

*Through the lens of The Mary Hamilton Papers (c.1750–c.1820):
Ego-documents, individuals and historical social networks*

The frequent lack of information about historical writers and the randomness of textual transmission often make it difficult in the field of historical sociolinguistics to focus on individual language use and stylistic repertoires. Ego-documents like private letters and diaries help overcome these shortcomings, and over the past two decades an increasing number of linguistic corpora have been constructed containing such texts (e.g. Rutten & van der Wal 2014). For Late Modern English, however, there remains a scarcity of extensive corpora based on original manuscript materials that offer crucial insights into both the author's individual language use and their social networks (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2014 for a notable exception).

In this context, the team of the *Unlocking the Mary Hamilton Papers* project is working on an online edition of ego-documents concerning Mary Hamilton (1756–1816), sub-governess to the Royal Court of George III and a member of the Bluestocking social circle. Because of both the time-span covered by the archive (c.1750–c.1820) and the wide range of correspondents in terms of age, gender, educational background and social groups, the corpus provides us with a unique opportunity to investigate the role of style-shifting and inter-/intra-speaker practices in historical social networks (cf. Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal 2018).

In this paper we present on the digitization, compilation and annotation processes of this c.1 million-word corpus consisting of letters written by/to Mary, a selection of her diaries and of her husband's journals, and some commonplace volumes. Special attention will be given to the personography (i.e. a database of people who wrote/received correspondence and/or are mentioned in it), and the high level and specificity of the coding – in particular the socio-pragmatic markup in the opening and closing formulae of the letters. The latter is the focal point of the research strand “Norms and Usage”, and will facilitate the study of language standardisation forces on letter-writing practices during the late Georgian period in light of the multiplex social networks of which Mary Hamilton was a part.

References

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- Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid 2014. *In Search of Jane Austen: The Language of the Letters*. Oxford: OUP.