated by its users in their social contexts.

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Patricia Ronan (TU Dortmund University) *Social variation in pragmatic markers in LModE Irish English letters: what can statistical approaches to greeting and leavetaking formulae show us?*

The present study asks whether we can find indications of pragmatic variation based on status differences in Late Modern Irish English letters. While both social context and relative status differences between interactants are well-known to have an impact on the pragmatic choices of contemporary language users, to date research has largely not considered these factors in earlier varieties of English. Recent exceptions to this are Elsweiler (2022) and Elsweiler and Ronan (2023). In these studies, the authors could show that social factors can be shown to have an influence (e.g. gender, Elsweiler 2022). Certain differences between varieties of English can be observed, yet, given not only restrictions in the amount of available data, but especially also of the available socio-demographic information, the creation of robust statistical evidence is an issue.

The present paper investigates address and leave taking formulae in approximately 200 letters written by Irish letter writers in the 18th century. The corpus is comprised partly of letters that are held in autographed letter collection at the National Library of Ireland (131 letters) and are available in unedited format on the webpages of the NLI. Further, 88 letters written by and to Irish emigrants in America were taken from the Corviz corpus. Sociodemographic data on letter writers and recipients is available in many, but not all cases. Where these are available, social status of letter writers and recipients are determined on information about occupation or titles, and, where known, the social relationship between the interactants is determined and

coded. The data were then analysed with the help of regression analyses and decision trees (Weihs & Buschfeld 2021).

Results of the analysis indicate that pragmatic structures exhibit most variation and innovation in letters written within the same status group. Across status groups, both writing upwards and downwards, the pragmatic markers are both more formal and more stable.

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