Christine Elsweiler

Ludwig Maximilians University Munich

Intra-speaker variation regarding request strategies in Scottish letters (1500–1700)

The language of Renaissance letters often follows formulaic conventions, which nevertheless leave room for individual variation (Nevalainen 2001). Among others, this is evident in the realisation of requests. Previous research has shown that factors such as the power relationship between the interactants influence the choice of request strategy in Early Modern English and Middle Scots letters (Sönmez 2005, Elsweiler in preparation). This paper focusses on intra-writer variation in the choice of request strategies in 16th and 17th-century Scottish letters taken from *HCOS* and *ScotsCorr*. Specifically, this study explores the effect of factors including register, the intended addressees and the relative power of the letter-writer on the selection of requestive strategies of individual letter-writers.

The requests were manually retrieved and annotated using a system based on the *CCSRP* classification scheme (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989), accounting for larger request sequences and differentiating between head acts, i.e. the core of a request, and external modification, e.g. supportive moves of a request. It moreover distinguishes between different degrees of directness.

Correspondence by letter-writers writing both non-private and private letters to different addressees will be considered. Intra-writer variation is e.g. evident in the correspondence of Thomas Hamilton, Lord Binning, a 17th-century Scottish politician. His non-private letters to William, Earl of Menteith, Charles I's chief adviser in Scottish affairs, do not contain a single imperative request, but rather e.g. performative requests, such as *I wish that your lordship […] may so informe his Maiestie*. Conversely, Hamilton's private letters to his father exhibit no performative requests. Instead he uses imperatives hedged by an *if*-clause, e.g. *gif your lordship think it fit I cum soner, returne ane ansuer*, a deferential formula making the request dependent upon his father's judgement. Although with both addressees Hamilton is in a position of lower relative power, the different social situations may explain his varying strategies.

References

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, House, Juliane and Gabriele Kasper 1989. Cross-cultural Pragmatics. Requests and Apologies. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Elsweiler, Christine, in preparation. From Shared Meaning to Divergent Pragmatics: A Comparative Study of the Modal Auxiliaries *May*, *Can*, *Shall* and *Will* in Scottish and English Letters (1500–1700*)*. Habilitation thesis.

HCOS = The Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots 1995. Ed. Anneli Meurman-Solin. Helsinki: Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki.

Nevalainen, Terttu 2001. Continental Conventions in Early English Correspondence. In Hans-Jürgen Diller and Manfred Görlach (eds.), *Towards a History of English as a History of Genres*, 203–224. Heidelberg: Winter.

ScotsCorr = The Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence 1540–1750. 2017. Ed. Anneli Meurman-Solin. Helsinki: Research Unit for the Study of Variation, Contacts and Change in English (VARIENG), Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki. http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:lb-201411071. (accessed: Feb. 1, 2018).

Sönmez, Margaret J.M. 2005. A Study of Request Markers in English Family Letters from 1623 to 1660. *European Journal of English Studies*, 9.1, 9–19.