

*Petitioning for the education of the poor:
The sociohistorical context of self-corrections in a Late Modern English draft letter*

This paper argues that self-corrections in ego documents are a profitable data source for studying intra-writer variation from a sociohistorical perspective, with a focus being placed on Late Modern English. While all manner of changes (such as 'slips of the pen', omissions, stylistic or grammatical changes) can be encountered in ego documents from members of any rank in society, both level of schooling and communicative purpose are revealed through the predominance of specific types of self-corrections. Letters by paupers, for instance, tend to contain a significant rate of corrections pertaining to mechanical errors ('slips of the pen') and spelling, which betray the writers' limited schooling (Fairman 2008). In contrast, corrections in ego documents by more highly educated individuals aim more strongly at changes in content or style (Auer 2008, Gardner 2018/to appear/accepted).

Intra-writer variation is usually examined on the basis of several letters by the same author (e.g. Schiegg 2018). Draft letters allow researchers to reconstruct the author's writing and thinking processes, and self-corrections contained within them profile their stylistic repertoire. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this paper analyses a draft letter written in the 1830s by the Vicar of Aymestry to the Bishop of Hereford, showing that the vicar's linguistic choices are intricately linked to the letter's sociohistorical setting. The textual alterations can be interpreted from the perspectives of both audience design and speaker design. On the one hand, the vicar adapts his text in the hope of enlisting the bishop's assistance in his endeavour to develop a school for the poor of his parish. On the other hand, the clergyman's self-corrections can be seen as an attempt to position himself and his school in the institutionalised, nationwide movement to improve educational possibilities for the labouring poor.

References

- Auer, Anita 2008. 'The letter which that I wrote': Self-corrections in Late Modern English letters. *Studies in Late Modern English Correspondence: Methodology and Data*, eds. Marina Dossena & Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 213–234. Bern: Lang.
- Fairman, Tony 2008. Strike-throughs: What textual alterations can tell us about writers and their scripts, 1795-1835. *Studies in Late Modern English Correspondence: Methodology and Data*, eds. Marina Dossena & Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 193–212. Bern: Lang.
- Gardner, Anne-Christine 2018. Downward social mobility in eighteenth-century English: A micro-level analysis of the correspondence of Queen Charlotte, Mary Hamilton and Frances Burney. Special Issue *Mobility, Variability and Changing Literacies in Modern Times*, eds. Anita Auer & Mikko Laitinen, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* CXIX (I): 71–100.
- Gardner, Anne-Christine. to appear. Self-corrections as a source of linguistic inquiry: A Late Modern English travel journal. *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics*.
- Gardner, Anne-Christine. accepted. Towards a companionate marriage in Late Modern England? Two critical episodes in Mary Hamilton's courtship letters to John Dickenson.

Schiegg, Markus 2018. Factors of intra-speaker variation in nineteenth-century lower-class writing. Special Issue *Mobility, Variability and Changing Literacies in Modern Times*, eds. Anita Auer & Mikko Laitinen, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* CXIX (I): 101–120.